

**PREACHING TO BE HEARD IN A TELEVISION AGE:
A Study of the Homiletical Response
to the Modern Media Context**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and constitutes the results of research in the subject.

Derek C. Weber
21 June 1993

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to record my sincere thanks for the help given to me by Professor Duncan B. Forrester, my first supervisor. His insight and encouragement, not to mention his friendship, has been invaluable. Dr. Chris Arthur (St. David's College, Wales) and Dr. Ian McDonald also served as supervisors and their assistance has been greatly appreciated. Thanks also to other members of staff at the faculty of Divinity at New College, University of Edinburgh. As colleagues and examples they have helped in the formulation of this work. And finally, thanks to my family for their faith in me and my wife, LaDonna, for all her work, love and support. It is to her that I dedicate this work.

ABSTRACT

This thesis begins with the argument that television is a dominant influence on modern society. Television is, for example, a primary source of information and a dominant medium of entertainment. The most profound changes television has brought to modern culture, however, are more fundamental. The television age has engendered a new language and patterns of communication.

The dilemma is how to communicate the gospel authentically from the Christian pulpit in a society where television dominates the patterns of communication. This thesis argues that preaching, in order to be heard today, must adopt the new language and communicative structures used by television. Old forms of deductive, conceptual preaching no longer encounter and involve an audience. The communicative tools of imagination, dialogue and experience must become central to an understanding of the preaching task. In addition, an awareness of the visual communications of body and face makes new demands of presentation.

As well as changes in technique, fundamental reflection on the theology of communication and nature of preaching can take place in light of the media context. Television challenges more than simply the structures of preaching, and it offers more than a threat. Models for communication practice that reflect both the theological understanding of Christian communication and the desire to be effective are examined. There is, for example, clear grounds for preferring Incarnational and Trinitarian models over older straight-line or monological models for Christian communication.

By means of case study, interview and sermon content analysis an investigation was made into the role (perceived and actual, as far as it can be determined) of television in the lives of a small group of preachers and students. The opinions and attitudes members of the two groups have toward television were explored. In addition, for the preachers and preachers in training, the potential that television has for informing preaching practice in any way (content, structure or genre) was examined.

The second element in the empirical research explored the understanding and experience of preaching. Investigating the priorities for preaching and the common structures employed in that practice, there was an attempt to discover the areas of this communicative act that are receptive to new influences. In addition, the presence of certain responses to the change in cultural communication patterns was explored.

Finally the thesis raises the issue of training for preaching. The case study with the New College students concerning the teaching of preaching is the primary tool for this section. With the history from the Edinburgh preachers as a background, this final section explores the possibilities for teaching preaching in the training of ministers today.

The writer of this thesis professes a faith in the efficacy of preaching. The Christian message can still be communicated through preaching, but most effectively through preaching that is heard in a television age. The person of Christ can encounter human beings through image; and a living faith may be seen through experiential preaching.

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PREACHING TO BE HEARD IN A TELEVISION AGE

INTRODUCTION

Christian preaching is an act of communication. Communication is, on one level, a way of transferring messages from one party to another. On a deeper level communication is what creates community, allows for civilization and even defines humanity. The ability to communicate and to operate the technology of communication is, to a certain extent, to control society. The communicators in today's world are the forces of power. The Church, to play any sort of significant role in society, must understand the nature of this power and be able to respond, with both criticism and commendation, to the various media functioning in that society. In addition, the Church needs to adopt new modes of communication that enable the Church to be heard in a media saturated society. This thesis attempts to make a response in the specific area of preaching.

PREACHING AS INCARNATION

It might be said that preaching is not just an act of communication but that it participates in the supreme act of communication. The preacher attempts to communicate God to the world. Just as the Incarnation was God encountering humanity in a recognizable form, so preaching is an act of making God and God's presence, will and activity recognizable to humanity today.

Thus, the model I argue for is preaching as incarnation, Word becoming "flesh." The "enfleshing" takes place in the act of communication and in the imagination and experience of the participants in that act. The medium for this communication is spoken language. This language must not be a specialized jargon, however, or use an unintelligible construction. It must be a language that communicates. The language must be recognizable, a part of the experience and understanding of the hearers; hearers who live in a media saturated world.

Two crucial elements of this language that help make connections between preacher and hearer are narrative and imagination. Imagination is the creative exercise of the mind which, at least in part, enables sensory experiences to be recalled and relived. In addition, it is through imagination that possible futures are examined. We not only can recall, through imagination, where we have been and recapture the fullness of that experience, but we can also project ourselves into alternative futures. In imagination we can explore potentials, test out attitudes and actions, and extrapolate consequences. And, finally, it is as we exercise the imagination that the unknown and unknowable can be approached. In the imagination of individuals and the community, the Word of God is made "flesh," made real in the sense that an abstract idea becomes a concrete image.

Narrative is the dominant structure of media programming and increasingly valued as a theological enterprise. Through narrative the images and experiences of existence and spirit are woven into a whole by which a person comes to understanding, sees his/her place in the world and comes to an awareness of meaning both personally and universally. The primary narrative, for the Christian preacher, is the gospel. It is as the gospel narrative is laid alongside the human community's life narrative, to affirm as well as challenge, that proclamation takes place. The gospel is "incarnated" in the hearing, and imagining, of the community. The preacher engages in this process of utilizing imagination to construct life narratives by presenting the gospel in dialogue with the hearers. The new communication is not "top-down," but participatory. The "hearers," surrounded by communicators of various sorts, want also to be heard. It is the employment of these two related but distinct elements of communication, imagination and narrative, that will provide a common ground and foundation for dialogical preaching that takes account of the vast influence of the modern mass media.

COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION

It is difficult to overestimate the fantastic changes taking place in human communication. This change in communication technology has affected the lives of those who come to hear the preacher. The modern mass media have increased output astronomically. Messages in many forms are targeted into people's lives 24 hours a day.

The volume of media messages and the number of media technologies means that it is increasingly difficult for individuals to disengage from the media environment. We receive more messages from more sources than our forebears. We find it ever more difficult to process the unrelenting stream of information and sensation.¹

These messages are packaged in the most eye- and ear-catching ways that can be devised by the dramatists, authors, producers and, above all, advertisers. All are presented in such a way that the most trivial of content becomes the most relevant and important. When messages of amazing complexity are received and understood through a flickering screen, we might reasonably ask if the time has come to abandon preaching as an irrelevant and ineffective means of communication. While the preaching event may seem little changed since its Victorian "heyday," massive upheavals have taken place all around it.

'What hath God wrought?'

A strange new device translated these pious words into impulses over an electrical wire. Another device at a distance received them instantly. History had changed. The barriers of time and space had fallen. Direct and immediate communication would

¹Jim McDonnell, "Mass Media, British Culture and Gospel Values," *The Gospel and Contemporary Culture*, H. Montefiore, ed. (London: Mowbray, 1992), p.160.

*henceforth be practical between anyone in any land.*²

In *Darkness at Noon*, Arthur Koestler argued that every major technological innovation, such as train, car, or airplane, transforms not just transportation but also society's entire way of thinking about time, travel, and movement. Similarly the explosion in communication technology in recent years has brought about a profound alteration in the way individuals in society view their relationships and themselves. Some describe this as a "paradigm shift," where the normative structures for thinking fail to contain new concepts and must therefore be restructured.

Such shifts are in themselves not new. They occur from time to time in human development. But we may claim that in the media age we are having a new experience of them. The "paradigm shifts" from a largely Oral culture to a Manuscript culture and then Print culture were significant in that the nature of community changed; from the small group or clan gathered around the story teller, to the larger community still listening to a single reader of a rare manuscript, to a somewhat more individualistic approach to knowledge with the advent of print.³ Some see the shift to electronic media as a return to an oral culture with its emphasis on sound.⁴ Yet with image so dominant this cannot be a complete reversal, but a move ahead into a new way of understanding. There are elements of the earlier shifts contained in the new dimension.

COMMUNICATING FAITH

Our understanding of the communication process, to which we will turn in Chapter III, shapes the community and the institutions in which the communicative act takes place. Certain models of communication call for certain structures. Television, as we shall see, is shifting the structures of society by altering communication patterns. Church communication, and specifically traditional preaching, seem for the most part to belong to what is increasingly an outdated societal structure.

The tension between the theological enterprise (whether it be teaching or preaching)

²George Roche, *One by One: Preserving Values and Freedom in Heartland America*, excerpted in *Imprimis*, Hillsdale Michigan, Vol. 19, No. 10, October 1990, p. 1.

³This change did not occur overnight. The shift from orality to literacy took some considerable development. Even as the technology was developing, much of human society was slow to change. The advent of television and electronic media, on the other hand, brought a much more dramatic shift. See, for example, Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Methuen, 1982) and Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990) for more on these issues.

⁴See Thomas Boomershine, "Religious Education and Media Change: A Historical Sketch," *Religious Education*, Vol. 82, No. 2, 1982, especially pp.277-278.

and the modern media context has to do, in part, with language. Andrew Greeley describes this as a struggle between creed and story:

There is a tension between creed and story. The former is too precise for the latter. The latter is too variegated and too rich for the former. Both are inevitable in a religious heritage, though their different perspectives lead to the possibility of conflict - not merely conflict between different creeds based on different interpretations of the primary story, but also conflicts between creed believers and story believers. A belief system without creed may be too amorphous to survive in a propositional culture like our own. But a belief system without a story may lack human vitality. Both story and creed are simple. The former is a direct result of the experience. Story is nothing more than an attempt to resonate and represent that experience, while creed, far removed from experience, is a result of philosophical refinement and purification and distillation of the experience.⁵

This is not a new problem. Creed and story have always been part of religion and that tension has always existed. The media age, however, highlights this tension. The dominant communicative structures of the people, as expressed in television, is story. The intricacies of creed or doctrine drive many to boredom. This can lead to the abandonment of the "philosophical refinement and purification and distillation of experience" because audiences will turn it off.

The theological task for preaching in a television age is to somehow maintain a balance between creed and story. In the creed, as Greeley uses the term, we have the interpretation of the encounter of God and the people, as well as the development of the idea of God. Yet, those encounters themselves, or the story, have been incorporated into the creed and thus attain the status of truth themselves. The preacher invites participation in the story, as the point of contact within the creed. It is as the story is made new, or "incarnated" in the imaginations of the community, that the need for interpretation, the creed, is renewed.

In the modern media context, preaching needs to pay renewed attention to the points of contact. The demand of the hearer is that the message be relevant. "What does this mean for me, living in this world, right now?" Preaching centres on what might be called the "intersection of doctrine and life;" i.e., how creed or doctrine today makes an impact on the lives of individuals and communities. Preaching has always done this. The classic Barthian description of the preacher as one who holds the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other is an image of the preacher standing at the intersection of doctrine and life. What perhaps is new is the urgency with which the preacher must approach this intersection. The media "have gone before" by challenging audiences with grim realities of life and by offering entertaining antidotes of fantasy.

The content of preaching cannot, in the end, be separated from the communication

⁵Andrew Greeley, *Religion, A Secular Theory* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1982), p.103.

of it. Modern secular pluralism, as exemplified in the mass media, has placed concerns about presentation into a new light. Pluralism makes for a more self-conscious reflection and hence demands a new atmosphere for communication.

PREACHING IN A MEDIA CONTEXT

In the light of the discussion above it is all the more crucial that preaching, in addition to engaging in the language of theological discourse, recognizes the need to be relevant to the concerns of the community. If it ever has been possible for the concerns of the community and the theological agenda of preaching to be separated, there is undoubtedly no longer a genuine alternative facing the churches and their preachers. Preachers need to be aware of the big questions on the public agenda. This is determined, as we have said, by examining how the attention and imagination of people who are living in a media context are being shaped.

This does not mean that our task is to explore the subversive quality of media. Though there is much with which to be concerned about television output, as we shall see, we must also realize that in the preaching event we also hope to shape people's imaginations and thus open them to God. Perhaps "shaped" is a term loaded with negative connotations. We might better talk of "sharing vision" or "awakening spirits." But these concepts involve disciplining imagination and imaginations can only be thus disciplined if they are first awakened by using symbol and metaphor to evoke the reality of God.

A question of approach is inherent in this proposal. Today there is an increasing call for relevance levelled at preachers. A pervasive assumption, both within and outside the churches, is that the preaching enterprise is aimed at answering questions that no one is asking. The Church and her thinkers, many people believe, have lost touch with where people are living, the concerns for everyday life that fill the mind of the man or woman in the pew. Such a complaint, if complaint it is, will always have the ring of truth about it. To remain a lively discipline preaching must make contact with people. However, the question is: Who dictates the contact? Does the context which is either generated or affirmed by the media dictate what preaching should be concerned about? In other words, should preachers be adapting the message to meet the concerns or helping to adapt the concerns to meet the message?

Today there is a search for a "contextual theology." Contextualization is the effort to make oneself understood in a new and unfamiliar culture. It is the process whereby a specialist language is translated into one that communicates more readily to those outside. It includes a move away from jargon, but not away from the heart of the message. For example, theology, and by extension preaching, is interested in showing how the human reactions to the

apparent senselessness of life in fact raise profound questions of theodicy.⁶ This is an old topic in theology with which all theologians are familiar. Yet the questions are fresh in the minds of people who are nightly shown scenes of appalling destruction and despair, both natural and human made. Though it might not enter into the minds of most television viewers, theology asks what kind of God is represented across the media spectrum, from soap opera to news?

I intend to show that a dominant influence on modern society is television. Television is, for example, a primary source of information and a dominant medium of entertainment. But more than that, I believe that television has begun to shape society in definite ways. Television provides data on what are fashionable life-styles and what values are prized in modern society. I will argue, however, that the most profound changes television has brought to modern culture are more fundamental. The television age has engendered a new language and method of communication. The language of the book, guided by rationality, deductive organization and logic, has made way for the language of television. This language is one of image and suggestion, narrative and emotion. For many this is a return to the characteristics of oral culture and there is much in this belief. I believe, however, that the electronic age is a move forward and not primarily a return. While there are similarities to oral culture in modern communication patterns there are also significant differences, which will be explored later.

Preaching, in order to be heard today, needs to adopt a new language and new structures. In addition, an awareness of the visual communications of body and face makes new demands of presentation. As well as changes in technique, fundamental reflection on the nature of preaching can take place in light of the media context. Is preaching, and Christian communication in general, fundamentally about transmitting messages or even The Message? Or is there something more? An offering of experience, perhaps, that engages the imagination and evokes the possibilities of life in Christ? Television challenges more than simply the structures of preaching, and it offers more than a threat.

WORKING FOR CHANGE

The arena for these changes can be theological education. By means of a case study I have explored the teaching of preaching at New College. The first case study involved a group of New College students at various stages of their training. The main themes for investigation were television and preaching, but here the element of training for preaching

⁶See, for example, Wesley Carr, *Ministry and the Media* (London: SPCK, 1990), pp.89-91, and Colin Morris, "The Theology of the Nine O'Clock News," *Wrestling with an Angel* (London: Collins, 1990), pp.92-105.

was an important addition. The second case study utilized a collection of Edinburgh preachers. Evenly divided between clergy and lay preachers, this case study included the elements of the others (television, preaching and training for preaching) and added an analysis of actual sermon material. From the sermons, all of which were preached in 1992, certain issues of language and structure relating to communication and preaching in a television age are highlighted.

The case study material supports the arguments as they develop in the thesis. The first major section of the thesis explores the communicative environment of our time. We explore the influence of television on the communication patterns of society. In the case study, the role (perceived and actual, as far as it can be determined) of television in the lives of the participants was investigated. Here we explored the opinions and attitudes members of the two groups have toward television. Common themes reflected in both the conversations and the argument as presented in the previous chapter are outlined. In addition, for the preachers and preachers in training, we examined the potential that television has for informing preaching practice in any way (content, structure or genre).

The second section of the thesis centres around the theology and practice of communication and preaching. With both students and preachers we explored understandings and experience with preaching. Asking about the priorities for preaching and the common structures employed in that practice, we attempted to discover the areas of this communicative act that are receptive to new influences. In addition we investigated if certain responses were already being made to the change in cultural communication patterns. As society has moved from oral/print based communication to a more visually dominated structure, we asked how preaching as practised in the local churches had begun to adapt, if at all.

Finally the thesis raises the issue of training for preaching. The case study with the New College students concerning the teaching of preaching will be the primary tool for this section. With the history from the Edinburgh preachers as a background, this final section explores the possibilities for teaching preaching in the training of ministers today.

THESIS STATEMENT

The problem before us is how to communicate the gospel authentically from the Christian pulpit in a society where television dominates the patterns of communication. This thesis argues that preaching, in order to be heard today, must adopt the new language and forms used by television. Old forms of deductive, conceptual preaching no longer encounter and involve an audience. I believe that *Idea* must evolve into *Image*, *Understanding* into *Experience*; that the communicative tools of imagination, dialogue and narrative must become central to an understanding of the preaching task. The medium of television can inform

preaching, even though television's message is seen by many to be antithetical to the message of the gospel.

This thesis is exploring a faith in the efficacy of preaching. The Christian message can still be communicated through preaching, but most effectively through preaching that is heard in a television age. The person of Christ can encounter human beings through image; and a living faith may be seen through experiential preaching.

I UNDERSTANDING THE HEARERS' CONTEXT

MODERN MEDIA AS CONTEXT

"Did you hear the one about the fish that says to another fish "how do you like the ocean?" and the other fish says "What ocean?"" A video entitled "The Power of Image" begins with this "parable of the fish" in order to say that the media have become the ocean for us, the environment in which we "live and move and try to have our being."¹

Defining Media

In the simplest terms, a medium is a channel for sending messages from sender to receiver. Though this direct line model of communication, as we shall see in Chapter III, has problems and has largely been abandoned; it still can convey the integral role in communication played by a medium. A medium is the means by which we try to send a message, whether simple or complex. Whether we consider the physical (voice, body language, gestures, actions, sign language, facial expressions, etc.), low technology (paper and pen, chisel and stone, spray paint and garden wall, etc.), or high technology (radio, television, telephone, computer network, satellite link, etc.), all are media of communication. The problem this thesis is attempting to address, on one level, is the fate of a physical medium (vocal communication in preaching) in a world dominated by high technology media (primarily television). When we use a term like "media" in modern society it is generally meant to refer to the electronic mass media. These media are most commonly understood as television, radio and the press. While "the press" may seem to be a low technology medium (ink on paper), in fact the modern newspaper and magazine is very much an electronic communication in its creation and would be a very different medium without that capability.

There have been various attempts to understand the function of these mass media. Perhaps the most famous was Marshall McLuhan, who postulated that the media are "extensions of man."² By this he understood that the media will begin to function as a human central nervous system beyond the physical one. Through media, McLuhan argued, our reach can go beyond our grasp. We are "hooked into" a larger world, we send and receive messages around the world with the speed of thought, we are as much a part of life in Burkina Faso as

¹"The Power of Image," A Friendship Press Production, 1990. *This video was produced as a resource for the 1990-91 Friendship Press ecumenical study on "Gospel, Media and Culture."* (taken from promotional material for the video).

²See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Ark, 1964). See particularly his discussion of the nature of television, pp.7-21.

in our own home town. This, he declared, would create the global village whereby ethnic and cultural differences would be but interesting conversation pieces in the patchwork of the world wide human community.

While there was and remains some truth in McLuhan's expectations, the global village seems a more distant ideal than before the advent of media. Michael Real takes McLuhan's metaphor and applies it on a different level.³ Media, Real argues, functions not as an *individual's* central nervous system, but the central nervous system of a *society*. The media function for human culture the way "internal biological messages do for the individual organism in providing growth, movement, healing and ultimate deterioration".⁴ Rather than linking up all humanity into one community, the media define individual societies much more sharply. In a sense, according to Real's thesis, the media might do more to fragment the world wide community even as it more sharply defines a specific society. In Scotland, the Gaelic community is a case in point. Here was a community that, for the most part, was rapidly disappearing, blending into the larger society of Scotland and/or the United Kingdom. Yet, when certain efforts within the media began to champion the cause of the Gaels, their profile was raised and the community began to reestablish itself within the mainstream of Scottish life. The media, at least in part, brought about a division as it helped to foster a society within a larger one.

There are many interpretations of media. Part of the debate is whether, because of the diversity of media, any clear definition can be made. The range of media, even when qualified as electronic mass media, is so diverse as to make all encompassing statements as to purpose and effect problematic. To say, for example, that television dominates the media is, for many, to overstate the case. In terms of interaction, or in terms of community building, other media may have a much more profound effect than broadcast television.

In addition, the technological developments of media have far outstripped simple broadcast television. Satellite and interactive cable technology have already begun to change the nature of television in significant ways and will most likely change viewing habits even further in the not too distant future. It is difficult, therefore, to talk about the influence of "the media" in simplistic terms or as a *fait accompli*. When pushing at the frontiers of media development, capabilities such as computer "morphing," the process of blending one image into another in an almost organic way, and virtual reality, a total media environment controlled by the "viewer" or participant, bring concerns so different as to be almost inconceivable. Even the steps along the way, computer game technology with CD images and sound, for example,

³See Michael Real, *Supermedia* (London: Sage, 1989).

⁴Ibid, p.84.

raise substantial questions and concerns of their own.⁵

Yet, despite the explosion of new technology and the changing nature of media, for the purposes of this study a significant element is the move from word to image that television brought to the public in such a dramatic way. All of the new developments are, in a sense, variations on that theme. What is new is the ability to manipulate the image, to control the narrative and to immerse oneself into the experience. These, image-narrative-experience, are the key factors in this thesis. So new media might be a matter of degree, in this sense, rather than a negation of the argument. Television, I contend, is still the norm by which communication is judged in modern society. All the other mass media, as Postman argues, have learned to adapt themselves to television.⁶ In a similar way, all the media currently on the drawing board are also reflections and extensions of television. This is the standard, then, by which we approach the preaching task. Our exploration is to discover ways of preaching in a television age. Those who come to hear preaching do not come as blank slates upon which a sermon might write. The hearers live in a world of communication. We explore the characteristics of a television age in order to understand the hearers and their environment.

TELEVISION AND MODERN CULTURE

The Pervasiveness of Television

We begin this exploration by attempting to understand the "ocean in which we live and move and try to have our being." The mass media, in which television dominates, have become our context, the all encompassing milieu that increasingly defines our existence. "Television's influence is all-pervasive," wrote Colin Morris, "it is not simply a device like a vacuum cleaner which serves us; it is an environment that wraps us round like a blanket."⁷ It is a, or perhaps *the*, major instrument of power and influence in today's world. Witness, for example, the place of television in the recent changes in Eastern Europe. The battle for power was not so much fought in governmental offices as in the television studios.

Events such as the turmoil in Eastern Europe, the footage from Ethiopia which led to another television event called *Live Aid* and the public reaction to television violence has fuelled the debate as to whether television is good news or bad news. The debate is being argued on many levels, from many different perspectives, with a wide range of ideological

⁵For a good overview of the issues of new media see Bob Cotton and Richard Oliver, *Understanding Hypermedia: From Multi-media to Virtual Reality* (London: Phaidon, 1993).

⁶See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.79-80.

⁷Colin Morris, *God-in-a-Box: Christian Strategy in a Television Age* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984), p.9.

assumptions. On the one hand are those who say that television is at best a force for good, providing a window on the world, education on a global scale, points of contact for a segmented society, and, at the least, a harmless source of escapism and amusement. For example:

*Much that is positive about public media tends to be overlooked. For example, the attempt to be popular enough (in terms of language, imagery and format) to be accessible to all, the need to be open and accountable to the whole community, the redemptive glimpses present in secular programs, the fact that mass media take our human needs for recreation and celebration more seriously than most churches - such features are easily forgotten.*⁸

But on the other hand are those who see television as something evil, eroding the moral fabric of society, handicapping future generations with learning disabilities and antisocial behaviours, isolating individuals into fantasy worlds devoid of human interaction. Such as this quote from Colin Morris, author of *God-In-A-Box*:

*It is, however, arguable that so all-pervasive is the mass of information now flooding our own society, we are dealing not with a cultural gap between Television Age and those which preceded it, but with the total disintegration of "culture" as the term has traditionally been understood.*⁹

Both sides are able to support their arguments with various bits of research and data.¹⁰ And work is continuing in an effort to shore up one or the other side in the debate.

While the debate as to whether television is good or bad continues, it is agreed by all concerned that it is no longer valid to ask whether it is worthy of debate at all. In other words, the discussion is what sort of influence television has on society, not whether it has any influence. It is no longer possible either to dismiss television as a passing fad or as a toy enjoyed by the unsophisticated masses and spurned by the intellectual elite. Research has shown that while it was true that in the early days of television there was a marked difference in viewing hours between those with less than a secondary education and those with higher degrees, in recent years the better educated have increased their television viewing by a much

⁸World Council of Churches, *Credible Christian Communication* (Geneva: WCC, 1978), p.9.

⁹Morris, op cit, p.168. It should be noted that Morris is hardly television's detractor. As a controller of BBC in religious programmes as well as regional programming in Northern Ireland, he has been immersed in the making of television and thus understands its power. Others referred to in this chapter have a much more negative view.

¹⁰Without attempting to cite here specific examples from both camps, let me refer to a few compilations of television research, most notably: Comstock, G. et al, *Television and Human Behavior* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Howe, M.J.A. ed., *Learning from Television: Psychological and Educational Research* (London: Academic Press, 1983). Comstock has also produced a series, of which the above citation is an overview. That series included a specific work entitled *Television and Human Behavior: The key studies*. All of the works mentioned include extensive bibliographies.

higher percentage.¹¹

*According to the A.C.Nielsen Company, in 1985 [in the United States] the television was on in the average home seven hours and seven minutes a day. The average viewer watched about four hours and thirty minutes each day. This amounts to 31.5 hours per week, or considerably more than one full day and night in every week of every month, year after year.*¹²

What this means is that the average American spends more time watching television than doing anything else, except sleeping and working. The average American youth spends more time watching television than going to school. Figures from Britain have always been somewhat lower. The European Institute for the Media reported that in 1988, the average weekly viewing in the UK was 26.8 hours.¹³ Britain 1990 reported that that average had dropped to 25 hours per week in 1990.¹⁴ This might be seen by some to be good news. Indeed, another report compared the 1987 viewing figures in age groups with those in 1989 and also reported some drops. (See Fig. 1)¹⁵ Though the changes might not be significant, and the advertisers' prime

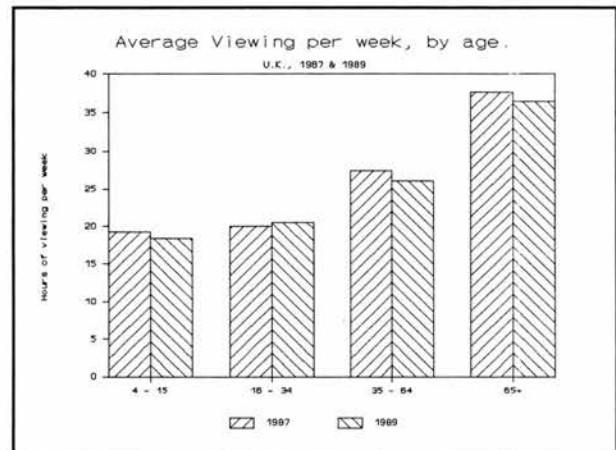


Figure 1

target group, age 16-34, showed an increase, any downward trend would be heralded as good news in some quarters. What this figure does not record is the growth in video use. In 1990, 14.8 million households owned a video recorder/player and an average of 7.3 million tapes were hired each week.¹⁶ This does not reflect the number of people who use the video for

¹¹Comstock, *Television and Human Behavior*, op cit, p.88f.

¹²W.F. Fore, *Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith Values and Culture* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), p.16. Fore also points out how different American viewing habits are from the rest of the world. However with television deregulation and advancing technology how long will it be before the statistics begin to level out?

¹³European Television Task Force, *Europe 2000: What Kind of Television?* (Manchester: European Institute for the Media, 1988), p.3.

¹⁴*Britain 1990: An Official Handbook* (London: HMSO, 1990), p.453.

¹⁵*Fact File 1992* (Carlisle: Caryl Press, 1992), p.51.

¹⁶*Fact File 1993* (Carlisle: Caryl Press, 1993), p.53.

time shifting.¹⁷ Great Britain has the highest percentage video ownership in Europe.¹⁸ In addition, the figures for the viewing of satellite television, a growing television network in Britain, are not included in those averages. So, a downturn in number of hours spent watching broadcast television does not necessarily mean fewer hours in front of the television.

Even twenty years ago there was an awareness of the power of television. James Halloran writing in 1970 states that "In general terms, when television is introduced into a society it becomes the most popular leisure time activity, and it tends to reorganize overall patterns of leisure-time behaviour."¹⁹ Today that observation is affirmed. "Television viewing is by far the most popular leisure pastime in Britain: nearly everyone watches television... About 50% of households have two or more receivers."²⁰

Many more statistics and observations could be quoted in order to show how far television has made its way into the lives and experiences of members of modern society. For now, suffice it to say that television is here to stay, taking a very significant role in the structuring of our modern society.

TELEVISION'S PLACE IN SOCIETY

It is to this process of structuring that I wish to address this next section. It is, however, beyond the scope of this work to make a complete assessment of the influence of television. Modern research on the influence of television covers a vast spectrum of topics. Therefore, it will be necessary to set definite boundaries for discussion. The simplest way of doing that is to state what will not be covered here.

First of all, I am going to leave aside, for the moment, the whole question of the specific content of television programming. It will be necessary at times to refer to content when assessing the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness inherent in the medium. But I do not intend an in-depth investigation of the merits, or lack thereof, in programming content. That means that I will not be dealing with the questions of whether television has too much sex and/or violence in its output. This is not to say that such questions are not important. Or that content is secondary to the medium itself. I do not subscribe to Marshall McLuhan's well known but probably little understood axiom that "the medium is the message." However, I would want to state that the medium is *a* message. This seems to be the position of J. Miller,

¹⁷"Time shifting" is the recording of broadcast programmes when aired to be viewed at a time convenient to the viewer

¹⁸European Television Task Force, op cit, p.38.

¹⁹James Halloran, ed., *The Effects of Television* (London: Panther, 1970), p.26.

²⁰*Britain 1990...*, op cit, p.453

one of McLuhan's strongest critics, who stated that while "it is a gross exaggeration to claim that the medium is the message, the medium does exert an effect over and above that which is carried in the message itself."²¹ It is this effect that I wish to examine: the effect of the medium itself and not the particular program content.

The prime question for this work is: has television changed how society and individuals understand and communicate with the world around them. In other words, as Michael Novak would ask, how does television shape our souls? "Television series represent genres of artistic performance, they structure a viewer's way of perceiving, of making connections, and of following a storyline."²² It is this perception, this way of assimilating and understanding the communications of the world for functioning in society that this chapter is attempting to define. Therefore, another important field of research that I will not directly consider is that of behavioral studies, which might be termed the sociology of television. How has television influenced behaviour? Again an important question, but one beyond the specific requirements of this thesis. However, "a man's behaviour is determined by the way he "experiences" the world. Beliefs, however strong they are, become ineffective if they are not rooted in a man's emotional matrix."²³ So, except as needed to assess perception, communication and understanding, this work will not examine behavioral studies.²⁴

Social Needs Met by Television

As usual it is easier to say what will not be covered than what will. Although there is a fairly straightforward question to serve as a focus, it is much less straightforward as to how one might answer that question. So let us begin by asking a different, perhaps seemingly unrelated question. That is: what is television for?

Cultural Education and Identity

One way to answer the question is by entering into the debate identified earlier in this chapter. However, a different strategy, one that I have chosen, would be to ask the question of the consumers of television. The current figures reported earlier show that the heaviest

²¹J. Miller, *McLuhan* (London: Collins, 1971), p.13.

²²Michael Novak, "TV Shapes the Soul," *Television: the Critical View*, H. Newcomb, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.336.

²³G.D. Kulothungan, "Media and People's Movement," *Religion and Society*, Sept-Dec. 1983, p.122.

²⁴For a discussion on behavioral studies see Halloran and Comstock op cit, as well as *Sociology of Mass Communications*, D. McQuail, ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

television viewers are those over 65. Comstock's research in the 70's reported that children and pre-teens were the heaviest consumers.²⁵ It is interesting to speculate on this change. It might be that, in Britain, there are more children watching videos than broadcast television which would account for such low figures. It could also be that as television has become such an accepted part of society, the fascination with television has waned somewhat in favour of the newer technologies of video games. Those over 65, it might be argued, can still remember when there were no televisions and, therefore, see it as a new technology. A question this raises, of course, is whether because of this change in viewing habits the influence of television on children and pre-teens is significantly less. While research is still needed in this area,²⁶ it is clear from viewing figures that children are still engaged in watching a considerable amount of television. For example, for the week ending 29 December 1992, of the top ten highest rated programmes on BBC1, four were episodes of *Neighbours*, a soap whose greatest appeal is to pre-teens. And on ITV, *Home and Away*, another soap with an even younger audience, received three of the top ten spots.²⁷ Children are still watching television and perhaps watching more selectively. While selectivity is a bonus, the questions as to the perceived purpose are even more important. We can no longer assume a total immersion model for television viewing. Therefore, we ask, why are the selections made?

Grant Noble, from the Department of Psychology, University of New England in Australia, reports on a study that asked a group of nine to 15 year-olds to write an essay with the title "Why I like to watch television." He summarizes the findings this way:

(The) two major content categories in answers were "to learn about things" and "to learn about themselves". When these, along with other more negative reasons such as passing time or forgetting problems were incorporated in a questionnaire completed by 726 comparably aged children, learning emerged via factor analysis as the single most important and coherent factor...²⁸

Children watch television to learn.²⁹ They desire to learn about "things," the world

²⁵Comstock, *Television and Human Behavior*, op cit, pp.173ff.

²⁶See B. Gunter and J.L. McAleer, *Children and TV: The One-Eyed Monster?* (London: Routledge, 1990) who have been engaged in answering some of these questions.

²⁷*Fact File 1993*, op cit, p.52

²⁸Noble, "Social Learning from Everyday Television," *Learning from Television* (London: Academic Press, 1983), p.108.

²⁹One might expect children to respond to a question asked by teachers in a school setting by saying that they want to learn. Just as one expects children to answer questions asked by preachers or in Sunday School with the appropriate religious code words. However, the results from these tests show that children consistently choose categories that in factor analysis lead to the learning response even when the word "learn" is not used.

around them; and about "themselves," their place and role in the world around them. How they learn these things and the context for assimilating this learning is, for our purposes, more important than the content that they learn. Patricia Marks Greenfield, Professor of Psychology, University of California in Los Angeles, attempted to discover how children learn from television.³⁰ Her findings directed her to the understanding that the medium of television has different symbols for carrying its message than the print medium. Like print, some time is necessary to develop a "television literacy." Once that literacy is mastered, however, some quite complex mental processes develop, enabling children to perceive information in a variety of ways. This information is primarily of a visual, spatial nature. She believes that children "learn to assimilate information about action, process and physical transformation through their exposure to all types of television..."³¹ In addition to an understanding of spatial relationship and a three dimensional view of the world, television literate children are enabled to engage in what psychology calls "parallel processing." In parallel processing a person is able to take in and assimilate multiple pieces of information simultaneously. This is opposed to "serial processing" which demands that the individual processes one bit of information at a time.

The differing skills required for interpreting print-media verses television-media will be discussed later. Yet, parallel processing is a key point in assessing the changes in understanding and perception brought about by television. The ability to process many differing bits of information simultaneously leads to a whole new way of learning.

*There's a pattern in these new media - not line, but knot; not lineality or causality or chronology, nothing that leads to a desired climax; but a Gordian knot without antecedents or results, containing within itself carefully selected elements, juxtaposed, inseparably fused; a knot that can't be untied to give the long, thin cord of lineality.*³²

This knot of elements or images have been described by D. Kellner as paleo-symbolic images.³³ Unlike representational symbols that carry a specific meaning in a simple image, paleo-symbolic images carry a range of meaning and emotion. This idea is linked to Freud's

³⁰P.M. Greenfield, *Mind and Media* (London: Fontana, 1984). Dr. Greenfield also notes that while her work focuses on how children learn from television it is also "about how all of us, children and adults are socialized by the media. It concerns the media and *human*, not merely *child* development." p.4.

³¹Greenfield, op cit, p.30.

³²E. Carpenter, "The New Languages," *Explorations in Communication*, E. Carpenter and M. McLuhan eds. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p.165.

³³For a complete description of paleosymbolism see Kellner, "TV, Ideology and Emancipatory Popular Culture," in *Television: The Critical View*, op cit, pp.391f.

concept of scenic understanding where scenes or events carry meaning beyond the literal or "visible" meaning. These images and imaged understandings have already been experienced by those working with television age children. Novak, a teacher, sees in his students the beginnings of new modes of communication and processing of information.

*Today the minds and affection of the brighter students are teeming with images, vicarious experiences, and indeed of actual travel and accomplishments. Their minds race ahead and around the flanks of line argument. "Dialection" rather than "logic" or "exegeisis" is the habit of mind they are most ready for.*³⁴

Having developed this "television literacy" viewers then are able to perceive messages from the medium in response to the questions they ask it. These questions from children and youth are, as stated earlier, how is the world ordered and how do I find my place in it. It is important to note that this way of understanding the use of the medium comes under the "uses and gratifications" model and not, primarily, the "effects" model.³⁵ The effects model states that the medium and the message act upon the viewer without any prior condition or relationship necessary. "Uses and gratifications" imply that the viewer is bringing a condition or a relationship to the viewing experience and, with the medium, is acting upon and assimilating the message. This condition or relationship is evidenced by these questions that are asked by the viewer. Another way of testing the preconditions or relationships brought by the viewer to the medium would be to ask what are the expectations that viewers seek to have met in their encounter with the medium.

Personal Gratifications

It is essential that we assess viewer expectations, or viewer "needs" when examining the impact of the medium of television on individuals and upon society as a whole. It is precisely this process of needs gratification that provides the medium with its awesome power. The needs that children bring have been touched upon here. When adults are brought into the picture there is a much broader collection of needs involved. Most writers will admit that the primary need adults bring to television is the need for escape and entertainment. This is what has given television its somewhat denigrated role in the thinking of social and psychological theorists. If television is used primarily as a way of getting out of the real world for a time, it is argued, then it cannot have an important impact on the real world functioning of society. That view is eroding rapidly. Partially because of the sheer volume of time spent escaping the real world into the "world of television." Statistics mentioned at the beginning of this section

³⁴Novak, op cit, p.338.

³⁵For a more complete discussion of the two models mentioned see Comstock, *Television and Human Behaviour*, op cit, p.168-172.

imply that this fantasy world seems to have many inhabitants. This alone is cause for intense study of the medium.

A valuable inquiry is carried out by assessing the roots of the need to escape. William Fore, writing from a religious communications perspective, outlines a much larger collection of needs that viewers bring to television.³⁶ His list begins with escapism, but goes on to include a psychological compensation for a sense of alienation or frustration, a sense of security and stability, information, a need to cope with modern society, a sense of belonging, and, of course, a fantasy world of entertainment and involvement. The question of the place of entertainment is an important issue that receives little interest from theological quarters. It is, for some, central to media studies. It is argued that an exploration of meaning and understanding in media cannot be complete unless it takes the issue of entertainment into account.³⁷ Colin Morris calls for a theology of entertainment that will enable people of faith to understand the nature of their society.³⁸ Postman sees the drive to entertain as the end of television, and a sorry end at that. But, he argues, television is at its best when trivial. It is when it attempts to get serious that the problems ensue. Dyer, on the other hand, interprets the drive for entertainment as a way of engaging with the world of experience and emotion. His list of needs, expressed in terms of what is delivered, includes energy, abundance, intensity, transparency and community.³⁹ Watching television is, he claims, an active not a passive pursuit. But overriding all the debate is a recognized need to be entertained that viewers bring to the television viewing experience. And television delivers.

Religious Needs Met by Television

It is the meeting of such a long and comprehensive list of needs that gives television its wide ranging appeal. If the needs Fore identifies are met by the medium, needs that may not be met anywhere else, then viewers are likely to invest a great deal of importance and relative power in whatever it is that will begin to meet those needs. Here is where Fore sees such a sinister effect in giving television such a prominent place in society. And Fore is not

³⁶Fore, op cit, p.19-20.

³⁷See, for example, Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1992), especially pp.1-15 where he defines what he means by a theory of entertainment. See also Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985) and Lisa A. Lewis, ed., *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992).

³⁸Morris, unpublished lecture given at *The Media and Theological Education Conference*, University of Edinburgh, 11 September 1991.

³⁹Dyer, op cit, pp.17-18.

alone. Others also see a great danger in looking to television for solutions to individual viewer's and the viewing society's ills; and an equal danger in trying to meet the needs of society as a whole, whether viewers or not, through media saturation.⁴⁰ A great proportion of the critics come from the religious community, a community that used to be the source for meeting the needs outlined above. Television, say these writers, is unable to deal with real solutions, instead it offers only placebos. It is incapable of offering more than escapist solutions. It must first re-interpret personal needs, notably religious needs for meaning and a sense of worth and belonging, into material needs to own and to be accepted in a material culture. The issue of religious needs met by television shall be explored further when assessing the theology of television later in this chapter.

But these are content questions, and questions that are raised quite well by Fore and others. Our question must be what is it about the medium that makes it such an attractive source for solutions and comfort. The message, say Fore and others, is banal, not ultimately satisfying. Therefore it must be the medium itself that is appealing. Why has this medium so transformed society as to make the traditional ways of finding meaning objects of scorn?

COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION

To find an answer to these questions the impact of television must be seen in comparison to its predecessor mass medium: print.⁴¹ The two media have a common function in that they are both designed to send a message to a mass audience. However, there is also great diversity in the method for transmitting that message.⁴²

From Print to Television

This diversity creates widely disparate world-views. There was a major shift in thinking and language with the introduction of writing and printing.

Writing encouraged an analytical mode of thinking with emphasis on lineality. Oral languages tended to be polysynthetic, composed of great tight conglomerates, like twisted knots, within which images were juxtaposed, inseparably fused; written

⁴⁰See also Postman, *op cit*; Morris, *op cit*; Guy Lyon Playfair, *The Evil Eye* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990) and Gerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980).

⁴¹In technological terms radio as a mass medium was television's immediate predecessor. However, in terms of media impact on society, radio had more in common with the medium of print. Its effect on the culture was not as pronounced as either the introduction of print or the introduction of television.

⁴²I am indebted to Neil Postman for this brief summary. See his argument in the opening chapters of *Amusing ...*, *op cit*, pp.16-81. See also Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Methuen, 1982) for a discussion of the shift from the oral to the print cultures.

*communications consisted of little words chronologically ordered.*⁴³

The world view of orality began to give way to the world view of print. Oral communication consisted in sound and story, activated through an historical imagination that reenacted events from the community's past. The world-view of the medium of print is, on one level, well ordered, linear, logical, offering a series of assertions designed to lead one to a rational conclusion. Print is two dimensional and involves only one human sense, that of sight, to understand and interpret it. It is a world of ideas.

Television, on the other hand, is a world of images. It is a medium involving at least two senses, sight and hearing.⁴⁴ It may be linear and a series of logical assertions leading to a conclusion, but more often it is not. Rather it is usually a collection of images that leads to an awareness or an experience. And

*it is apparent from this analysis of media images that these images are not mere representations but form a complex structure. They are compressed images narratives and dramas, ways of seeing the world, and invitations to live a certain way.*⁴⁵

One might say that where print is rational and concerned with the mind, television is emotional, concerned with the heart.

This is of course somewhat simplistic. Print can also be deeply moving, more concerned with emotion than with concepts, more with images than ideas. Similarly, television may invite some quite direct intellectual processes, logical assertions aiming to the formulation of ideas. Yet, even in this scenario of emotive print and logical television, we discover that the mental processes and the experience are quite different. Though our hearts may pound as we read a thriller, we can also turn back a page to search out the clues or answer a question arising in our minds. Television, on the other^{hand}, directs the flow of information at the speed it chooses. Though video and interactive technology may change this and make television viewing more like book reading, the most common use of television is still viewing broadcast television. Even should this capability transpire, television's language is image and print's is word. They are interrelated, of course, interpreting images takes words and understanding words takes images. But receiving and assimilating images is distinct from receiving and assimilating words. And the process of television viewing is distinct from reading. "Television may work through feelings rather than through thought, these being but

⁴³Carpenter, "The New Languages," op cit, p.162.

⁴⁴I say "at least" because part of McLuhan's argument is that television is a "tactile" medium, involving touch. See McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (London: Routledge, 1962).

⁴⁵P. Mann, "Journey into the Image: Religion, Arts and Telecommunication," *Image, Model, Word: Reflections on a Theology of Telecommunications* (Dayton, Ohio: Center for Religious Telecommunications, 1984), p.32.

two of the primary ways of knowing outlined by Jung as being mutually antagonistic ways of apprehending reality."⁴⁶

One of the reasons for television's emphasis upon emotion rather than intellect has to do with the speed with which the images change. "The average sound bite is about 10 seconds; and this has important consequences for what can be said. One can express a stripped down feeling or attitude in 10 seconds, but it is rather difficult to make an argument."⁴⁷ Television is concerned with life as lived, as felt or experienced as opposed to life as understood.

McLuhan stands as one of the few who rejoiced at the advent of television and electronic media. He saw television as a return to a more primitive way of perceiving the world through the senses. "The print-made split between head and heart is the trauma which affects Europe from Machiavelli till the present."⁴⁸ Whereas print served to fragment and isolate society, television binds people together in "a global village."⁴⁹ For McLuhan the medium of print signalled the end of community and began the emphasis on the individual and the individual mind. Television brought a return to the participatory experience of art. This medium creates community and invites emotional involvement. Any question of the power for good or for ill of the specific content of television, for McLuhan, is swallowed up in the greater issues of the medium.

TELEVISION WORLD-VIEW

But these greater issues of media include many questions, such as "what is the nature of this 'community' created by television?" and "What is the world-view of such an all encompassing medium?" In addition, content questions must continue to be asked for a complete assessment of the medium of television. From a religious or even humanist point of view, the medium of television offers solutions and world views that are not supported by its content.

Reductionism

Why does the medium appeal? "Television works by reducing the scale of big events

⁴⁶Grant Noble, op cit, p.102.

⁴⁷Todd Gitlin, *Watching Television* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p.18.

⁴⁸Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, op cit, p.170.

⁴⁹See McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage* (New York: Bantam, 1967), which is McLuhan's radical attempt to apply the format of television to print, as well as to explain his thesis on the relative impact of print versus television.

to one of personal relationships with the people which are seen from the television set."⁵⁰ There is a problem with this process of reducing, however. As many writers have noted, one of the big complaints against television is its proclivity to trivialization. The major issues of the day, the grand ideas of the past are reduced to personal relationships. Yet, in a medium dominated by images this must be expected. The question is what happens to the ideas. Are they lost, trivialized away; or are they made real and a part of the perception of individuals? Noble includes a quote from *The Economist* about the television broadcast of Holocaust. Is this an explanation of the medium's method of trivializing ideas, or a witness to the power of the image?

It took the screening on West German television of the American blockbuster about the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany, "Holocaust", to do what scores of well-intended and often well made documentaries, films, plays, and other broadcasts about Hitler's Germany never achieved: to provoke an urgent debate about a past which, even after 34 years, remains undigested and unredeemed. Soap opera it may have been, but to many Germans, "Holocaust", by scaling down...six million murdered Jews to the more easily encompassed sufferings of a single family, made the final solution real for the first time. Shock, horror, disgusted surprise: these are the salutary feelings about a gruesome period of recent history, and there is no point in being prim about the use of Hollywood methods if that is what it takes to achieve such an effect.⁵¹

This is reduction, obviously, but is it trivialization? To an historian's point of view it might be. To perceive the impact of the slaughter of six million as the sufferings of one family is trivialization. But in terms of human understanding and relationship, it is an image of transforming power. One that might be grasped and incorporated into a larger understanding of the world and one's place in it. As Stalin reportedly said: "A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic." History as statistic, as idea, is easily dismissed. History as relationship, as image, is compelling.

Television Language

Image

It is possible from the above to have a grasp of what might be called a "television language." Or perhaps it might more appropriately be called a methodology. Investigating the appeal of the medium leads us to make certain statements about how it works. We have seen that television is, first of all, a medium of images rather than ideas. This is not to say that there are no ideas, but that they are encapsulated in the images that are shown on the screen. The least effective television is the "talking heads" variety, whereby an expert with nothing more than words attempts to communicate an idea. Television demands pictures. The images

⁵⁰Noble, op cit, p.106.

⁵¹Ibid, p.107.

drive the ideas. John Berger and Jean Mohr consider images "another way of telling."⁵² Images require both recognition and interpretation, and yet communicate more than words through a connection with experience.

Experience

Secondly, television is a medium of emotion. For some this means that it is of a lower order of knowing. Whether it is lower can be debated, but it certainly is different from thinking. Feeling is a way of comprehending reality, and the way that television communicates. As feelings are aroused, connections are made between what is viewed and "real life." What is being offered in television viewing is an experience or an engagement rather than an understanding. The hope is, no doubt, that the experience will lead to an understanding. But it is the nature of television that it works through an experiential encounter. This is to be expected with a medium dominated by images. Images evoke experience. This evocation might lead to understanding or to confusion, it might also lead to an understanding not intended by the producer. But the nature of television is experiential, as McLuhan claimed.

Identification

Television methodology is also aiming toward identification. Rather than aiming toward assent or agreement, television invites the viewers to see themselves in the situations, the images, provided on the screen. As the Holocaust example reminds us, it is in the ability to see a distant event or issue in terms of here and now, happening to me or to people very much like me, that the power of television is seen. Again this is an experiential, not an argued, understanding.

In enabling the viewer to identify with characters or events on the screen, television has altered the nature of authority. Rather than an authority that comes from the outside, an institution or an office, television authority is that with which the viewer can identify. Authority, in television terms, is relational, it is given by the viewer more than it is owed to the person viewed. The newscasters whom we trust are the ones who enable us to identify, and to feel with the situation. Michael Buerk's position as an authority figure grew when he invited the viewing public to experience and to identify, to a degree, with the plight of the Ethiopians.

Richard Dyer refers to this identification leading to authority as sincerity. In his

⁵²Berger and Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (Cambridge: Granta, 1989).

theory of entertainment, a principal element of interpretation is "transparency."⁵³ This, claims Dyer, refers to how well the viewer can participate in the relationships that he/she sees on the screen. The more "sincere" the relationship, the more the viewer will identify.

A key to this relational understanding of authority is the intimate nature of television. The viewer invests authority on a one to one relationship with the newscaster or character. The television invites us into areas of the lives of the characters on the screen that we never see from our neighbours or even family members. We are invited to enter the inner world, with all its darkness and light, of the people whom we watch. And what we discover is that they are very much like us, or like we would like to be. In this intimate identification, we discover friends and authority figures who tell us how to live our lives, solve our problems, heal the world, and "go for it!"

Narrative

Narrative, rather than an element of television language is instead a dominant structure of that language. The images and experiences leading to identification are generally ordered into a narrative. The most obvious use of narrative are the drama and comedy serials which are easily recognizable as performed stories. But as John Fiske points out narrative is hardly confined to the fictional end of the spectrum.

*Television is primarily narrative in its mode. Television drama is obviously narrative, but so too is news; documentaries impose a narrative structure upon their subject matter; sport and quiz shows are presented in terms of character, conflict and resolution. Many commercials and rock videos are mini-narratives; arguably only music lacks a narrative structure, and even that has similarities in its ability to structure time.*⁵⁴

This language of image, experience and identification structured in narratives is how television communicates. The communicative discourse, then, is what gives television its power to influence the communicative patterns of a society.

Power of Television

This language or format of television is seen across the spectrum of programming. Though some may be more idea based than others, on the whole and certainly in the most popular programmes, television communicates in imaged experience. Some would argue that this format is limiting, that other perhaps more serious attempts at communicating ideas or issues suffer in the face of the power of television.⁵⁵ In essence, this is television's power

⁵³Dyer, op cit, pp.17-18.

⁵⁴John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1987), pp.128-129.

⁵⁵See Postman, op cit. Postman's argument is that television's proclivity to entertainment forces any subject, no matter how serious, into trivialities and titillation.

to determine public discourse.

Others are less sure that this power is so pervasive.

Television has become less dominant. Often it provides merely background noise. We are also much more familiar with the nature of television. We are less surprised or shocked by its presentations. The bored viewer who's seen it all before flips from one channel to the next. Its illusion of omniscience and truthfulness has also been exposed over the years.⁵⁶

The question, of course, remains: is the familiarity a weakening of the power of television, or an acceptance of that power as normative? Not, perhaps, in the sense of specific content, as Bush reminds us that viewers are much more wary. George Gilder argues that the new technologies have made television redundant.⁵⁷ Interactive cable, he argues, will change the nature of television's influence on society. It will become a more democratic system with the power to determine programming, narrative and dialogue in the hands of the consumer rather than the producer. He celebrates this change and looks forward to a waning of the concern over the power of television. I contend, however, that the format of television is still the dominant mode of communication in Western society. It is possible that a more effective dialogue might ensue from the new technology. Even with more control, however, the audience will still have to rely on the producers to make programmes available. So, even though we might be more hopeful, we must still be aware of how television structures public discourse.

Control of Information

A significant part of this structuring has to do with what is being told. Though not the focus of this thesis we cannot avoid asking certain questions of content. Down the ages control of information has been a major means of the exercise of social power, and the powerful have been careful to manage (and from time to time manipulate) the flow of information. The modern media attempt to project an impression of balance, independence and objectivity. But censorship, distortion and the suppression of disturbing truths are only too common. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, for instance, in *Manufacturing Consent* argue that the mass media in the United States systematically choose "safe" ethical concerns for dissemination and suppressed or marginalized news that was challenging or disturbing to

⁵⁶Randall K. Bush, "Not Global Villagers, but Global Voyeurs," *Christian Century*, September 9-16, 1992, p.809

⁵⁷Gilder, *Life After Television* (New York: Norton, 1990).

the political establishment.⁵⁸ They instance the vast press coverage given to the murder of a single Roman Catholic priest in Poland as compared to the extraordinary reticence about the killing of hundreds of priests, nuns, and religious workers, including Archbishop Romero, in Latin America.

This concern does not diminish the great effect and power of the media to raise awareness of issues world-wide. But it does introduce a note of caution. The aware viewer must be able to stand apart to listen for voices other than those of the public media and to direct the attention of the hearers to those 'quieter' voices. But oddly enough advocacy, drawing attention to concerns vital to the health of a society, is one of the great functions of broadcasting, particularly public service broadcasting as is at present in Britain.

Censorship

While a part of the larger issue of control of information, censorship raises issues that need to be examined separately. Censorship may be political. Or it may be to enforce moral standards and exclude views considered by an influential group, a lobby or by the electorate to be unacceptable. Or it may be the censorship of the market, such as the fact that only programmes which attract a mass audience are allowed, or minority views and positions must be excluded, or, above all, things the advertisers dislike must not be allowed on the air. This censorship by power, wealth, majorities, or pressure groups is often subtle, but always needs to be scrutinized. The questions to be asked about censorship include who decides, in whose interests, and what justification is there for a specific form of censorship? Few people believe that a total lack of regulation is possible or desirable - programmes that incite racial hatred, or encourage cruelty, for example, have hardly anything to be said for them. But difficulties arise when the statement is made that regulators must be accountable. Media institutions often argue for self-censorship and against external, especially governmental, control. Individuals complain that the media's self-censorship does not reflect their idea of what is appropriate. In the United States, for example, local communities have been given the right to decide what magazines can or cannot be sold within the town boundaries. However, the process of coming to a corporate decision has not satisfied the most vocal. Neither does this decision deal with the censorship of the airwaves, of materials or programmes which originate outside of our towns, yet are "purchased" in our living rooms.

Determining the Public Agenda

Strict censorship is not, however, the greatest control of information problem facing

⁵⁸See Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

the viewer in a television age. A greater problem is how the media, and television at the forefront, are increasingly the source of all our information about living in the world. We describe the 'good life' by what we see, read and hear from the media. The public agenda seems set by the mass media. Some would argue that the media even determine what it means to be human in modern society. As Goethals claims, "television images, particularly in the United States, are public, shared symbols that for many Americans answer the Questions "Who am I?" and "Who are we?"⁵⁹ To take a step further Peter Elvy paraphrases Descartes, "I am televised, therefore, I am."⁶⁰ Even existence itself is determined by the media. What is seen on the public screens or heard on the public airwaves or read in the public's press is. What does not appear does not exist.

THEOLOGY OF TELEVISION

Image of the Church

Aware of the power of television to help define our society, we must then ask what might be missing from the media's representation. On perhaps a surface level, many argue that the Church itself does not appear. Or that the representations of the Church and of Christians are so stereotyped as to make them laughable. The public perception of the Church, therefore, is either a nonentity or an object of scorn and derision. Others consider this a problem of Public Relations and not of ultimate concern. Yet if it is true that the public agenda is being set by television, ought not the Church have a voice even there?

A Sense of the Transcendent

The more serious issue for many in the Church, and outside of it, is the recognition that what is apparently missing from the media is any concept of the transcendent, any idea that there is anything beyond the flickering images on the screen. The media, television in particular, need something upon which to focus: a person, place or thing that the camera or microphone or transmitter can pick up. As a result what is concrete and specific broadcasts more readily than what is usually considered spiritual. Therefore, there is a lack of obvious reference to or recognition of a world beyond the day to day one in which we live. The media, it is argued, are antithetical to a religious impulse, to any awareness or striving toward

⁵⁹Gregor T. Goethals, *The Electronic Golden Calf: Images, Religion, and the Making of Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 1990), p.161.

⁶⁰Peter Elvy, an unpublished paper, "The Future of Christian Broadcasting in Europe," delivered at a conference of the same name, Cranfield Conference Centre, 13 October 1990.

the transcendent, and therefore at odds with faith.⁶¹

However, the issue is not quite that simple. Television and the other media do communicate the transcendent. In fact it might be argued that that is the secret of their appeal. A viewer receives not information alone, but information mediated through experience, as we have seen. This television experience enables people to go beyond themselves, to step outside of themselves, to share in a "communion of spirit" with writers, producers and characters. Writing about the television genre of "soap opera," Robert Cathcart describes the appeal in terms in this interaction beyond the physical.

*Soap Opera is a form of mediated interpersonal communication. Interacting with a soap opera is a way of expanding interpersonal relationships. By accepting the persona of one or more soap opera characters we can extend and / or substitute for our emotional involvement with others. Soap opera interaction places us in a special community, with much more intense interpersonal networks than we can actually attain in everyday life. ... Every possible nuance of human relationship is explored and reexplored without end. Every conceivable personal tragedy which could befall family and friends is set before us. We are invited to probe our emotions through a soap opera persona.*⁶²

This does not, of course, imply that this sense of "communion" or "spirituality" is an appropriate substitute for that sought by people of faith. Much of the media's transcendence is a "secular transcendence." By its very nature the media present the "absence of God" because they focus on the hearts and minds of the human viewers and producers. The Holy Spirit is not explicitly given a lot of air time. The main news of the day, both the great disasters and trivial happenings, are all human ones. As Angela Tilby has noted, "television does not reflect God, but it does hear and see God's world."⁶³ The television context might be seen as a context without reference to God. A clear avenue to respond to the influence of television, then, might be in enabling people to make the link between God and God's world. In this way the "viewer" has help in identifying the transcendent in a manner similar to that of the media storytellers.

Through television one is able to encounter a sort of reality that is beyond one's own normal experience. Television may appear at times to be almost wholly engaged in fantasy. But one of the major functions is also to inform and so to keep us in tune with the wider world. It does this not by taking us to that world but by bringing it to us. Through television

⁶¹See, for example, Chris Arthur's argument in "Television, Transcendence and Religious Education," *Occasional Papers*, Number 27, Farmington Institute for Christian Studies, 1988.

⁶²Robert Cathcart, "Our Soap Opera Friends," *Inter / Media: Interpersonal Communication in a Media World*, Gary Gumpert and Robert Cathcart eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.208.

⁶³Angela Tilby, "Like the Appearance of Lamps: Television and the Transcendent," *The Way*, Issue 31/ Vol. 2, April 1991, p. 100.

(which might as easily mean "seeing to afar" as "seeing from afar") an awareness of situations in places far removed from us is opened up to us. There is, therefore, an interaction of a sort, but one which is different in quality from simple human relationships. It occurs through the sharing of experiences through the images presented. For example, the presentation in 1984 and in 1991 of the Ethiopian famine offered something beyond our experience. Yet through viewing the images we found ourselves drawn into that experience, especially through identification with the obvious feelings of the reporter, Michael Buerk. Thus Ethiopia became, in some way, a part of our life and subject to reflection and action. Through television millions of viewers were stimulated to a connection, to an interaction with people half a world away.

Defining the "Real"

The "realities" that the media present, however, are *edited realities* and often *constructed realities*. Events are seen through the eyes of a number of people - the reporter, the producer, the cameraman, and so on. These "gatekeepers" direct our viewing and thereby order our experience. It may also be argued that the perception of the world, and even of reality, is subtly different when it is mediated. Obviously the experience we have of the rainforest on television is not the same experience as we would have if we were standing in it. Therefore, to rely solely on the media to keep us in tune with the world would be to restrict what we mean by "experience" and so begin to diminish the possibilities of our understanding - or perhaps better, interpreting - both that world and our experience of it. In other words, the signals of transcendence which have been argued by Peter Berger, are inevitably minimised because of the nature of the media-saturated world which we have created and now inhabit.⁶⁴ The rumour of angels becomes gossip that is no longer believed.

The world that the media present is a world which is already interpreted. This is not a new phenomenon: most, if not all the books of the Bible, for example, present interpreted history or story. There is, however, a key difference. Whereas the Bible presents us with a world-view that is God centred, the media world-view is human centred.

Communicating Values

Alongside questions of how television interprets the world must come other questions of "media theology." We contemplate whether the modern mass media, rather than the Church or the preachers, are redefining faith in the twentieth century. "Television is becoming a vital

⁶⁴See *A Rumour of Angels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

cradle of meaning for most of Western society," says Angela Tilby.⁶⁵ It, she believes, is shaping the belief systems and thought processes of our society. The implications of this view, if it is correct, are enormous. It would involve an intense study of the programming of the media across the board to determine the nature of this potential "theological system."⁶⁶ Yet, even the most cursory glance at the output of the media reveals certain aspects of its "theology." William Fore has stated that television presents certain dominant "myths" that could be seen to represent a theological system. These myths include: The fittest survive; Happiness consists of limitless material acquisition; Consumption is inherently good; Property, wealth, and power are more important than people; Progress is an inherent good. Fore believes that "the whole weight of Christian history, thought and teaching stands diametrically opposed to the media world and its values."⁶⁷

Some suggest that the media's theology argues that the nature of the world is essentially dualist - us against them, good against evil; the idea that might makes right and that force is the best way to solve the world's problems; that good triumphs and evil is vanquished in the end. These are, of course, simplistic summaries that are disproved by individual programmes. It is also true that much of public service broadcasting works quite hard to counter these simplistic and naive assumptions. Yet many critics warn that the media present a series of theological assumptions which confirm popular belief and which have historically been put under judgement by the Christian churches and their teaching. And few could doubt that the media, rather than the churches, are the primary "cradle of meaning" which helps to shape our faith and understanding.

Images of Faith

The advent of television did not bring about this shift in the ground of meaning. For centuries artists have understood themselves to be engaged in a theological exercise. Two of the first modern abstract painters, Piet Mondren and Wassily Kandinsky, saw themselves taking over from the Church. As Gregor Goethals writes:

From a variety of religious strands they sought to forge nothing less than a spiritual revolution through art, leading others to a universal metaphysical reality. In the face

⁶⁵Angela Tilby, op cit, p. 97.

⁶⁶Many such works have been done and more continue to be produced. See works such as: Gregor Goethals, *The TV Ritual: Worship at the Video Altar* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981); Neil Postman, op cit; Guy Lyon Playfair, op cit; William Fore, *Mythmakers: Gospel, Culture and the Media* (New York: Friendship Press, 1990); Mary E. Brown, *TV and Women's Culture* (London: Sage, 1990).

⁶⁷Fore, "Mass Media's Mythic World: At Odds with Christian Values," *Christian Century*, January 19, 1977, pp.34-35.

*of materialism and the waning power of the Church, these two artists saw a saving role for the arts in modern society, independent of the Church's traditional icons and rituals, yet accessible to all.*⁶⁸

Mondren and Kandinsky considered that they were engaging in an exercise of salvation through their art. This might seem to be a radical, even heretical, statement. However, trying to discover what it is in which individuals and society find "salvation" might lead one toward the media (in the broadest sense of that term) rather than the Church or any faith. Modern media give many people a sense that there is, or might be, meaning in today's world. Goethals points to art and media, or "high" and "popular" art as encompassing the individual and shared values of a community. In the final chapter of her book, she shows how this takes place.

*[I]n one important way [high and popular art] are indistinguishable. In museums as well as on television, images attest to values and world views. The essential power of images is their capacity to give material form to invisible faith. If we look back over history, we see an almost endless panorama of symbols human beings have fashioned to impose order on experience - from the handprints on a palaeolithic wall to the pervasive electronic images which leap across national barriers and boundaries. Both high and popular art document the human construction of meaning, using material of the seen, known world to interpret experience and to legitimate faith. ... Transformed by communications technologies, contemporary mass media have become instrumental in a worldwide symbolization of ideologies - social, economic, political. High art also embodies a variety of faiths - in individualism, in private visions, and in the art market.*⁶⁹

Images help to define and shape faith. The points of contact are much more clear and much more appealing. Therefore, individuals and communities are drawn toward the images which are most prevalent around them. The flood of images which pours from the mass media ensures that everyone is able to find those images which most resonate with their own experience, in the process confirming and affirming those beliefs and experiences. They are, as it were, "saved" through these images. Soteriology, then, in the modern media context, is a doctrine of immense importance, as people seek the images that challenge, transform or renew.

If nothing else reflection upon the "theology of television" reminds us that the preacher is not alone in helping hearers explore meaning in modern society. The question arises, however, as to whether preachers see this "competition" as a help or a threat.

CONCLUSIONS

The Media Context

The "blanket" of television and other media which wraps round our society has shaped

⁶⁸Gregor Goethals, *The Electronic Golden Calf...*, op cit, p. 85.

⁶⁹Ibid, pp. 209-210.

the communication patterns and expectations of those who come to hear preaching as surely as it has changed the nature of discourse in the public at large. Understanding the nature of this change is the first step to responding to the change. Television makes new demands on communication, raises new issues for discussion, and, in a sense, evaluates all of our communication. As the preacher attempts to make a public proclamation, the minds of the hearers are full of other public proclamations. The preacher cannot compete with the resources of television. In that sense the power of television is bad news for the preacher. But television has opened up avenues of communication, has put serious and heartfelt issues on the table for debate or at least observation, and, most importantly, has captured the minds and imaginations of the hearers with an experiential language of image and story. Though the images provided and the stories related might be ones which the preacher must oppose, in opposing there is opportunity for replacement with better images and stories. Even as the preacher stands against the tide of cultural assumptions, materialistic world views and the devaluation of human life in much of the content of television, he/she can respond to television by employing a language and a structure with similar characteristics. In so doing, it might be possible to find a language for preaching more appropriate to the preaching enterprise than the rational exposition has been.

Exploring the "theology of television" invites us to explore our theology of preaching and, behind that, of communication. How is our theology revealed in our approach to Christian communication as much as in our thinking and writing about it? How do we understand the process of human communication, and the unique communication of preaching? In this chapter we have examined the world that surrounds the hearer. In Chapter 3 we investigate the world of Christian communication to discover how great the distance might be between these two.

A Media "Gap"

But before attempting a theology of communication, we turn to the case study. A problem for preachers in thinking of the links between television and preaching is the "media gap" that exists between ministers and the general public. Often, for instance, the newspapers usually read by ministers are not those with the highest circulation. The television programmes that pastors watch may not be those viewed by members of their congregations. And to pretend otherwise merely leads to a sense in people, and in the pastors themselves, of hypocrisy. The pastoral heart calls for perception and self-awareness, so that the minister may ask where the people are and how are they understanding or defining themselves. This media gap is an instance of the cultural distance that every minister at some points feels from those among whom he or she is working, whatever the precise social composition of the parish or

district. How, then, does the minister communicate to the people outwith his/her context? One approach to any popular context may be through condescension, especially with casual talk of "mindless entertainment." Yet, those programmes which pastors may so easily judge are contributing in a unique way to the assumptive world of those among whom they minister. Preachers might also overlook their own involvement with the media context, and are even apologetic about their viewing: *I just happened to see ...* Recognition of the way in which media are involved in all aspects of people's lives (including their own) may enable preachers not only to speak the language but more importantly to meet people where they are. Such a skill can be developed and employed without recourse to direct use of the media or even specific reference to programmes or articles. To read, listen and view with the intention of getting alongside the parishioners would be to destroy all possibility of such association. The media context imbues today's experience; it is not an extra. The urgency of this is shown forcefully when we begin to explore the overwhelming pervasiveness of television.

Case Study

The question for this first part of the case study material is "how do the preachers and preachers in training interact with the media context?" Is there evidence of this "media gap," or are the preachers already aware of the influences and power of the medium? It is to these issues that we turn in Chapter II.

Preaching in a Television Age

Whether we believe that television's power to convince is waning, or that television is a great manipulator of public opinion and understanding, it is beyond dispute that television's position in modern Western society is, for the majority of the populace, far more influential and far more normative than the pulpit. Given the understanding that this position is not likely to change in the foreseeable future we must be willing to ask if the preacher can still legitimately preach at all in a television age.

II CASE STUDY: OPINIONS AND USE OF TELEVISION

NEW COLLEGE STUDENTS

Two groups of students from New College, University of Edinburgh participated in a case study experiment. The first group of seven students (Group A) had just begun their training for ministry and had not been exposed to any formal education in the area of preaching. The second group of ten (Group B) consisted of students from an advanced homiletics course in the Practical Theology Department. The sessions with this latter group took place both within and outside the context of the class. The class met weekly for ten weeks. In addition two individual interviews were held with each student over the course of the term. All work with Group A took place outside of formal teaching and except for one group session was conducted on an individual interview basis.

Aside from the number of years spent at New College the two groups were quite similar. Both covered a wide age range (from low 20's to over 50) and a variety of experiences. Out of seventeen students there was only one who had entered theological education directly from school. All the others were second career. There were nine females and eight males. Fifteen were at various stages in their training for the Church of Scotland ministry, while two were hoping to serve in the Episcopal Communion. They also divided themselves quite neatly theologically as five considered themselves liberal, five moderate and five conservative (two were undecided and all were uncomfortable with strict "theological labels"). Most were long term church members with only five of the total having attended less than 10 years.

In Chapter VI, when examining attitudes toward and understanding of preaching, it will be useful to keep the two groups of students separate. But here when we are attempting to get a picture of how well these students fit into the "television culture" it is possible to examine the two groups together.

The analysis begins with an investigation into the students' television use, at least as they present it. This is then followed by an inquiry into the attitudes and opinions they might hold about television.

TELEVISION VIEWING CHOICES

Amount

To get an accurate picture of television use, it would be necessary to set up some sort of observational mechanism whereby the students' practices would be recorded. For the purposes of this exercise it was enough to get an impression of the students' practices by

discussion.¹ By a simple reporting method, it was determined that none of the students in this group would be classified as "heavy viewers" in terms equivalent to those in the general public. Despite the figures recorded in the previous chapter, the heaviest viewers from the student groups were those who watched ten or more hours per week. In this much smaller scale, there were eight "heavy" viewers, five "moderate" viewers (5 - 9 hours per week) and four "light" viewers (less than five hours per week). Already we can see evidence of the "media gap" as the British **average** viewing was approximately 25 hours per week.

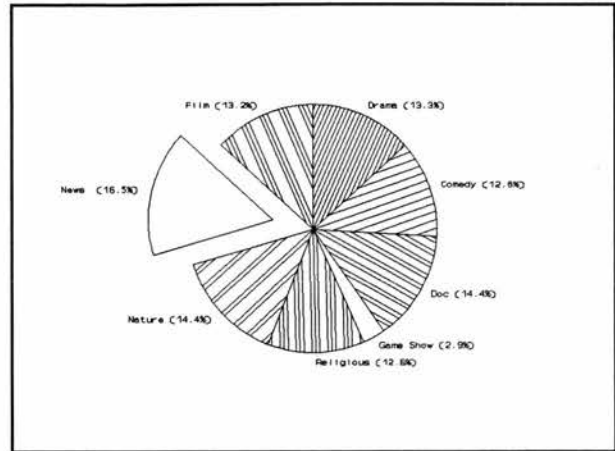


Figure 1 Television Preferences

Already we can see evidence of the "media gap" as the British **average** viewing was approximately 25 hours per week.

Programmes

The gap is further seen by investigating the types of television the students preferred (see Figure 1). The factual programmes in general were selected as favourite over any of the fictional programming. News came out as favourite followed by Documentary and Nature programmes. Next came Drama, Film and Comedy programmes, all receiving high ratings. Though not on the original list, Sport was very popular with some students, but not at all popular with others. So it came out somewhere in the middle. The only type of factual programme that fell behind the fictional programmes was religious broadcasting. Actually, religious programmes were often rated quite highly by some of the students and therefore the relative position of this type of television was not that low. The one area that consistently fell to the bottom of the list was game and/or quiz shows. In fact, some of the students considered this type of programme "the worst excesses of all that is wrong with our society." Soap opera was not often discussed. In some of the written responses it would appear as a favourite. In fact one female student said that all she would watch was news and soaps. But in discussion soap opera usually was only mentioned negatively or when talking about what "those out there watch." Further exploration of the student responses can be found in Appendix B.

Moving from general categories to specific choices we find an interesting variety of television programmes identified as favourite. Over all, five students chose factual

¹See Appendix A for a sample of the instrument that was used in data gathering. This instrument was used in conjunction with student interviews and as a postal questionnaire for the preachers.

programmes (*Newsnight*, *Sportscene*, "a good Documentary," and two for "News"), seven students chose fictional programmes (four comedies, two dramas and one soap), and five students did not have a favourite. It is possible to make a distinction within this "none" category, however. Out of the five, three chose none because they did not find anything of regular interest. The other two stated that there were so many programmes that they enjoyed watching that it was impossible to choose just one favourite. So we might classify the former as "none -" and the latter as "none +" in order to differentiate the responses.

It may seem surprising to see that four of the students selected a Comedy as their favourite programme, given that comedy was the lowest rated type of fictional programme. When exploring this with the students their explanation was the type of comedy chosen as favourite programmes were not of the type with which some of the students had problems. The programmes chosen (two American sit-coms - *M*A*S*H* and *Wonder Years* and two British comedies - *Minder* and *Only Fools and Horses*) were seen as respectable mainstream programmes. In reference to the American programmes in particular it was noted that they both were "able to deal with quite complex social and personal issues and still make us laugh."² The type of comedy of which many of the students complained were the "alternative" comedy programmes which focused on stand up comedians or social/political satire. The programme *Spitting Image* was most often mentioned as "television comedy gone wrong." The drama programmes chosen were *All Creatures Great and Small* and *Inspector Morse*. The one "soap" selected as favourite was *Coronation Street*.

Out of all the choices for favourite programmes only two (*Coronation Street* and *Inspector Morse*) are in the top five listings for the nation. This emphasizes that this group of students is atypical when it comes to television viewing.

FUNCTIONS OF TELEVISION

The students were asked to discuss the function of television. In other words, they were asked "why do you watch television?" The overall student responses can be seen in Figure 2.

To Educate

The function of television most often cited by the students was to educate. Across the board, learning appeared as dominant for this group. The type of learning sought was as varied as the students themselves. "I am fascinated by the documentaries, going places I've never been, studying ideas I have never heard about. There is simply a lot of good

²All quotations in this section represent actual comments from a student in the group. These comments were recorded and notes and/or transcripts are available.

information on television." "I watch to learn who's in and who's out." "Television can push the boundaries of a society, both in knowledge and in behaviour."

To Entertain

The second most cited function of television was as entertainment. In general, the students put entertainment below education. The students had little difficulty in talking about entertainment.³ What caused more complaints was when we tried to move from television as entertainment to television as an escape.

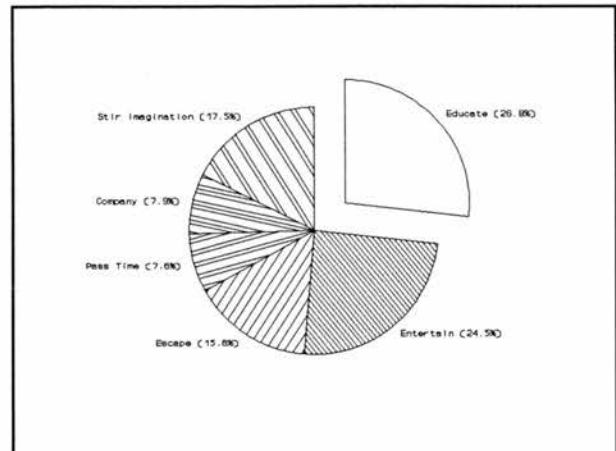


Figure 2 Functions of Television

To Escape

"I don't like that word "escape," it implies a loss of control." "Yeah, it also means that I don't like where I am or what I'm doing or, ultimately, who I am." These sorts of comments account for the lower importance given to television as an escape.

On the other hand, those who were more sympathetic to television as an escape were more likely to talk in terms of entertainment and diversion. "I use television to get me to stop working or thinking about work. It makes me more sociable." This student wanted to disagree with the others who were suggesting that television viewing is strictly a solitary activity. For him, his work tended to separate him from social interaction, while television became a common ground of experience and conversation.

To Stir the Imagination

The idea of escape caused many of the students a certain amount of unease. They were much more comfortable talking about television as an exercise in "stirring the imagination." Though a few students wanted to talk about how little imagination was actually engaged in watching television ("It does everything for you. All you have to is sit there like a sponge and soak it up."), most of the group saw imagination as the means whereby television makes its impact. "When you are caught up in the stories, when you feel with them, that's when television works best." It was this function of empathetic imagination that received the most favourable comments. "It's like you're right there with them. Whether it's the news

³There was not universal agreement on this point. See Appendix B for further expansion.

stories about Somalia or the drama stories about people like us, good programmes grab you." "After some programmes," echoed another student, "I feel drained, exhausted. But good."

In general, the younger the student the more inclined they were to see television as a stimulus to imagination. Some of the older ones would repeat the old cliché about "the pictures on radio being better." These less explicit media, they argued, were more conducive to imagination than television. The younger ones on the other hand were quite at home with television and were able to see that television often drove their imaginations in other experiences. "The imaginative process with television could be relating something you see in one setting to a completely different one." This process of making connections between one set of circumstances and another, perhaps contrasting, set of circumstances is a key to the imaginative process. We shall explore this issue in greater depth in Chapter V.

To Provide Company

Only one student out of the 17 considered "providing company" a respectable function of television. "I'm not necessarily thinking of myself," he said, "but those older, lonely people who have no other contact with the world. Having a television means they aren't completely cut off." A noble sentiment. Yet one that was generally derided by the rest of the group. "I agree that television is often some people's only contact with the world. But I see that as a great tragedy and indictment of our society, rather than a positive function of television." This latter was the more accepted position. There was very little acceptance of the idea that television could provide "company," either for the students themselves or for others in their society. Many of them could relate stories of (primarily) older relatives or friends who withdrew from society and carried on conversations with television characters. When pressed as to whether television was at the root of this phenomenon, one replied "probably not, but it certainly doesn't do much to stop it!"

To Pass the Time

It was this darker side of television use that distressed the majority of students in the group. While most were sure that their own use was not governed by such things as a need for company or as a way to pass the time, they were afraid that too many others were not so discerning. "What worries me about television is not people like us, we can take it or leave it. I'm worried about the masses of people out there who don't know any better." This comment was quickly followed by another student who tried to mitigate such an extreme position. "You mean that you don't think people with less formal education can get much out of television and are using it like a child's dummy? I think people are smarter than that. Maybe they watch television so much for the same reasons we do: to learn something and to be entertained."

What's wrong with that?"

It was interesting that as long as the group was exploring the more positive functions of television they were quite willing to investigate their own experience. But when it came to unfolding the "negative" side many of them wanted to look elsewhere for the guilty parties. Here is the "media gap," to which we referred earlier, in action. The list of television uses identified by Fore and others includes escape and social contact as central.⁴ Yet, these students indicate that such uses are somehow of a lower order than the more proper functions of education and entertainment.

OPINIONS OF TELEVISION

Window on the World

Despite this, many of the students profess an open mind, and indeed a certain amount of enthusiasm, about the possibilities of television. But there is also evidence of a deep suspicion of the medium. Figure 3 shows the range of opinion. For example the most common opinion of television as a medium is that it serves as a "window on the world." Many students comment on the "global village" concept as a powerful force in modern society. By

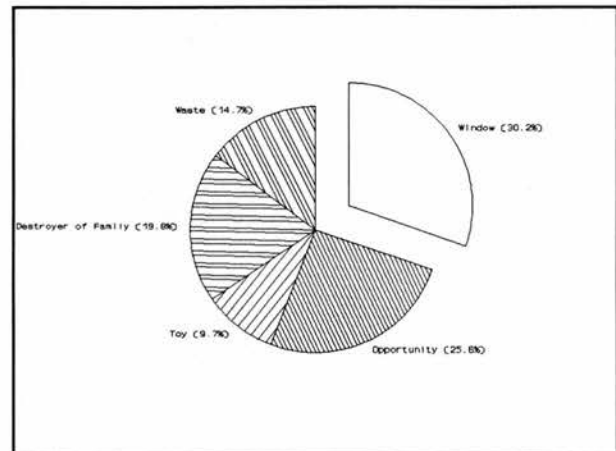


Figure 3 Opinions of Television

this they usually mean that television "brings far away places right into our living rooms." "We can see parts of the world that we will never visit," says one student. There were, however, some more cautionary notes sounded on this theme. See Appendix B for more details.

Opportunity for the Church

The students then explored the issue of the Church's potential use of television. Again, over-all, the students were quite willing to embrace the medium for the Church's purposes. "If we want to be heard we have to go where the people are." The students almost unanimously subscribed to the view that television is the "public square" of our society, or at least where the public agenda is set. Though there was some reservation, as shown in Appendix B, the students as a group were inclined to be favourable to the idea that the Church should be involved in television. Some went so far as to say that "the Church should control all religious media, well, at least Christian television. Leaving it up to the BBC or ITV

⁴See Fore, *Television and Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), pp.19-20.

has led to the current output of bland little nothings." When asked if the Church could produce better programmes given a lack of media savvy, this student replied, "If we can't, we should."

Waste of Time

Some of the more "negative" aspects of the medium were considered as well. A common complaint is that television is a "monumental waste of time." Though there were a few in the group who held this position quite strongly, most of them were only a little concerned. Out of the 17 students, for example, there were only four who did not claim that watching television was their number one leisure time activity. This echoes other outside statistics which claim that television ranks below only sleeping and work as the greatest time consumer in the nation.⁵ It was that smaller group who were most concerned about television being a waste of time. Most of the Group A students were quite involved in sports or other outdoor pursuits and, thus, saw television as a diversion from those more "involving" activities. Indeed, the two groups of students were all rather active, listing many endeavours in which they participated and few could qualify as "couch potatoes" slumped in front of their television sets for hours on end. This is not unexpected given that they are all engaged in degree programmes that involve a lot of time. Still, when assessing their leisure time, as limited as it may be, the group as a whole did not see television as an intrusion, but rather a convenient and inexpensive way to spend that precious time.

Destroyer of Family Life

The most commonly uttered negative opinion about television was that it was "destructive of family life." Many students agreed with one who said that "no matter what good can be said about television, its overwhelming effect is to keep my family from spending time together." The small group who did not put television as their number one leisure activity were the most negative on this point. "We've decided to get rid of our TV while our children are small," reported one, "how else will we get to take time to talk with them and do things with them." There was some dissent to this somewhat apocalyptic view. A few of the students pointed out that it was up to the family "to make quality time a priority and turn it (television) off." See Appendix B for further explication.

An Innocent Toy

In between the more positive opinions about television and the more negative opinions

⁵See viewing statistics in Chapter I.

there is the neutral position: television as an "innocent toy." The students were most derisive of this idea. "Television at its most innocuous is still an influence on us." "We may not be aware of how it is shaping us, but it is. The question is whether it is shaping us for the better or for the worse."

RECOMMENDING TELEVISION

To Family

After investigating personal favourites and opinions, the students were asked which programmes they would recommend their family watch and which programmes they would recommend that their family not watch. This proved to be an interesting but contentious exercise. When talking about *personal* likes and dislikes it was possible to keep things friendly and open. But when it came to directing others on their television use, some students got quite assertive in making their case.

Inviting suggestions as to which programmes to recommend to the families proved the less difficult task. Only four out of the 17 said that they would not want to recommend any programmes. These four were primarily heavy viewers themselves and wanted to allow other family members to make up their own minds about what to watch. "I would not want to impose my views on any one," claimed one student, a male, former teacher! These four believed that there is a lot to like on television and would allow even young children to make their own decisions.

The rest of the group gave a variety of recommendations. Three of the responses were more about the general effect than about a programme or type of programme. One student declared she would recommend "useful ones," while another suggested "anything enjoyable." The third student recommends "almost anything." While many of the rest could agree with the first assessment, the latter two caused considerable argument. The argument about how discerning small children could be in selecting programmes for viewing led to some quite heated debates. More specific recommendations can be found in Appendix B.

The students found it a much more difficult exercise to find programmes that they would recommend their families not watch. First of all, the exercise was designed to express more force than simply asking what they would not recommend. I wanted to discover which programmes the students would actively discourage their families from watching. There were six students who said that there were no programmes that they would dissuade their family from watching. None of the remaining students had specific programmes that they could name. A few mentioned genres of programmes to which they would give a blanket restriction: Soaps and Game Shows primarily. The rest of the students chose instead to ban certain types of content rather than a specific programme or genre. And as might be expected "Sex" and

"Violence" head the list of content to be avoided. Over all it must be noted that while a few had a more libertarian view, the majority were concerned about making good use of the medium.

To Church

The students were asked what programmes would they recommend their Church members watch and which would they recommend they not watch. We have moved out of the arena of family responsibility and are now asking about pastoral responsibility. This caused much more disquiet among the students, at least one of whom wondered if we were now "moving away from preaching into meddling?"

Seven of the students chose to opt out of this process, saying that they couldn't imagine making any recommendations at all concerning television viewing to their congregations. A further three could perhaps see themselves suggesting something to watch, but could not see themselves making suggestions about programmes to avoid. In fact, one student said "How dare I presume to do such a thing?"

I believe that this is quite revealing about underlying attitudes towards television. If, as pastors, we are concerned with the community as made up of whole persons, then surely activities outside of the Church building are a part of that concern. By suggesting that it would be beyond their remit as pastors to make recommendations, these students are communicating that television use is of no consequence to their congregation. Viewing figures, and the argument in the previous chapter is that this is clearly not the case for our society. A preacher who sees nothing to recommend in television is not speaking to people "where they are."

Ten students tried to come up with something to recommend and seven of those tried to suggest things to avoid. Only one specific programme was recommended: *Panorama*. Others recommended types of programmes or gave general guidelines, such as "anything useful." On the negative side the seven students who wished to make some suggestions merely repeated their prohibitions from the family category. Six of the seven students warned against television violence or sex and usually both. While it is important for clergy to be aware of the pervading moral environment of television and to make suitable suggestions for addressing certain issues, it is perhaps a bit of a stereotypical response to be railing against the "televised smut on display in our living rooms." Again, the basic question is whether we as pastors are willing to recognize that for many members of the society in which we minister, the television holds a place of prime importance. The students engaged in these conversations, in general, did not seem willing to recognize or in any way to act upon that awareness.

THE GOSPEL ON TELEVISION

Each student was asked if the gospel could be communicated on television, if the medium made it possible to communicate such a message as the Christian faith. In general the students were positive about the nature of the medium and its suitability for communicating the gospel. Only two of the 17 students answered in the negative.

Of the 15 who said that it was possible, only two could name a programme where the gospel was being communicated. *Songs of Praise* and *This is the Day* were the programmes that two students identified. "They may not be perfect, but they are real and they use prayer and Bible reading more overtly than any other programmes. Of course they are limited by the rules of the BBC which blunts their effectiveness, but a lot of people watch."

The rest of the group and the more liberal ones, were uncomfortable with this assessment. "It is all so unreal, so simple and simplistic." "The gospel is about challenge, not just about sad stories with happy endings or old songs sung by artificial congregations." Many of the students complaining about the "*Songs of Praise* gospel" had to admit that they don't usually watch the programme, and therefore might have been attacking a stereotype. "But even so, those who watch that are the old ladies who want to be nostalgic about their religion."

When asked what sort of programme might be more effective in communicating the gospel, most of the students were hard pressed to come up with anything. Perhaps their reluctance to be truly creative stems from their opinion that television, while potentially "something special for God," is for the most part a distraction from the real work of the minister. Just as the students were unable or unwilling to be proactive in recommending television programmes for their Church members, so they were unlikely to see that the medium might be a help to them in communicating the gospel. There seemed to be a great gulf, or a "media gap," fixed between what goes on in the pulpit and what takes place in the television room.

EDINBURGH PREACHERS

Though it is the students who are the focus of the study, it was decided to have as a contrasting measure a similar picture of a small group of practising preachers. Here again, the thrust of the study is to determine how closely the preachers' use and opinions concerning television mirror that of society in general, is there a "media gap" that might make communication difficult?

The group consists of clergy and lay preachers in almost equal measure, six clergy and five lay preachers. They were predominantly men, though there were three women in the group of eleven. They were divided more or less equally between the Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church. And, as with the students, this impression is a somewhat limited view.

TELEVISION VIEWING CHOICES

Amount

Like the students, none of the preachers would confess to be heavy or even average viewers on the societal viewing scales. But on our smaller scale there were three who are "heavy" viewers (ten hours or more), six "moderate viewers" (five to nine hours) and two light viewers (less than five hours). Both of the light viewers actually claimed to be "non-viewers."

Programmes

As a whole, the preachers preferred the factual programmes almost exclusively (see Figure 4). News and Documentary were the favourites followed closely by Nature programmes. Drama and Films manage to rate above Religious programmes. At the bottom of the list were Comedy programmes and Game Shows as the ultimate waste of television programming time.

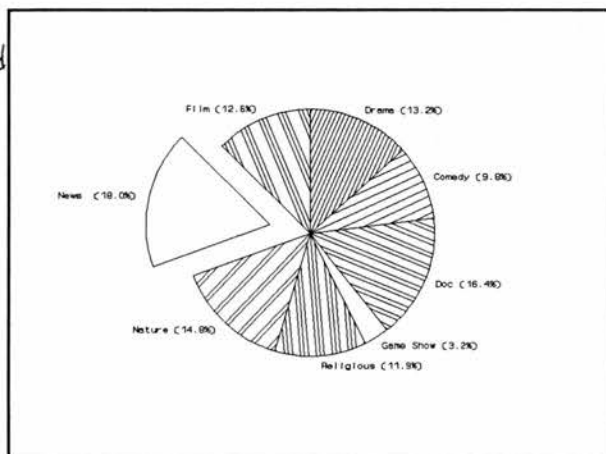


Figure 4 Television Preferences

When it comes to choosing particular programmes to name as favourites, the preachers came out about half and half. Half of the group could choose no favourites at all.

Of those who did choose a favourite, only one chose a type of programme rather than a specific one: "a good play or opera." One selection was a bit puzzling; *Adventure Series*, Channel 4, could refer to a genre or a specific programme of which I am unaware. The remaining selections represent a great diversity of choice. One chose News as a favourite, but specific enough to select "either the 9pm or 10pm variety." One chose a travel programme (*Holiday*), another a soap (*Take the High Road*). And, a rarity, one preacher actually chose a religious programme as a favourite (*Highway*).

The very diversity of these favourite programmes makes a general assessment difficult. There seems to be no overwhelming trend toward fictional or factual programmes. It seems surprising that the group as a whole claims to favour the factual programmes by a large margin over the fictional types of programming, and yet in selecting specific favourites they produce a list of considerable diversity.

FUNCTIONS OF TELEVISION

In examining the preachers' understandings of the function of television, or asking why they watch, we find a hierarchy similar to that of the students (see Figure 5). The most

important function of television for the preachers is to educate. In fact for many of them, if it didn't do that it wasn't worth bothering with, so much higher did they rate this function than any other. For others, primarily the clergy, to entertain was as important as to educate. Entertainment had a generally favourable rating.

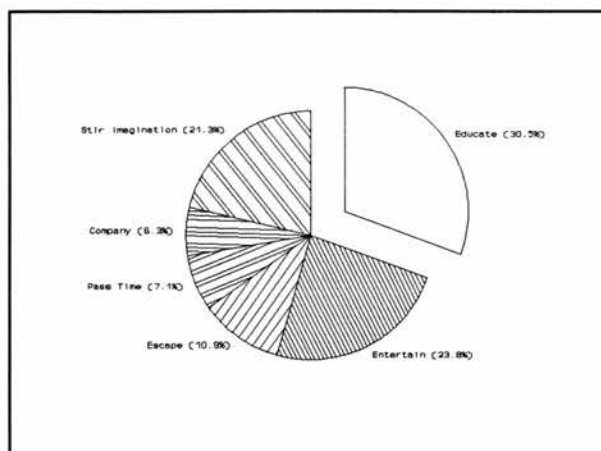


Figure 5 Functions of Television

The function of television as providing an escape leads to a similar division. As a group the preachers are generally dismissive of the need for escape.

The preachers were also generally dismissive of television as a way to pass the time or as providing a sense of company. The latter receiving the lowest general rating.

The last function of television mentioned was that of "stirring the imagination." The group as a whole was little more than neutral on this point. They did not disagree with this function, but they were not overwhelmingly supportive either. The lay preachers were a bit more favourable than the clergy. Most of the lay preachers would rate this function higher than "entertainment." But perhaps this was simply a more acceptable way to talk about the same thing. Stirring the imagination for many of the group was a way of providing a diversion, of getting out of one's own situation into another world. These descriptions, voiced in a group session, sound suspiciously like entertainment and escape. But those words were negative for these lay preachers, while imagination was a more positive way of expressing this function.

OPINIONS OF TELEVISION

In taking the large view of the group of preachers, the first thing that strikes is that there are relatively more negative "extremists" than in the student group. Two of the preachers (one each in the clergy and lay categories) were extremely negative about the place and function of television in modern society. These individuals coloured the group as a whole in a way that no individuals of the

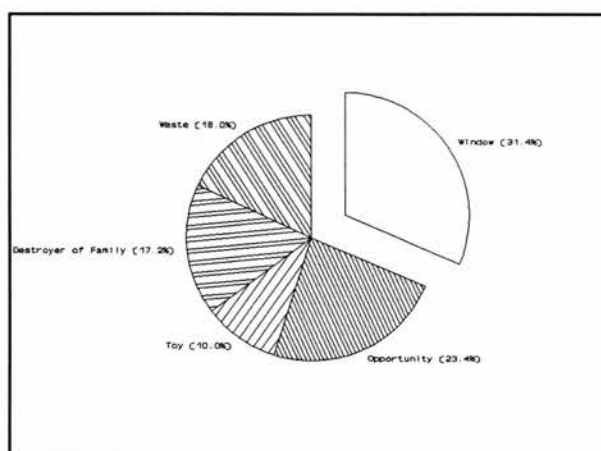


Figure 6 Opinions of Television

student groups did. However, it is still possible to get some general impressions from the group as a whole.

With the awareness of the those extremes, we can still see that the preachers were also generally positive about the role of television in society (see Figure 6). The overwhelming opinion of television is that it provides a "window on the world."

On the issue of whether the television provides an "opportunity for the Church" the preachers were a bit more ambivalent. Though leaning to the positive side, they were clearly less comfortable with this opinion than with the "window" idea. And it is the clergy who proved to be the most sceptical. The lay preachers were much more positive about the Church's potential involvement in the medium.

On the negative side, even with the two holding such extreme positions, the preachers as a whole did not believe that the negative aspects outweighed the positive. Of the two ("waste of time" and "destroyer of family life") they considered time wasting the greater danger.

The effect of television viewing on family life, did not seem to concern the preachers that much. Except for the few who saw that television was very little more than a waste of time and destroyer of family life, the preachers did not seem to think that its effect on the family was that strong.

As to the neutral position, the preachers were also sceptical. Very few of the group were willing to agree that television was an "innocent toy." The clergy were much more likely to agree with this assessment than were the lay preachers. So, even though rating the neutral opinion far below both the positive and the negative opinions, the clergy were still likely to give more credence to the "take it or leave it" idea of television.

RECOMMENDING TELEVISION

To Family

Examining the preachers' recommendations was also an eye-opening exercise. First of all, more of them were reluctant to make any recommendations at all. Only four of the total group felt able to make any positive recommendations. In looking at the family, the four positive recommendations included only one specific programme: *Songs of Praise*. Two of the four recommended factual programmes only: Documentary, Nature, News and *Songs of Praise*. One of the others recommended only fictional programmes: good Drama and Serials. The other preacher recommended one of each: Nature and Soaps. The appearance of Soaps in this category is a bit unexpected, given the generally low opinion of the genre. But the recommender was also the preacher who selected *Take the High Road* as her favourite. The remaining preachers all claimed that they would make no positive recommendations.

On the negative side, there were five preachers who would recommend that certain programmes be avoided. Again, there was only one programme named: *Spitting Image*. Out of the five, however, three recommended against comedy. Besides *Spitting Image*, the list included Alternative Comedy and Blue Comedy. One of these also included Horror. The remaining two preachers wanted to ban Game Shows and Violence, and "All Television." This last came from one of those identified as anti-television. The remaining six preachers did not wish to make any negative recommendations at all.

To Church

When turning to recommendations for church members the scene changes considerably. Again there are four preachers who would make positive recommendations. But this time they are all factual programmes and no specific programmes are suggested. The list includes News (twice), Documentary, Nature, and the Occasional Special. Though, theoretically, this last subject could include a fictional drama or comedy special, it is unlikely because the one who made this recommendation is the other "extremist" who has already declared his antipathy to fictional television.

When it comes to making negative recommendations, only three ventured this exercise. The three types of programmes, because no specific suggestions are made, that are to be avoided are Game Shows, "Witchcraft and the like," and "All Television." It is difficult to avoid asking the inevitable question, namely is there a lot of witchcraft on British television? I guess it depends on the interpretation of witchcraft. But as this recommendation to avoid all such programmes is made by someone who is proud of the fact that he doesn't own a television, it is not surprising that he would react against a stereotype. However, I believe that it is far more consequential that so many of the preachers in the group would not be willing to make any suggestions at all.

THE GOSPEL ON TELEVISION

Finally, the preachers were asked about the suitability of television to communicate the gospel. Surprisingly, only one of the 11 preachers said that television cannot communicate the gospel. This was a clergyman who was generally favourable to television and was himself a moderate viewer. We can speculate on his position, however, as his responses indicate that for him the main function of television is to entertain. It is likely that, as he was not as optimistic about the power of television to educate or to stir the imagination, he would be less willing to allow this medium to communicate the gospel which he would no doubt see as something other than entertainment.

But the surprise is not simply with the one who did not see television as capable of

communicating the gospel. It is also surprising who did see that it was possible. The two preachers who took the most negative positions toward television were also willing to admit that it was possible for television to communicate the gospel. One of them even admitted that it was already being done. The other preacher could not identify any programme which was communicating the gospel. But then three others also had difficulty in identifying such a programme, one of whom was a heavy viewer of television and another who chose *Highway* as his favourite programme. It is intriguing that a preacher, a moderate viewer whose dominant opinions on television were that it is both a "window on the world" and an "opportunity for the Church," a member of the clergy with a religious programme as a favourite, was not able to discern the gospel being communicated on television at all. A closer look, however, might reveal some reason for this situation. In assessing his reasons for watching television we discover that the function given the highest rating is "to pass the time." Not looking for education or even entertainment or escape, this preacher declares that his moderate television viewing is primarily a way to pass the time.

This apparent dichotomy between opinions about television and use of the medium is not uncommon among the preacher group. Others in the group expressed opinions that are not reflected in practice. It will be possible to see these conflicts more distinctly when we compare the responses of the preachers to those of the students.

The preachers were more able to identify programmes where the gospel was being communicated than the students. In fact, out of the 10 who believed that such a thing as communicating the gospel on television, ^{was possible} six could name a programme. A few were somewhat general in their response: "believing worship" and "Films and Documentaries."

The remaining preachers with specific suggestions for programmes communicating the gospel favoured the more direct appeal. Two of them mentioned the *Morning / Evening Call* epilogue type of programme. One voted for *Songs of Praise* and the other mentioned "any of the programmes by Colin Morris." The preacher suggesting *Songs of Praise* does so somewhat defensively. "*Songs of Praise* is generally derided by ministers as too superficial and popular. But I guess it comes closest to communicating the gospel." Not an overwhelming support. A curious fact is that all of the lay preachers in the group were able to name a programme or type of programme that, in their view, was communicating the gospel, whereas the clergy by and large were more reluctant to do so.

All of the responses except one refer to programmes that are obviously religious in nature. I believe that this fact, along with their general reluctance to make recommendations, positive or negative, to Church members regarding their television viewing, reflects most strongly their attitude toward television. The preachers primarily see television as a distraction from their task as preachers. Television is about trivialities, or about the secular

world in a way that their preaching is not. Rather than seeing television as a help to their communication of the gospel, or as a way to understand the concerns and world-view of the people to whom they preach, they see it as something outside their vision. This is especially curious when we realize that many of the preachers are quite concerned to read the signs of the times for their preaching. Their sermons, as we shall see later, do contain images of the world outside of the Church building, yet almost never does that world contain the television experience. Neither do they, as a group, take seriously the forms of discourse that television prefers. Their mode of address is as "anti-television" or at least as "un-televisual" as their responses here seem to indicate. We shall return to these issues when we turn to a brief analysis of opinions toward preaching, and the actual sermons themselves.

COMPARISON OF STUDENTS AND PREACHERS

In general both the students and the preachers held positive opinions about television. Though both had their detractors, and the preachers held the stronger negative opinions by far, the groups as a whole were much more disposed to positive statements. All agreed that television provided a "window on the world." The students, however, were a little less enthusiastic on this point than were the preachers. The students were younger with more members who could be considered the "television generation." It appears, as shown in Appendix B, that this invests in the students a certain amount of healthy scepticism about the medium. This being said, it is also true that the students were more positive about television providing an opportunity for the church than were the preachers. Many of the students saw that the potential for the Church's use of television was as least as important if not more so than its potential as a "window on the world." None of the preachers were willing to make such an assertion. In fact a few of the preachers consider the possible benefit to the Church to be the least likely scenario.

On the negative side, the students were most concerned about the effects on the family, while the preachers were most concerned about the waste of time. At least one of the preachers saw that the wasting of time was the most significant effect of television. But over all the preachers saw the two negative effects to be roughly equal. The students on the other hand, did not seem overly concerned about the time element but were most distressed about the effect on family life. Neither group was convinced that the medium was a neutral "toy" or tool only waiting for proper or improper use.

It is clear from responses in general relating to television use, the students ^{were} much more positive about television than the preachers. Across the range of "functions" investigated, the students were more favourable than were the preachers. Even in reference to the more "negative" functions such as "to pass the time" and "to provide company" the

students were more willing to see these as part of the benefits of the medium. The students wanted to say that television "was now a part of our lives. So we might as well use it for what we can."

The preachers were more likely to see it as an intrusion, or a diversion, rather than an integral part of living in the modern world.

As to types of television preferred, again the students ^{were} more generally positive than the preachers. The hierarchy of preference works out about the same, except that the preachers were more favourably disposed toward film than were the students. The other main difference is the approval of comedy. The students enjoyed comedy programmes slightly more than religious ones, whereas the preachers put comedy at the bottom of the list just above Game Shows. But though the order of preference is more or less the same, the students rated everything more highly than did the preachers.

When it comes to making recommendations, the students as a group were more willing to attempt to make some sorts of recommendations, positive and negative, than were the preachers. Though neither were able to be very specific, the students' list of content or types of programmes to be avoided was much more complete than was that of the preachers. Less than half of the preachers were willing to make recommendations to their families, let alone their churches.

Two-thirds of the students of the students made both positive and negative recommendations to their families, and over half thought they would make positive recommendations to their Churches.

As to the subjects to be avoided, the one glaring difference is that none of the preachers mentioned "sex" as a subject to be avoided, while a number of the students were quite clear that both family and church should be warned off of such subject matter. Only one of the preachers mentioned violence, while five of the students chose to do so. The preachers were more likely to mention comedy as a genre to be avoided than were the students. This perhaps reflects that for the preachers, the subject matter was not the main issue of contention, rather it was how it was presented. Alternative Comedy takes all sorts of quite serious subjects and uses them for humorous effect. This caused some of the preachers more difficulty than which subjects were being so used. The students on the other hand, who claim to enjoy television comedy more, don't like to see certain subjects on television in any format.

Finally, it is interesting that the preachers were more able to suggest programmes they thought effective in communicating the gospel than were the students. Most of the members of both groups were favourable to the idea of using television to communicate the gospel, but the students had a difficulty in seeing it taking place in the current diet of programmes.

On the one hand, it is possible that the students have a much more rigid idea of what constitutes communicating the gospel than do the preachers and therefore they are less likely



to find it occurring. On the other hand, the preachers might be more aware of how difficult a task it is to communicate the gospel to those outside of a theological college and are more willing to allow "hints and pointers" to carry the weight. *Late Call*, for example, could hardly be considered either a great theological explication or a clear call to response, and yet a few of the preachers saw something significant happening in those few seconds. The students' opinion of *Late Call* was generally derisory. "It seems one of the worst examples of television in general, let alone religious television, I've ever seen," complained one student. "I think it does more to make Christians and even Christ look bad, than anything comedy show poking fun at the clergy could ever do," declared another. *Songs of Praise*, though one student did state that it did meet the criteria, also has a generally derided position, as one of the preachers pointed out. Yet, the preachers seemed more willing to see potential or possibility in these programmes than did the students.

It is possible that we shall see more of this dichotomy between students' expectations of communicating the gospel and the preachers' experience of doing just that when we move on to explore Christian preaching in Chapter VI. It is out of this context of media awareness, or lack of it, that this investigation must take place.

CONCLUSION: THE MEDIA GAP

The media gap exists in varying degrees. It can be seen in the amount of viewing time, the selection of programmes and the reasons for watching television. The implication from this investigation is that the preachers and preachers in training are "out of touch" with the majority of the society around them. The media gap implies that the influences on communication may be felt more keenly by the congregations and the wider community than by the preachers.

The fact that, for the most part, the students and preachers would be reluctant to make recommendations for or against television programmes shows the low regard they have for this medium. As suggested earlier in this chapter, the pastoral role involves meeting people where they are and speaking to their needs and experiences. It cannot be denied that television is a major part of human experience. Preachers can seize the opportunity to make contact with the treasure house of images and stories, even if they are wary of much of the content. To ignore television, however is to deny the significant role it plays in shaping understanding and cultural world-views.

This media gap need not be crippling, therefore. The students in particular have an open attitude toward the medium. This openness could be harnessed to a clear desire to communicate appropriately in a television age. Before us, then, is the task of establishing an "appropriate communication."

III

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF COMMUNICATION

In Chapter I, the influence of television on society was explored. Certain key elements of that influence were identified. The most relevant of these elements was the impact of television language and discourse on the dynamics of human communication on a variety of levels, from the intra-personal (how an individual comes to understanding) to the mass (how a community or a society receives information and a sense of identity). The implication of this thesis is that these changes have taken place outwith a theological framework provided by the Church, her thinkers and preachers.

Before the Church can respond to these changes, a theological foundation for the process of communication should be established.¹ Such a foundation safeguards against what might be "reactionary" proposals for Christian communication, of which preaching is but one aspect. These reactionary proposals might lead to a response like that of the tele-evangelists, who *are* adapting to television language but are not maintaining a connection with the theological foundations of the gospel. Peter Horsfield argues, for example, that the tele-evangelists "have pushed the simplification of the Christian message to such an extent that in recent years they have also begun to be criticised by leaders of their own denominations."² A theology of communication provides an understanding and a framework from which change is made or resisted. In exploring the media context the question of what can we affirm and adopt and what must we resist and reject is always before us.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

"Communication is the fundamental human fact... The essence of our humanity lies in this fact."³ This is why we must consider communication from a theological perspective, because it is in the first instance, as Peter Elvy states, the study of "Everything."⁴ It is that

¹Anne van der Meiden argues that there can be no theology *of* communication because the very concept of theology includes communication. See "Appeal for a More Communicative Theology," *Media Development*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 1981, pp.43-45. Though I agree with her assessment that theology must be communicated to be theology, I also believe that it is possible to provide a theological framework for human communication on a variety of levels.

²Peter Horsfield, *Religious Television: The American Experience* (New York: Longman, 1984), p.44.

³Roger Mehl, quoted in Henrik Kraemer, *The Communication of the Christian Faith* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957, p.11.

⁴Peter Elvy, *The Future of Christian Broadcasting in Europe* (London, McCrimmons, 1990), pp. 1-9.

process by which we can have any awareness whatsoever. Without some way of ordering our experience, without language of some sort to put frames around the various aspects of our selves and our world we cannot be said to know anything. Communication, whether it be internal or external, is necessary to that understanding.

Secondly, it is the study of the glue that holds societies, communities together. We form relationships and bind ourselves into groupings through communication. Common language, images and symbols shape those societies. As we investigate communication, therefore, we explore the nature of community.

But more than a binding agent, communication is the lubrication that enables the moving parts of society to function smoothly in concert. We can live in society, can function together only by communicating. Our study of communication, therefore, must include the study of the various technologies that supposedly increase the flow of information - whose main or only function is to communicate. And we ask ourselves do these technologies help or hinder what we understand to be authentic communication, or do a bit of both?

Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, we must also seek to understand a theological enterprise that includes divine communication taking place with the human individual and society. What are we saying when we talk about the communication of or with God? Does this imply a different understanding of communication than the one we use for our human communication?

COMMUNICATION THEORY REFLECTS A THEOLOGY

Models of Communication

We can begin a move toward a theological understanding of communication by briefly looking at the process of communication. How shall we define the act of communicating? Individuals are defined by relationships within the human community and, for the Christian and others, relationships beyond human community. For there to be any type of relationship, any point of contact between persons there must be communication. This does not necessarily require language, for communication can be on other levels than the purely verbal. But it does require communication. Henrik Kraemer names this relationship building function of communication "communication between."⁵

The partner of "communication between" is "communication of."⁶ This is the message relaying function. However, says Kraemer, while a distinction can be made between these

⁵Kraemer, op cit, p.11

⁶Ibid, p.11.

two functions, there can be no complete separation.⁷ The goal of communication, therefore, could be said to be both conveying messages and creating community; community being defined as the sphere in which human relationships are created and maintained.

This relational function of communication has significant theological elements. By naming the players in this communicative act we begin to declare our theology. Traditionally the communicative act in its simplest form has been characterized by the model *Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver (SMCR)*.⁸ Yet this model does nothing to depict the persons behind the roles. It devalues persons in favour of the message. In addition, the model emphasizes the authority of the "sender" and the powerlessness of the "receiver". Though a familiar and often used model, SMCR is essentially hierarchical (top-down communication), authoritarian (keeping power in the hands of the "senders") and monological (one-way communication). The concept of "communication between" calls for models of communication that are participatory, that underscore the worth of the hearer who also, through response, functions as speaker. Our models must also recognize that the message is communicated not in isolation, but wrapped in and shaped by a messenger, who listens to the response when it comes. In community, persons exercise their relationships through communication, as both sender and receiver. "Communication between" implies reciprocity as well as the recognition of individual worth.

The SMCR model of communication, while still holding sway in many areas of communication research, is certainly not the only model in use. A variety of models which take into account feedback, context, environment, and the person of both speaker and hearer are in use.⁹ One of these models is that designed by Paolo Friere.¹⁰ Concerned with "Conscientization" or raising awareness and empowering those traditionally on the receiving end of communication, Friere favours a two-step flow model of communication. Though there may be an initial sender-receiver relationship, an act of communication is not complete until the "receiver" makes the message his/her own by acting as sender and receiver in a variety of other contexts. A student, for example, takes a communication from a lecturer and

⁷Ibid, p.12.

⁸This model is usually referred to as the "Shannon-Weaver Model" after the first theorists. See Richard Ellis and Anne MacClintock, *Do You Take My Meaning: Theory into Practice in Human Communication* (London: Arnold, 1990), p.71.

⁹See Dominic Infante, et al, *Building Communication Theory* (Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland Press, Inc., 1990) for a more complete assessment of a variety of communication models.

¹⁰See his discussion of communication in *Education for Critical Consciousness* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973).

completes it as he/she talks over coffee with other students, tests out the ideas with family members and attempts to reflect and analyze in an essay or exam. The communication is not completed at the end of the lecture, but only initiated.

Others, less concerned with scientific models, also talk about communication as a shared activity. Charles Taylor, in *Liberalism and the Moral Life* writes about conversation:

A conversation is not the coordination of actions of different individuals, but a common action in this strong irreducible sense: it is our action. It is of a kind with - to take a more obvious example - the dance between a couple or a group, or the action of two men sawing a log. Opening a conversation is inaugurating a common action. The common action is sustained by little rituals which we barely notice, like the interjections of accord (unhuh) with which the presently non-speaking partner punctuates the discourse of the speaker, and with the rituals which surround and mediate the switch of the 'semantic turn' from one to another...¹¹

In other words the meaning that is communicated is not bound up in one or the other of the partners in the conversation, or in the words themselves, but it is a shared meaning that is shaped in process. Taylor explores this a bit further:

Some things have value to me and to you, and some things essentially have value for us. On a banal level, jokes are much funnier when they're told in company. The really funny joke is an integral part of a conversation... What raises a smile when I read it alone can put me in stitches mediated in the ritual of telling which puts it in the common space. Or again, if we are lovers or close friends, Mozart-with-you is a different experience than Mozart-alone.¹²

One might ask, then, whether certain forms of communication subvert this process. In various mediated communications the sender is quite removed from the receiver. In such situations one would be hard pressed to recognize any relationship building. "Communities" created through these types of communication would not be communities based on human relationships, but upon information mediated one way. These forms of communication seem to have disposed of "communication between" for the sake of more efficient "communication of."

Failure of Communication

It must also be said that communication on every level does not always succeed in this community creating activity. In fact, says Kraemer, it usually fails. We live, he says, in a

¹¹Charles Taylor, "Cross Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate," *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, Nancy Rosenblum, ed. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp.167-8.

¹²Ibid, p.168.

fallen state of creation.¹³ In a broken world that which seeks to unite is frustrated. Indeed the common societal norms for behaviour aim one toward isolation. From best-seller lists full of books on "Looking Out for Number One" and "How to be the You You Always Wanted to Be" to various seminars on assertiveness training, it is the individual's progress and achievement that is celebrated. The ubiquitous "personal stereo" has redefined public and private space. Self-preservation and self-enhancement are the key words for living in the modern world. Communication as a uniting force is therefore frustrated.

The Biblical witness echoes this frustration of the uniting powers of communication. From the Genesis account of the Tower of Babel we see that "unhampered dialogue is the hallmark of normal human existence...and the broken dialogue as the crux of man's actual existence."¹⁴ In this light it might be wondered how any true communication can take place. What can be said of "communication of" if "communication between," its inseparable partner, is frustrated? This leads us to ask whether certain modes of communication change the content of the message. Is the environment, whether it be this fallen world or western society or even the menu of daily television fare, in which our communication takes place shifting the emphases of our message? To what extent, in other words, does the medium become the message? When we begin to explore the specific communication act of preaching, these questions and their answers will become central.

Christian Principles of Communication

Certain themes regarding communication from a theological or Christian theological point of view seem to dominate. With these themes in mind, the World Association of Christian Communication (WACC) attempted to establish what they call Christian principles of communication. The idea behind these principles is that they would serve both as a diagnostic tool for assessing communicative input into a specific situation and/or society, and they would provide would-be communicators from within the Christian perspective with some guidelines for shaping their communicative output. These principles are further developed in a pamphlet produced by WACC.¹⁵

The first two of WACC's principles follow the argument of this chapter. They are: 1) Communication creates community. 2) Communication is participatory, it is dialogic in nature. As Kraemer outlined in 1957, a Christian understanding of communication is one that

¹³Kraemer, op cit, p.17.

¹⁴Ibid, p.65.

¹⁵WACC, "Christian Principles of Christian Communication," *Statements on Communication* (London: WACC, 1990), pp.1-4.

is creative not destructive; it is affirming of human worth and aiming toward community. Therefore, for a Christian theology of communication, the straight line, SMCR, model is not adequate. Communication cannot be considered complete without an opportunity for response. Authentic communication, or Christian communication, does not tolerate social divisions of those with power and those without, those with access to media of communication and those without that access and, therefore, silent. Rather, it aims at creating a community of equals able to communicate fully in dialogue, as both receivers and senders.

An important consequence of this theology is a new look at mission and evangelism. Old style evangelism techniques that operated monologically or hierarchically from those who had the message and those who needed it do not engage in authentic communication. The critical element is how one maintains a belief in the importance of communicating the gospel without usurping the rights of communication from those with whom the communication takes place.¹⁶

The remaining principles that WACC has developed are in some senses an extrapolation of the first two. Concerned about "Media Imperialism," WACC submits these principles as a way of emphasizing that international electronic communication has wider effects than introducing more consumer options into a new society. The principles are also a reflection of Liberation Theology. Such classification does not lessen their importance however, but rather defines the orientation from which they arise. The remaining principles are: 3) Communication liberates. 4) Communication supports and develops cultures. 5) Communication is prophetic.

Inherent in this theology are definite statements about the understanding of community from a Christian perspective. Communication and community share an etymological root, which is interesting if not necessarily significant. Yet, as we have seen, community cannot exist without communication, and likewise, communication does not take place without a community.

COMMUNICATION IS AT THE ROOT OF THEOLOGY

Experience of Community

The Church has always been and continues to be concerned with forming or sustaining community. Yet the very concept of community is changing in the television context. Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase "global village" some 30 years ago. Others are now

¹⁶This is not a completely new concern for mission studies. See, for example Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel in Western Culture* (Geneva: WCC, 1986), pp.5-20 for a discussion along similar lines.

asking if there is any real content to the concept of a "mediated community" in which individuals in front of their screens or around their radios are supposedly bound together by the message. Obviously some sorts of relationships are established and sustained through electronic media. A common starting point for many conversations, for example, is a recap of a programme or news item: "Did you see?" An answer in the affirmative begins a relationship that might have no other grounds for contact. Isolated individuals can take part in a shared experience: rejoicing at their team's success in the World Cup hundreds of miles away; sitting in reverent silence during a royal wedding or as a new archbishop is enthroned; sharing in a nation's grief through a televised memorial service after a national disaster. During such events the media audience may in fact be more able to "participate" than those who actually attend such events. Often those actually attending are unable to see clearly or to hear an announcer's voice adding comment, thereby limiting their experience of the event.¹⁷ Some sort of community *is* created through media. But is it community of a different or distinctive type? A million people laugh at the same joke, yet they laugh in their ones and twos.

Randall K. Bush, in a recent article of *The Christian Century*, points out that the nature of this global village is one of isolationism, leading not to global villagers but "global voyeurs."

*The concept of village evokes images of commonality, relatedness. The prophets of the media-created global village assert that the electronic age has returned us to a more integrated, primitive awareness. Yet the source of this awareness is not a rediscovered communal spirit but rather a reversion to our basest level of egocentrism. Unlike villagers, we can sit in isolation at the helm of our media devices, peering into other lands and other lives in a voyeuristic fantasy.*¹⁸

Colin Morris, on the other hand, emphasises the growing role of the Church in the mediated community atmosphere. The Church will increasingly offer the distinctive element of "true community."

*The Community of Faith will become one of the few places where corporeal three-dimensional community still takes place -- where people meet and touch and interact. The terms private and public are becoming obscured.*¹⁹

This blurring of the public and private reflects in how we define "community." Does the idea

¹⁷See Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan, "Media Events: On the Experience of Not Being There," *Religion*, Vol. 15, Num. 3, July 1985, pp. 305-314, for a discussion of the participation in public events through mass media.

¹⁸Bush, "Not Global Villagers, but Global Voyeurs", *The Christian Century*, September 9-16, 1992, p.811.

¹⁹Colin Morris, lecture: "Where have all the preachers gone?" St. George's West Church, Edinburgh, October 1990.

of community demand physical presence? Perhaps a collection of individuals who share something in common constitute a community. But, as we have come to understand communication and community, these individuals must interact on some level in order to be considered a true community. Simply sharing common interests, values or ideals does not create a community until those interests, values or ideals are shared in some sort of public space, which might be face to face or through a computer network.

One embodiment of the ideal of interaction in a media age might be that a community is a collection of persons with a shared story. This story is the means by which the members of the community identify themselves, orient their priorities and determine meaning. As the story is told and retold within the membership relationships are created, new understandings develop and the members grow and change over time. A congregation is, in part, a community of persons with a shared story. Preachers are encouraged to become involved in the life story of their congregations or of individuals who approach them. This "story" is essentially the day to day activities of the individuals and the group as well as the interpretations and understandings that each member and the community as a whole put to these activities. As a Christian congregation, the shared story includes the gospel, or "God's story." But also included in both an individual's and a society's life story are the *mediated stories*, the programmes and characters on television or radio or in print that find a place, however peripheral, in individual and group consciousness. The preacher is seen as one who articulates the life story of the community in a public fashion. But the preacher also takes part in these stories, both by virtue of being a member of the group and because he or she is a person in modern society.

It is essential for us to understand that these programmes, these *mediated stories* provide more than merely diversion. They are, for many in the community and the congregation, one means by which people interpret the world and so discover a sense of identity and place. Though we often trivialize media consumption, many researchers are beginning to realize that something fundamental for human self-identity and self understanding is taking place.

More recent research confirms that leisure is not just absence of work, but the time when we develop our personal identities and establish our own personal values. The importance of leisure for taking decisions and forming the trajectory of our "life stories" is highlighted by studies which show that in transitional periods of our life, leisure becomes more important for exploring and mapping out our future. ... Because the media have become a leisure-time activity, they have taken on a meaning as a space somewhat at a distance from short-term goals of work life and a time to explore imaginatively other possible worlds. Current studies suggest that we approach the media much more actively and selectively than earlier theories of the "all powerful media"

*implied.*²⁰

Thus, "taking part" in the mediated stories means more than simply being able to name the characters of *Neighbours*. It means first of all being aware of the amount of time spent engaged in these stories.²¹ It also means sampling the wide range and variety of media. Most importantly perhaps, it means being able to understand how individuals can see *themselves* being portrayed in the various programmes and how in consequence self-identification occurs through the media.

The media context invites some rethinking about the nature of the theology which must lie behind any programme for preaching the life story of the community. This theology must incorporate an exploration of the interaction between "our story" and "God's story."

Experience of God

As stated at the beginning of this chapter a theological understanding of communication must also reflect upon divine communication. What do we understand by referring to the communication of or with God? Or, perhaps more simply, how does God communicate Godself to the world? Traditionally, Christians identify the means of this communication as the Word of God.

God's Word is seen in Old Testament theology to be the creating power of God. "The God depicted in the Bible is the God of creation, who spoke and darkness gave way to light, chaos to order; [but also] the God of redemption, whose 'Word was made flesh and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth'..."²² For the Christian communicator or preacher the Word is understood to be Christ. Christ is God's ultimate self-revelation, Word made flesh. "Revelation... is first an event; and even more specifically the communication of a Self; and particularly in the event of the Incarnation, a communication that is interpersonal, visible,

²⁰Fr. Robert White, "Formation for Priestly Ministry in a Mass-mediated Culture," *Seminarium*, Number 4, 1987, p. 813.

²¹An important resource for investigating the use of media in Britain is the IBA survey produced by Michael Svennevig, et al, *Godwatching: Viewers, Religion and Television* (London: John Libbey, 1988). This survey investigates the patterns of viewing, the amount of time spent in front of the television and the types of programmes preferred, both religious and secular, as well as the survival outside the churches of belief in God and religious attitudes.

²²Donald Coggan, *Preaching: The Sacrament of the Word* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), p.31.

fully human and fully divine."²³ The characteristics of this communication through Incarnation, then, are that the communication is personal, dialogical and visual in that the Word was given a form and substance.

Incarnation, as the model for divine communication, discloses that God's nature is to reveal God's presence and will to creation. God is "a talkative God," as Colin Morris states.²⁴ There is a drive to communicate, to be known. Preaching, as one act of Christian communication, participates in this drive and shares in the impetus to make God known.

We will explore the implications of the model of Incarnation for preaching in the next chapter. Here we can ask how the television age impinges on the communication of God. Humans come to know of God and to receive God's Word through the scriptures and traditions of a variety of faiths. In a sense the television age has had little effect on this. The Bible is still the central book of the Christian Faith, the traditions of the Church still provide interpretation. The issue of personal revelation, while receiving many interpretations, also seems to take place outwith any influence of television or other media. If God chooses to communicate with individuals in a more or less direct way, surely this act of communication has remained unaffected by developments in human communication.

Yet, as discussed in Chapter I, the television age impinges on the communication of the Word to a significant extent. Both in terms of agenda setting and in terms of communicative structures, Christian communication, which enables the divine communication, takes place within a media context. The way human beings come to understanding, which as we have seen is greatly effected by the influence of television, is also the way human beings come to grasp the reality of God.

The thrust of the argument is that our theology, our thinking about God and how God is revealed to humanity, is in large part a reflection on communication. Our concept of God has profound issues of communication bound up in it. For example, the doctrine of the Trinity is, at one level, an issue of communication. Our experience of God, we say, has three aspects. But more than that, the Trinity is actually a model of authentic communication.

If the essential Christian message is that of God's self-disclosure, then the Trinity shows how it is done. Father, Son and Holy Spirit obviously do not communicate by passing on information to one another like friends chatting on a three-way phone. They express their essential selves through love; their fiery gaze is enough. Taken with absolute seriousness, the Trinitarian model implies that the essential precondition for

²³M.C. Boys, "Telecommunications: A Way of Revolutionizing Religious Education?" *Reflections on a Theology of Telecommunications: Image, Model, and Word*, Lange, E.C. ed., (Dayton, Ohio: Center for Religious Telecommunications, 1984), p.10.

²⁴Colin Morris, *God-in-a-Box: Christian Strategy in a Television Age* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984), p.209.

*all true communication is love.*²⁵

The Trinity serves a model of communication. Our experience of God has been, traditionally, interpreted in certain ways. These experiences, or communications from and of God, lead us to make certain statements as to how communication between and about ourselves ought to take place.

*Since communication within the Godhead is personal and relational, we may conclude the same is true of all meaningful communication. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit do not communicate with each other as if each were outside or alienated from the other. The witness of true communication is that it is always expressed through love. Love is the basis of good relations, and therefore the context for all good communication is that it is always expressed through love. Love is the basis of good relations and therefore the context in which all good communication should take place. Certainly trinitarian communication stands in judgement on our attempts to communicate in our impersonal and non-relational ways. It sets up a standard for communication...*²⁶

Inherent in the very idea of faith is the desire to communicate. Christianity is not a solitary diversion, but a move toward living in community. In Christianity, then, the experience of the community and the experience of God are part and parcel of the same experience of faith. We know as we make known, we claim faith as we share faith. The biblical injunction is "what you have heard in a whisper, proclaim upon the housetops."²⁷ Thus the cycle of "receiving" and "sending" is completed and each participant takes on both roles in dialogue.

Christianity is communication, says Colin Morris.²⁸ And "faith comes from what is heard," says St. Paul, who goes on to say that "what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ."²⁹

PREACHING AS A MODEL OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATION

Once, the preacher served many functions in society. He (because preachers were almost exclusively men) was frequently the only educated person in the town or village, he was literate in an illiterate world. The preacher was the professional communicator. Few challenged this position in society and people flocked to hear whatever the preacher wanted

²⁵Colin Morris, *Wrestling with an Angel* (London: Collins, 1990), p.15.

²⁶Robert Webber, *God Still Speaks* (London: Nelson, 1981), p.71.

²⁷Matthew 10:27b, RSV.

²⁸Morris, *God-in-a-Box*, op cit, pp.208-223.

²⁹Romans 10:17, RSV.

to say. The preacher had many functions. Through his sermons he brought the news from the outside world and related it to the life of the community. He was entertainer, whose style of preaching was almost as important as the content. And he was the one who instructed the people on the meanings of the gospel and so enabled them to structure their journey through life, manage their affairs, run their families and be citizens in their community. Not all did all of this, but the range of these activities fell within the preacher's brief.

This situation has changed drastically, as said in Chapter I. In a media age (filled with messages of all shapes and colours, wrapped up in 3-hour films and 10 second sound bites, surrounded by computer technology and psychological research into sound and image response) the preacher feels like an amateur in a world of professional communicators.

The problem is not merely a practical one, however, it is also theological. The practical concerns centre in the question "how do I communicate more effectively?" This is an important question which will be addressed in Chapter IV. But here the question is a theological one. In effect, we are asking what drives our pulpit communication? An answer to this question is that we approach the communicative act of preaching with the same impulse with which God approached creation. So we ask "Why is God so intent on getting the Word across to the world?" Or to use Donald Coggan's words: "if we ask: 'Why is the Christian's God a God who speaks?', the answer must be: '[God] speaks because [God] loves.' Love always seeks to communicate."³⁰

So long as we regard preaching solely as a matter of words with a traditional, somewhat detached technique, then it will seem increasingly an irrelevance in the modern world. But if we perceive that it is more than a means of transmitting information about the faith and that the Word was "spoken" (incarnated) so that every person would know of and be able to experience and respond to God's love, then we have reason to study preaching and refine its purpose. Since this universal love of God becomes the contact point for preaching, it is supremely relevant, even today. In the midst of a fragmenting and dehumanizing society, to know that one is loved without preconditions remains a message for all. In other words, an "amateur" is precisely what is required in preaching. An amateur might be described as one who acts not out of a professional skill so much as from the heart or the self, in other words out of love. The preachers preach because their's is a message of love, because they love the people to whom they preach, and the context in which they preach is that of love. It is this impulse to communicate God, which is an impulse of love, that shapes our communicative acts. In as much as preaching participates in this divine communication of God's love, it participates in the Word of God. God, who communicated God's love to God's people in the

³⁰Donald Coggan, *Preaching: The Sacrament of the Word* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), p.31.

incarnation, calls preachers to incarnate that love in their preaching and, beyond preaching, in their lives. But when all this is said, the fact remains that preachers must be heard.

The Nature of Preaching

We have begun to ask that question most important to our purposes here: how can the Christian message be communicated? Is this a message that can be communicated along with the myriad of other messages to be communicated in an information saturated society? Or is there some fundamental difference to this message that requires a specific approach to its communication? Are there methods of communicating this message that would be inappropriate; that would deny the message even as it tries to speak the message? Indeed, might we ask if the Christian message can be communicated at all? One cannot answer these questions, however, without a look at the message itself. What is the Christian message? The answer to this more basic question will lead the way to answering the questions about its communication.

Content of Preaching

What is the content of our communication as Christians? The answers to this question might range from the behavioral (right actions, "do's and don'ts," coping with life, self-actualization, etc.) to the doctrinal (articles of faith, biblical story, creedal statements of belief, etc.). All seem appropriate for Christians to hear and to proclaim. Yet, none seem to be the totality of the content. In the ordination ritual of my denomination (the United Methodist Church) the act includes the commission to be a "faithful dispenser of the Word of God". The ritual then continues with the presentation of a Bible and the words: "Take thou authority...to preach the Word of God..."³¹ According to this ritual the content of preaching is to be the Word of God. Therefore all questions of doctrine, behaviour or whatever else becomes the basis of a specific sermon or communication, must somehow intertwine with the notion of the Word of God.

As discussed earlier God's Word is seen as both the creating and the redeeming power of God. For the Christian the Word of God is fully revealed and incarnated in Christ. Christ, then, is the content of preaching; Christ, whose birth, life, suffering, death and resurrection incarnate God's Word to the world.

So then, what is the Christian message? The Word of God, the Love of God, the Incarnate Word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ. The ideas fuse together into one. The radical note in this statement is that this message is not a statement of fact, not an idea, not

³¹"The Order for the Ordination of Elders," *Ritual of the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980) p.59.

a system of thought, but this message is a person. The Christian message is a person, a specific person namely Jesus called the Christ. All of the other basic statements about Christianity, such as the redemption of the world, of the need for salvation, of the human's place in Creation, and indeed the Christian's understanding and perception of the world at large, must ultimately be defined or understood in terms of a specific person, Jesus the Christ. In addition, this person is not a theoretical construct of an ideal human. The Christian "message" is a person of history, a person who lived and breathed and spoke and worked in the context of history. This is what sets the Christian message apart from other messages.

Where the Greek had looked at reality and interpreted the whole of reality through either the Logos or the idea, where the Rabbinic Jew had looked at reality through the Torah, the Christian evangelist looked at reality wholly through the living Person, Jesus of Nazareth, the Word and the Image of God.³²

So, then, the question is how does one communicate a person? If the heart of the Christian message is a person and not ultimately an idea, how does one communicate that message? "To take seriously whom we communicate does provide sharp answers to how and what we are to communicate as Christians."³³ The only adequate answer must be to communicate that person in the way he communicated himself. Christ's mission was a communication of himself, so that others might hear this new message and be enabled to respond to him. Therefore, the Christian message is one to be communicated.

Indirect Communication

We return then to the question of method. How did Jesus make himself known to the world? Søren Kierkegaard attempted to answer this question in the second book of his *Training in Christianity*.³⁴ In that work Kierkegaard submits that by his very nature Jesus did not directly communicate himself to the world, even to those closest to him, and that to have done so would have been a negation of what he came to encourage. By Christ's indirect communication Kierkegaard means that Jesus was more than he appeared to be and that he did not publicly profess to be what he was. Rather, Jesus was a sign of what he really was, namely the God-Man. Kierkegaard used the term "the sign of the contradiction" to refer to the God-Man. "To be a sign," Kierkegaard states, "is to be, beside what one immediately is,

³²F.W. Dillistone, *Christianity and Communication* (London: Collins, 1956), p.72.

³³World Council of Churches, *Credible Christian Communication* (Geneva: WCC, 1978), p.7.

³⁴Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, Walter Lowrie, trans. (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp.79-144.

also another thing; to be a sign of contradiction is to be another thing which stands in opposition to what one immediately is."³⁵ Jesus, in other words, was a man, to all outward appearances like any other man. This was the sign, a man, by which we see the reality of the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The contradiction was that in "fact" he was not a man like any other man at all, he was the Son of the living God. The paradox of the sign of contradiction is that the sign is as "real" as that for which it stands. Jesus was, in "fact" both a man, fully human, and the Son of God, fully divine. It was this sign that allowed for a response in faith, to perceive the God-Man in the person of Jesus or to be "offended" and to turn away from the sign. Christ called for a response in faith to his own identity. To make a direct communication of himself would be to disallow a response in faith. Here we can understand the "Messianic Secret" to be not an attempt to stifle communication, but a way of allowing for faith response, an indirect communication.

For Kierkegaard, indirect communication is more than simply a choice one makes between different approaches to communication. Instead, certain types of subject matter demand a certain approach to communication.

That communication on the subject of the highest and most concrete phase of Reality must necessarily be indirect, has its ground, according to Kierkegaard, in the fact that the actualization of the real is always in process, and also in that independence of the individuals which makes any essential discipleship a false relation...³⁶

Kierkegaard, Swenson argues, recognized that the nature of faith is distinctive. It is not something that can be transferred from one person to another as a complete package. There is no way to communicate the faith with all the questions neatly resolved in a planned programme that would lead the recipient to a full Christian faith. In this Kierkegaard held "a conviction that becoming is something more than knowing."³⁷ There is a process involved in "hearing" or receiving the faith. And this process, though taking place within a community setting, has a distinctly individual element.

Direct communication...seeks to make the receiver of it attentive as well as it can; it begs and beseeches him, impresses upon his heart the importance of it, warns and threatens, &c.- all of which is direct communication, and hence there is not seriousness enough in it for the highest decision, nor does it sufficiently arouse attention.³⁸

Direct communication usurps the role of the individual in the process of coming to faith.

³⁵Ibid, p.125.

³⁶David F. Swenson, *Something about Kierkegaard* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1941), p.140-141.

³⁷Ibid, p.238.

³⁸Kierkegaard, *Training...*, op cit, p.140.

Direct communication, which Kierkegaard also calls "communication of results" in that all of the problems and applications are sorted out by the speaker for the receiver, is "an unnatural form of intercourse between man and man, in so far as every man is a spiritual being, for whom the truth consists in nothing else than the self-activity of a personal appropriation, which the communication of a result tends to prevent."³⁹

Yet it is apparent, to Kierkegaard and to others, that most of the communicators of the Christian message are doing so directly. They are making it as direct "as putting the foot into the stocking," as Kierkegaard complains.⁴⁰ Direct communication is more than merely inadequate, it is a distortion of the truth. The truth is distorted because the subjective is objectified.

*While objective thought translates everything into results, and helps mankind to cheat, by copying these off and reciting them by rote, subjective thought puts everything in process and omits the result; partly because this belongs to him who has the way, and partly because as an existing individual he is constantly in process of coming to be, which holds true of every human being who has not permitted himself to be deceived into becoming objective, inhumanly identifying himself with speculative philosophy in the abstract.*⁴¹

In direct communication the subjective involvement in the message is left out, as is the possibility for choice, for a true response in faith; which by definition must allow for the possibility for offense. Kierkegaard held that communication must allow for response. Dialogue, even if and when it becomes the internal dialogue of the hearer, must be allowed. "So the secret of all communication consists precisely in emancipating the recipient, and for that reason he must not communicate himself directly; aye, that it is even irreligious to do so."⁴²

The question then, if this is how Christ made himself known, is do we employ direct or indirect communication to communicate the Christian message, which is essentially the same message that Jesus wanted to communicate, namely himself? In other words, if we accept Christ as the communication, must we also accept Christ as the communicator? But lest we think that using Christ as the model for communication might be unduly contextual, Kierkegaard argues that the nature of divine communication itself is also indirect. He argues that only

³⁹Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, D.F. Swenson and W.L. Lowrie trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p.217.

⁴⁰Kierkegaard, *Training...*, op cit, p.140.

⁴¹Kierkegaard, *Concluding ...*, op cit, p.68.

⁴²Ibid, p.69.

*God, who as the eternal spirit from whom all spirits derived, might in communicating the truth, seem to be justified in sustaining a direct relationship to the derivative spirits ... For no anonymous author can more convincingly conceal himself, no practitioner of the maieutic art can more cunningly withdraw himself from the direct relationship, than God. He is in the creation and present everywhere in it, but directly He is not there; and only when the individual turns to his inner self, and hence only in the inwardness of self activity, does he have his attention aroused, and is enabled to see God.*⁴³

Kierkegaard states unequivocally that we must remain faithful to God's and Christ's own method of self-revelation. If only God has the right to employ direct communication and chooses indirect communication instead, then we humans, or the "derivative spirits," have little recourse but to adopt this as our norm and practice.

Kierkegaard's own practice as a Christian communicator was to engage in indirect communication. His writings took on an "aesthetic" quality, for example, in order that he might "get in touch with people 'where they might be found,' and, since they lived in mainly aesthetic categories, he began with the aesthetic..."⁴⁴ He wrote many of his Christian treatises under a pseudonym so as not to unduly influence the reader. He believed that the reader should have the freedom to respond from their own perspective and context and not assume his. "For this reason, the deception was kept up long after his identity as author was known. What mattered was not the deception but getting under the skin of the public."⁴⁵

This then is the nature of "indirect communication," that it works not from the outside, with results, solutions, arguments and concepts; but that it "gets under the skin of those who come to hear and to participate in the communicative act.

Image and Story

Our communication, or in this case preaching, cannot be a complete communication. It allows room for response, for allowing the hearer to make the message his/her own and instigates or participates in the individual's, and the community's, process of coming to faith. "The communication must be indirect, *artfully* devised to prompt the other to think out the thing for himself, while the subjectivity of the communicator remains concealed."⁴⁶

It may be that complete concealment of the "communicator's subjectivity" would be antithetical to authentic communication. The issue of the person of the preacher will be taken

⁴³Kierkegaard, *Concluding...*, op cit, pp.217-218

⁴⁴George Price, *The Narrow Pass: A Study of Kierkegaard's Concept of Man* (London: Hutchenson & Co., 1963), p.16.

⁴⁵Ibid, pp.16-17.

⁴⁶Lowrie, in Kierkegaard, *Training...*,op cit, p.132, see footnote.

up in the next chapter. But allowing the subjectivity of the preacher to interfere with the subjectivity of the hearer should be avoided. A way must be found to allow that freedom of response in doubt or faith.

In *Christianity and Communication*, F.W. Dillistone attempts to define the Christian message in terms of the Image and the Word. In this he is also pointing to the fact that the essential core of the Christian message is a person and not a doctrine. Dillistone's "conclusion, then, is that the essential Christian message consists of a story and a picture."⁴⁷ The "story" he defined as being the record of the actions of the life of Jesus the Christ. The "picture" is the Image of Christ and the reenactment of the events of his life, as well as the parables or word-pictures told by Jesus. The use of image and story is widespread in modern society. It is my contention that these elements of language provide the scope for indirect communication. Just as Kierkegaard attempted to communicate with people "where they might be found," so the preacher in a television age has recourse to a vast storehouse of images and stories with which he/she might "get under the skin" of the hearer. Dillistone's argument is that not only are these effective tools for communication, they are the essence of the message itself.

Dillistone's argument, in fact, is that image and word are the primary means of all communication. All communicators, then, need to communicate in both image and word.

*Both are necessary and whereas the one possesses the capacity of making a special appeal to the ear, the primary appeal of the other is to the eye... It is through the living interaction of the two and not through the exclusive sovereignty of the one that the essential Christian gospel can be continually proclaimed.*⁴⁸

The Christian communicator has a particular need to emphasize both word and image. Dillistone contends that

*while these affirmations give a striking emphasis to the Image on the one hand and to the Word on the other, no too sharply defined distinction must be made between the two. "God has spoken through His Son" ... Gospel and light, word and image, are inextricably bound together in the Christian revelation.*⁴⁹

The distinctive Christian event, the Incarnation, is a blending of words and images. Our communication of this event, and the implications of this event, can maintain this blend. Preaching, as a word-based communication, provokes images in the consciousness of the hearers and in this way keeps the elements of word and image together. Though images in preaching are verbal images, they nonetheless activate the "mind's eye" in the same way a

⁴⁷Dillistone, op cit, p.98.

⁴⁸Ibid, p.92.

⁴⁹Ibid, p.48.

physical image activates the physical eye. The mental process of interpretation is much the same, but in addition the imagination is employed to "create" the image. (Imagination in preaching will be the focus of Chapter V.)

It is the task of the communicator to use the most appropriate media possible to communicate the message. The communicator's task according to Dillistone is "to determine what are the most significant instruments for conveying information to our modern world and what are the language forms which have the widest currency in ordinary speech."⁵⁰ Writing thirty years ago, Dillistone already began to suspect the vast impact that television was going to have. As argued in Chapter I, it is obvious that the language forms with the widest currency at least in the western hemisphere, if not the world as a whole, can be found in television. Karl Rahner states that the act of communicating carries with it a responsibility to be understood.

*The Speaker is responsible for ensuring that his statement is conveyed in the appropriate manner and measure, having regard to the general intellectual environment of speaker and hearer alike. He is responsible for doing his utmost to make sure that what he says can be understood and assimilated (this is a duty of love which he owes to the individual, and of respect which he owes to the community in its intellectual and social aspects.)"*⁵¹

Therefore, one cannot purport to communicate the Christian message from the pulpit, for example, to a television culture without due consideration to those language forms.

In addition to considering whether television created the most common language forms, we must also ask whether these forms are "the most *appropriate* vocabulary available."⁵² It is not simply the ubiquity of the influence of television, but the appropriateness we must also question. I am arguing here, however, not for the use of the technology of television, but rather attention to and employment of the language forms and the vocabulary employed by television. We can look to television to find a language that communicates, a language structure that carries meaning and an entrée into the minds and imaginations of people in modern society. Television language invites us to move out of the ghettos of theological jargon and an insider Christian rhetoric, and attempt to "meet people where they might be found." This is the process that Ronald Falconer is advocating when he says that

⁵⁰Ibid, p.119.

⁵¹Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Vol. VIII* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), p.115.

⁵²Trevor Rowe, *The Communication Process* (London: Epworth Press, 1978), p.15. My emphasis.

*sound theology is a profound and necessary subject, the proper foundation for both preaching and pastoral work. But not enough time is spent...in paring it down into non-technical and human language such as, for example, Jesus uses in his teaching... Such is the ideal communication of profound truth.*⁵³

Falconer sets an agenda for Christian communication: finding a language, or a medium (for language is a medium of communication), for communicating the depths of the Christian gospel. Trevor Rowe suggests an avenue whereby we might find that ideal communication of profound truth.

*We have to look for what someone has called a prose for God and it may be that we shall be best served by reading, not learned and abstract theological works, but nursery stories, folktales, the classical myths and above all the Bible.*⁵⁴

The stories, the images that are a part of human experience provide the language for communicating the gospel. "It is because the spiritual is related to great images that it becomes revealed truth."⁵⁵ If images occupy the minds of people today because of the visual influence of television are we then able to communicate with the same rational, theological language of our past?

*If the theologian chooses a rational form as the way of shaping what he wants to say about the Christian faith, he will not find himself able to speak sensibly about Incarnation, the work of art in the center of the Christian faith... The sacraments set out a way of making Christian statements, that require a leap of faith into another frame of reference in order to make any sense of them whatsoever.*⁵⁶

It must also be said here that television has an advantage when it comes to communicating word and image. It is in the interest of the Church to learn from that advantage for its own communication of a message that is Word and Image. What might we learn, or perhaps re-learn?

*What can be said finally about the media and techniques of communication which work through eye and ear, through the image and the word? There is little doubt that the central form by which such a communication can be made is the drama.*⁵⁷

This is not to say that the only adequate communication of the Christian message is a play performed on a stage with all the requisite action and dialogue, gestures and expressions. The Christian communicator, however, must be able to see him or herself as a

⁵³Falconer, *Message, Media, Mission* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1977), p.11.

⁵⁴Rowe, *op cit*, p.129.

⁵⁵*Ibid*, p.131.

⁵⁶*Ibid*, p.128.

⁵⁷Dillistone, *op cit*, p.127.

dramatist when communicating the message; a dramatist in the sense that Gabriel Marcel describes.

*What is the function of a dramatist? It is certainly not to mount into a pulpit; every time he tries to preach he betrays his mission. His task is rather to place himself at the very heart of human reality, in all its poignancy and intimacy. He must, it seems to me, link himself magnetically to the strands of our most secret hopes; and the account with which he expresses feelings we hardly dare admit even to ourselves, must be strong enough and magical enough to transfigure our interior landscape and illuminate it in a flash of light that seems to come from beyond.*⁵⁸

Despite Marcel's words against the pulpit, it is preaching that he has defined; preaching of word and image, preaching indirectly the person of the Christ. It is the function of the sermon "to move men, not to educate them; to touch them at the springs of their beings, not just to proffer them advice or counsel."⁵⁹ To communicate directly the Christian message is to dismiss the power and the personalization inherent in Jesus' method of communication. The Christian message "is incommunicable, it cannot find an adequate translation in any human speech and thought and yet it touches the deepest aspirations and needs of men, so having in principle also at least a possibility of resonance, of vibration."⁶⁰

This is the self-revelation of Jesus, that he stands at the very heart of human reality, "there is no direct communication, and no direct reception - there is a choice.... An altogether distinct sort of reception is required - that of faith. And faith has a dialectical quality - and the receiver is the one who is revealed..."⁶¹ The person of Jesus is the light from beyond that illuminates not himself, but ourselves. It is the task of the sermon to Incarnate the Christ so that that light may shine in the lives of those who come to hear. And through this light, this very specific "communication of," to restore the possibility of "communication between."

CONCLUSIONS

How we communicate in a television age is not simply a practical consideration. Our acts of communication are profoundly theological as well. The models we choose to define and shape communication practice make definite statements about how we perceive both our place in the world and the experience we have of divine communication. If we practice communication authoritatively, monologically and separated from human experience the image

⁵⁸Marcel, *A Man of God, Ariadne, The Funeral Pyre: Three Plays with a Preface on the Drama of the Soul in Exile* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1952), pp.32-33.

⁵⁹B. Barr, "Pop Sermons," *Christian Century*, 17 September, 1969, p.1191.

⁶⁰Kraemer, *op cit*, p.36.

⁶¹Kierkegaard, *Training ...*, *op cit*, p.140.

of the God we present is one also separate from the details of human existence. If, on the other hand, our communication practice is engaging and open then the image of the God we present is that of involvement in human community.

Christian communication includes notions of dialogue, response, liberation and equality. The model we have in Christ, is a model of indirect communication motivated by love. Preaching, as one example of Christian communication, operates within this model. Preaching grows out of a desire to make connections, to enter into dialogue, to re-incarnate the Christ in the hearing and experience of the Christian community and the world at large. Communication is about participation in community, and about allowing for the process of becoming. As such it does not renounce the gospel in favour of a more human message, but rather rekindles the freshness of the gospel in the hearing of the community to convince, affirm, represent and reorient.

In the next chapters we shall attempt to explore the practicality of preaching in this theological model. The homiletical response to the television age is firmly grounded in Christian theology. It is not a reactionary response to new technology, but a considered engagement between the nature of the message we proclaim and the human community in which the preaching act takes place. The initiation of a fresh look at preaching in a television age, as it is in interpreting the influence of television, arises out of a contextual theology. The specific techniques for preaching that might be considered, then, are examined in two lights, that of the faith and that of the world.

IV STRATEGIES FOR PREACHING IN A TELEVISION AGE

Christian preaching takes place within a context. Though the content of preaching (Christ) is beyond the limitation of a particular context, Christ coming into the world as Jesus of Nazareth brought a contextual dimension. The Incarnation is, on one level, a contextualization of the universal. Or to put it another way, it is a means of discerning the immanence of the transcendent God.

The act of preaching is modelled on the Incarnation. The universal truth is "incarnated" into a particular reality. A sermon, though reaching toward the ultimate, is located in time and place. Christian preaching is speaking the truth in love to the people who come to hear. It challenges and directs, it affirms and supports, it invites and unites. But through it all preaching communicates with people where they are, people in a particular context.

The context within which preaching takes place today is one in which certain modes of communication dominate. The community of faith is located within a culture supported and defined, to a degree, by the media of mass communication. Today's preachers have little choice but to listen and learn from communication theory and technology; specifically, they need to become aware of the cultural dimension of communication. These media, with television at the forefront, provide information and experience by which the members of a society understand themselves. The images and language of television touch the human needs and desires of the viewers in a way that might look incomplete and demeaning, but in fact provide for aspirations and the assurance of the attainment of these aspirations in a real-world, matter of fact style. The solutions may be temporary and shallow, but there is always another answer to follow that promises even more.

The media are tuned in to the needs and wants of the audience, and they seek to meet them "where they are." Preachers, who are more committed to the message than to the communication, often attempt to answer questions no one is asking. The preacher may desire the community to strive for higher things, to move out of the materialism of living "of this world" rather than merely in it. But until the connection is made with the hearer where he/she is, there is little chance of movement to a more transcendent reality. The media show the way of making contact with people. By listening and learning, as well as rethinking the purpose of preaching, the preacher is alerted to the demands of communicating in a television age.

Such sensitivity and willingness to learn is not, however, a surrender of the gospel. On the contrary, our theology is the foundation upon which a change in preaching purpose and technique takes place. But, as we explore the nature of the act of communicating faith, we discover lines of congruence between television communication and preaching that we

might not have suspected. In addition, an awareness of the need to adapt communication techniques represents a recognition of the way in which the gospel is inevitably enculturated. And, on a simpler level, it is also to understand the "competition."

IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

History of Preaching Change

Biblical Examples

It is not a new thing to ask preaching to adapt to cultural styles. The history of preaching includes many innovations that conformed to prevailing attitudes toward oral discourse. Jesus himself was wise to the techniques of communicating in his day. Like other teachers, he told parables, posed difficult questions and left some requests unanswered. "What is truth," Pilate asked and received no reply because the Truth was staring him in the face. Jesus understood the patterns of communication well, and yet he moved them on to create a new thing. "See with what authority he speaks," was a comment that arose out of his communication, or preaching. Part of this had to do with the nature of who he was. "Jesus as parable, as well as Jesus' parables are taken as models for theological reflection, we have a form that insists on uniting language, belief and life -- the words in which we confess our faith, the process of coming to faith and the life lived out of that faith."¹

Jesus spoke out of who he was, rather than out of the tradition. He was a parable as much as he told parables. But, his act of communication was not a way of separating out believing and living, or thinking about belief, holding belief and acting upon it: there was integration. His communication did not demand that the hearers be anything but what they were, and yet it invited them to move with him to a deeper understanding and experience of Emmanuel, God-with-us. In Chapter V we shall look more closely at the nature of parabolic communication. Here Jesus' use of parable provides an example of the preacher who adapts to commonly understood media of communication and yet provides more than what is usually expected. The parable was commonly accepted as a medium of communication, yet in Jesus there were new layers of meaning and a new experience of hearing.

More traditionally, perhaps, Paul is seen as the first evidence of a preacher adapting to cultural change. When he moved from the parable-story centred culture of Judaism into the Greek dominated world, his approach incorporated argument and debate, and sometimes question and answer in an almost Socratic style. "I have become all things to all men that I

¹Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p.3.

might win the more," he writes to the Corinthians.²

But perhaps Paul's most distinguished adaption of communicative style is found in the letters. Robert Funk claims that

*the letter ... is an appropriate substitute for oral word - it is as near oral speech as possible - yet it provides a certain distance on the proclamation as event. If the parable is a gesture pointing the way into the kingdom of God, the letter is only one step removed: it wonders why the gesture had been missed*³

Sallie McFague sees in the letters "an intermediary form between parable and confession."⁴ Contained in these letters was Paul's frequent use of autobiography. But the purpose of the personal story was not for self-aggrandizement, but to provide an example of a life lived in faith. A way of illustrating, or concretizing a theology. He used what was close at hand to make the story of living faith a real one.

*His was a fantastically fertile imagination, using anything at hand - tents, bodies, buildings, kernels, homes, flesh. Metaphors spill from him - slaves and sons, flesh and spirit, Adam and Christ, body and members, home and away from home - with the ingenuity of a man who was himself living the thing he was attempting to convey. His metaphors are so good, they work so well, because they are not off the top of his head but are hammered out both through the agony and passion of his own life ...*⁵

He was not afraid to use his own story to communicate the gospel story. We shall look later at the issue of the person of the preacher and Paul's example will be crucial to that understanding. But here we examine how Paul takes a common means of communication and invests it with the power to communicate the gospel. In his public discourse he adapted to his surroundings, in his writing he infused a common epistolary form with the Word of God and in his autobiographical statements he used his own life as a means to communicate the faith. But through it all, he was driven by a commitment to those to whom he spoke. "Many of them came out of a world-view already at hand, of course, but Paul renews them by setting them in the context of God's radical love, the unfamiliar that provides a new context for the familiar so that it is seen anew."⁶

²I Corinthians 9:22, RSV.

³Robert Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p.248.

⁴McFague, op cit, p.159.

⁵Ibid, p.161.

⁶Ibid, p.161.

Augustine and Rhetoric

Since Paul, preachers have been adapting and renewing media of communication to similar ends. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.) was quick to use and to advocate the rules of rhetoric as a means of communicating to his age. "Should speakers of falsehood speak briefly, clearly and plausibly while the defenders of truth speak so that they tire their listeners, make themselves difficult to understand and what they have to say dubious?"⁷ Augustine argued that the preacher is judged by the hearer on how well the message is communicated, and the message itself is shaped by the communication.

Earlier Cyprian (200-258 C.E.) had argued the opposite. His position was that rhetoric disguised the gospel. "In adapting rhetoric to the pulpit, Cyprian said that preachers, unlike lawyers in court, should aim at 'a chaste simplicity' that uses truth, not eloquence, for conviction: 'not clever but weighty words, not decked up to charm a popular audience with cultivated rhetoric, but simple and fitted by their unvarnished truthfulness for the proclamation of divine mercy.'"⁸

The use of rhetoric is a special case to which we shall return in the next chapter. But it is interesting that Augustine, who also used autobiography as a means of communicating the faith in his *Confessions*, called for preachers to be able to "compete" with other orators of the time. He recognized that rhetoric, while not a new medium of communication, was gaining an audience and shaping the patterns of language and public discourse, and preachers were being left behind.

Romanos and Poetry

In the Eastern Church other trends were developing. There was a move from oratory to poetry as an attempt to "compete" in a changing communication environment. One influential, though little known figure in Eastern poetical preaching was Romanos the Melodist (c.490-c.560 C.E.). According to Paul Scott Wilson, the preaching of Romanos represents a significant shift in communication patterns.

Romanos' metrical sermons met two needs: an attraction away from theatre and circus, particularly on feast days, and reinforcement of the emperor's theology.

An ancient biographer for the church calendar says that Romanos received the gift of composing the kontakion from the Virgin Mary, who appeared to him in a dream during a Christmas Eve all-night vigil. She gave him a piece of paper he was to eat. On consuming it he awoke, mounted the pulpit and sang a sermon, "On the Nativity I" (on Mary and the Magi). His kontakia found their way into the regular liturgy of the Eastern church, in which he became a saint. Eventually they were presented with

⁷Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book IV (Indianapolis: Bobs-Merrill, 1958), p.118.

⁸Paul Scott Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1992), p.54. From Cyprian's *Letter to Donatus*.

elaborate artistic backdrops and were removed from the liturgy in the iconoclastic movement of the eighth century. They continued to be performed in other locations such as the Imperial Palace of Constantinople, at least until the twelfth century. By the close of the first millennium, his sermons had influenced the creation of sacred "mysteries" and the rebirth of theatre in the West.⁹

Not only did his style of preaching bring change within the Church, its effect was felt in the wider community as well. His preaching, and some particular sermons, became part of a larger public arena. Though a move to metrical, or poetic, preaching might have been a reaction to changes in the hearers' context, it also served as a model for communication in other arenas.

Though perhaps partially responsible for revitalising this style of preaching, Romanos was hardly the only preacher who utilized the poetic form for sermons.

Discovery of the "Homily on the Passion" by Bishop Melito of Sardis, who lived in West Asia Minor around 165, has led scholars to believe that there was an unbroken tradition of sermons with meter and rhyme, perhaps originating with the Psalms. Augustine's sermons, if read in the original Latin, frequently have rhyme, parallelism, antithesis, assonance, and wordplay. St. Paulinus of Nola (353-431), a bishop in France, wrote extensive poetry that may have had homiletical use. Nothing in the West, however, compares with the poem sermons of Ephrem (c.306-c.373), Romanos, and, later, John of Damascus (c.675-c.749). Each devised his own personal, distinctive form set to music that is now lost.¹⁰

Romanos was concerned that preaching be heard, that it challenge and interest the hearer. He devised his new style of preaching in order to respond to the influence of other forms of public discourse, i.e. theatre and circus.

Gregory and Audience Diversity

Richard Lischer identifies this concern with the hearer as uniquely Christian.

The ancient rhetorical arts were not concerned with audience analysis. It was the occasion - forensic, political, or ceremonial - that determined the quality of the speech. Although Aristotle examined the stimulation of various emotions in the hearer in Book II of the Rhetoric, neither he nor Augustine after him addressed the problem of a mixed audience. Indeed, it was a uniquely Christian problem created by the intellectual, social, and economic diversity represented at any given worship service. To this heterogeneity Gregory the Great (c.540-604) spoke as no one had before him.¹¹

Though it might be something of an overstatement to claim that only the Christian church was concerned with how they were being heard, the problem of such a great diversity

⁹Ibid, p.47.

¹⁰Ibid, p.48.

¹¹Lischer, ed., *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition* (Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1987), p.261.

of hearers is central to Christian communication. The modern media place great emphasis on targeting, i.e. identifying the segment of the public toward which to aim a particular message. Gregory was engaged in a similar exercise. "Under the rubric of 'one doctrine - many exhortations' Gregory first enumerates thirty-six pairs of opposite characters and then proceeds with a sermonette appropriate to each pairing."¹² Some of his pairings are social categories of concern to all communicators: men and women, poor and rich, prelates and subordinates, servants and masters (or perhaps oppressed and oppressors), those bound by wedlock and those who are free from the ties of wedlock. Others are of concern primarily to Christian communicators: the meek and the passionate; the kindly disposed and the envious; those who do evil secretly and good publicly, and those who conceal the good they do and yet in some things publicly allow evil to be thought of them; those who deplore sins of thought and those who deplore sins of deed.¹³

The goal of such a list of audience traits was, "in Gregory's words, 'to suit all and each for their several needs.'¹⁴ Gregory's example is one of attempting to speak to people where they are. Understanding the hearer must, in his view, be a crucial part of the nature of the preaching task.

Hildegard and Social Commentary

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179 C.E.) was one of the few women preachers of whom there is some substantial work. Her main style of preaching is considered mystical in that much of her language is a poetic vision like that seen in some of the apocalyptic literature of the Bible. But though the images themselves may point beyond the physical reality, Hildegard's preaching could hardly have been considered "other worldly." Her sermons addressed real issues in the Church. She was very much a political activist of her day, challenging the wrongs she identified in the priesthood. She "was read widely during the Reformation - she had forecast that church corruption would lead to seizure of church wealth and dissolution of the monasteries."¹⁵ Though she was in some senses a forerunner to other mystic women preachers, she did not directly attack the exclusion of women from the preaching office. Yet, by her dynamic and popular example she could not but draw attention

¹²Ibid, p.261.

¹³From Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, Part III, 1-3,8, James Barmby, trans., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol.XII (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1984), pp.24-29.

¹⁴Lischer, op cit, p.261.

¹⁵Wilson, op cit, p.74.

to the gender issue.

One of her lasting, or perhaps newly rediscovered, influences was her ecological concern. "The word she coined, *veriditas*, for the power of greening, can be a reminder of how much we must learn, alter our life-style, and preaching about caring for the world if life on this planet is to continue as we know it."¹⁶ Again, here is a preacher who is attempting to communicate to people where they are, by voicing their concerns about the Church, in a language of rich images that brought her numerous listeners. But she was not satisfied with simply being heard, her preaching task was to shape the imaginations and the vision of the people to include a new way of living in the world.

Francis, Wesley and the Move Out

Other numerous examples could be cited of preachers who saw a change in the directions of public communication and took steps to follow that trend. Consider St. Francis of Assisi (c.1181-1226 C.E.) and the order he founded. Together they moved preaching out of the Churches (which were considered by many to be temples of wealth) into the countryside as a way of making contact with the ordinary people. Like the troubadours and travelling story-tellers, these preachers went to where the people were to communicate their message. But perhaps the most radical move of Francis and the order which took his name, was to declare that the speaking of their message must be accompanied by the living of the message. As his message was both respect for creation and divestment of worldly property, the sight of the beggar priests became a communication of the message of Christianity is a powerful and real way.

Later, John Wesley (1703-1791) and George Whitfield (1714-1770) followed the Franciscans out to the field where the people who were left out of the Church could hear. It was Whitfield who led the way and encouraged John Wesley to join him in preaching out in the field. Whitfield enthusiastically embraced this new freedom for preaching and took it with him as he travelled to the American colonies. He was instrumental in instigating the "Great Awakening" in the American churches, primarily the early Methodist movement. Wesley, after much internal debate, finally consented to "become more vile" and preach to the masses on the hillsides and mineheads and even graveyards of England. This move to go where the people were was accompanied by other techniques of tapping into popular communication trends. Wesley, for example, often used well-known tunes to communicate a new theology in song. His sermons, though strongly based in the Bible, showed evidence of exposure to popular writers and thinkers of the day.

¹⁶Ibid, p.77.

Spener and Engagement

At the end of the 17th century a German Pietist named Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) challenged the effectiveness of the communication of preaching. Spener was distinctive in that he was moved to embrace dialogue as the proper means of communicating the faith. "Much of German Pietism has a familiar ring to contemporary Christians, especially Spener's criticism of the lectionary and the monological sermon, as well as his advocacy of small-group discussion of Christian issues. In all his proposals Spener's concern was practical..."¹⁷ At first glance, Spener might appear to counsel a move away from issues of communication toward a more complete focus on the message. "It is not enough that we hear the word with our outward ear, but we must let it penetrate to our heart, so that we may hear the Holy Spirit speak there, that is, with vibrant emotion and comfort feel the sealing of the Spirit and the power of the word."¹⁸ Yet the problem that Spener identifies is essentially one of communication. The message is not heard with the power that it has. Something is putting a block between the Word and the heart of the hearer.

*There are probably few places in our church in which there is such want that not enough sermons are preached. But many godly persons find that not a little is wanting in many sermons. There are preachers who fill most of their sermons with things that give the impression that the preachers are learned men, although the hearers understand nothing of this. Often many foreign languages are quoted, although probably not one person in the church understands a word of them. Many preachers are more concerned to have the introduction shape up well and the transitions be effective, to have an outline that is artful and yet sufficiently concealed, and to have all the parts handled precisely according to the rules of oratory and suitably embellished, than they are concerned that the materials be chosen and by God's grace be developed in such a way that the hearers may profit from the sermon in life and death.*¹⁹

Spener exposes the problem of focusing on communication for the sake of the speaker as opposed to the communication itself. As Lischer points out above, attention to rhetoric (or oratory as Spener calls it) is attention to the event and the act of speaking, but not to a high degree attention to the audience. Spener advocates, rather, attention to communication for the sake of the hearer. Preaching, he argues, should not use a foreign language that is unintelligible to the hearer, which could just as easily be theological jargon or an insider Christian argot, as Hebrew or Aramaic. He rails against attention to rules of oratory, to structure for the sake of structure, rather than to a structure that allows the hearer to hear with the inner ear, to feel the presence of the Spirit with "vibrant emotion and comfort." Like

¹⁷Lischer, op cit, p.60

¹⁸Ibid, p.64. These excerpts come from Spener's *Pia Desideria*, Theodore G. Tappert, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964) pp.87-91, 115-117.

¹⁹Ibid, p.63.

Kierkegaard, Spener called for preaching that "gets under the skin."

Spener's reaction to the prevailing communication trends of the Church was to complain that they were out of touch with the people, that the communication context of daily life was more "real" and more relevant than that taking place from the pulpit. It might be argued that, in Spener's day, formal rhetoric was the prevailing communicative discourse and, therefore, he was actually arguing against the trend. This is true to a degree. It could also be argued, however, that that style of communicative discourse did not have such widespread appeal among the people. The use of rhetoric was confined to relatively small segments of the population. Hence Spener's complaint that most congregations did not "hear" what was being preached. Spener's call was for preaching that communicates.

Fénélon and Appropriation of Truth

Contemporary with Spener was a preacher who was also concerned to move away from a rhetoric that no longer communicated.

Like Augustine's On Christian Doctrine, which was said to "begin rhetoric anew," the Dialogues of François Fénélon (1651-1715) constitute the first modern rhetoric. ... Fénélon decried the effects of [the neo-scholasticism of Peter Ramus] on the French pulpit of the seventeenth century. Mere ingenuity of speech was of no help to preachers like Fénélon, who were concerned with a persuasive, missionary apostolate to the Huguenots. In an effort to restore the integrity of rhetoric (and preaching with it), he advocated a plain style of discourse and encouraged preachers to interpret and apply the Scripture according to the way in which the hearer most naturally appropriates the truth. According to Fénélon's method, the message is logically unfolded, rather than displayed. Although his proposal stops short of modern "inductive preaching," it is clearly influenced by growing pressures of seventeenth century experimental science. Fénélon's rhetoric was a part of a comprehensive revolution in the relations of experience, thought and discourse.²⁰

The process continues up to the present day, from the Victorians (latter half of the 19th century and considered by most to be the most "traditional" preachers, although this tradition is as culturally bound as any), through the American camp meetings (early 20th century) which made preaching and worship a carnival of sorts, to the ideal of preaching as pastoral/personal relationships and preaching as social action.

Farmer, Fosdick and Pastoral Relationships

The affinity of preaching and personal relationships is exemplified in H.H. Farmer who wrote that "preaching is only to be rightly understood and conducted when it is seen in the context of a Christian understanding of persons and their relationships with one another.

²⁰Ibid, p.224.

It is first, last, and all the time a function of the personal."²¹ A thought that is echoed in Harry Emerson Fosdick's view of preaching as personal counselling.

*Any preacher who in his sermons speaks to the real conditions of his people, making evident that he knows what questions they are asking and where their problems lie, is bound to be sought out by individuals wanting his intimate advice. And any pastor who, with intelligence and clairvoyance, practices such personal counselling, is bound to find his sermons, in content and form, insight and impact, profoundly affected.*²²

King and the African-American Preaching Tradition

As for preaching as social action, though numerous examples could be cited, perhaps one of the most powerful figures is that of Martin Luther King, Jr. What is striking about his sermons is that, though politically oriented, they also arise out of the consciousness of the hearer. Black consciousness and communication patterns were central to King's preaching. His use of the rhythms of speech (not unlike Romanos), popular and suggestive imagery (like Hildegard) and a language that showed an awareness of how the hearer "most naturally appropriates truth" (a la Fénelon). But perhaps what is most unique about King's, and indeed most of the African-American homiletical tradition, is the level to which "the congregation is part of the sermon delivery, and the preacher depends upon their energy and response."²³ This is preaching dialogue in its most overt form.

Tele-Preaching?

Today, a case could be made that the preachers attempting to let the influence of television on society direct their attempts at communication the most are the much maligned tele-evangelists. Most of the innovation, however, is not in their preaching, which largely retains a traditional expository and deductive style. The innovation is to be found in their attempts to provide a variety of communication styles. A recent trend, for example, is a move from a worship and preaching based telecast to a talk show or even variety show format. Adapting themselves almost completely to the medium, these preachers have abandoned, to a degree, preaching in favour of the more intimate and informal chat.

I do not advocate emulation of these preachers. In the process of adapting the structure to the demands of the television, they have also, I believe, adapted the message. But, as an example of how Christian communication, if not preaching per se, has changed with the

²¹Farmer, *The Servant of the Word* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964 [originally published in 1942]), p.21.

²²Fosdick, "Personal Counselling and Preaching," *Pastoral Psychology*, March, 1952, p.11.

²³Wilson, op cit, p.173.

demands of new communication patterns the tele-evangelists have a place.

Challenge to Preaching

The history of preaching and homiletics is rife with examples of preachers and thinkers who have experienced the need to adapt communication styles. Some of this change grew out of a theological reflection on the nature of preaching, rather than direct influence of public communication shifts. Despite this, the need for change and, perhaps, even the theological reflection grew out of an awareness of blockages in the communication from the pulpit. It is true that the suggestions and innovations that many of these preachers made to the preaching event would not communicate in today's communication environment. What was innovative and exciting for the Wesleys, for example, would be out of place in the television age. Yet, the emphasis on the hearer and on how the hearer "most naturally appropriates truth" is very much in line with this thesis. Preaching must be in tune with those patterns of communication.

What makes this reflection even more urgent is the ease with which television participates and affects communication. In this sense preaching must "catch up" with the media when it comes to communication. Malcolm Boyd said over 35 years ago:

*The mass media have often been far more effective than the pulpit in expressing man's realistic condition, in verbalizing questions which man asks within his own soul. Our thought and action patterns are moulded by the media and by the very climate in which the media are the dominant "taste-makers."*²⁴

The modern visual media, chiefly television, have brought about a change in the context of the person in the pew. Obviously preaching has to address this change with changes of its own, especially changes in structure, language and delivery. The theological issue, however, remains that of an unchanging gospel, the connection between the medium and the message. The Christian preacher still claims that the Word of God in Jesus Christ is supremely relevant to modern life. It does not follow that the search for new structures for preaching means the abandonment of the biblical text as witness to the Christ. Expository preaching is still demanded, even if the form of the exposition is questioned. Conceptual, deductive preaching appealed to the mind; this may have to give place to some extent to more image oriented, inductive movement, which leads one to an experiential encounter with the gospel. Christ is incarnated into our story, our image structure.

Modern communication theory and the technical brilliance of the mass media undermine the cultural phenomenon of preaching less than might be supposed. There is much

²⁴Boyd, "Crisis of the Mass Media," *Christianity and Crisis*, Volume XVI, Number 9, May 28, 1956, p. 69.

to be learned from the media. But the core of any preaching is "speaking the truth in love."²⁵ The sermon calls for the integration of the preacher, what is preached and how it is preached. In those senses preaching is the Word lived. Because it is incarnated in this multifaceted fashion, preaching invites participation at a range of levels which remain beyond simple analysis. When done faithfully and well, preaching offers story, myth or verbal image that, even if not fully understood, can be grasped and made a part of one's life.

Present-day "Crisis" in Preaching

And yet, "preaching is in crisis. This awareness has been with us for some time now, reducing pastoral morale and congregational fervour. But the way out, toward new effectiveness in preaching, is not yet clear."²⁶ So Richard Eslinger begins his introduction to a recent work on preaching. His pronouncement of the crisis in preaching has widespread agreement. Many other preachers and professors of homiletics have expressed dismay at the apparent futility of preaching in today's world. Some have attempted to provide solutions, new theories that will restore preaching to its rightful place of prominence in the life and witness of the church and the world. There is now a proliferation of books on preaching, many of which profess to hold the key to the revival of preaching. But none of them seem to be able to diagnose the problem adequately. Why is preaching in crisis? What is the nature of the crisis? How is the crisis in preaching reflected in the crisis of the Christian Church as a whole? Alarming membership and attendance figures in the mainline denominations signal a definite problem, if not a crisis, for the future of the Church. Does this mean that there is no longer a need for the Church or for the Christian message? Perhaps the Church should be phased out to make way for the new level of consciousness. Perhaps God is dead or at least no longer necessary in the self sufficient world in which we live. This may be an over-dramatization, but still the question persists, is the Church or the Christian message no longer necessary?²⁷ Are these questions about the Church what is behind the crisis in preaching? Perhaps both problems, the apparent crisis in preaching and the difficulties facing the Church, are both part of a larger issue of growing secularization.

While it is true that the Christian Church is shrinking in Europe and North America,

²⁵Ephesians 4:15, RSV.

²⁶Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletic Method* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), p.11.

²⁷I do not mean here to equate the Church and the Christian message. For the purposes of a discussion on preaching, which concerns the Christian message within the body of the Church, I have put them together in order to briefly touch on a fundamental question of purpose.

it is growing rapidly in the East, in Africa and in South America. The underground Church in the former USSR and other totalitarian states managed to stay alive despite tremendous pressure. Also, it is the mainline churches that are in trouble. Some of the independent, more conservative churches are doing well in the U.S. All of this is to say that the Christian Church is still meeting needs in the world today, or at least that people are still seeking out the Christian Church and the Christian message.

So then, why the crisis? Why is the mainline Church failing in the West and why is preaching in need of "a new hearing"? The problems that face the Church in the West are many. I do not propose to nail the fault of the declining Church onto the preacher's study door. Increasing institutionalization and a lack of concern for evangelism are but two of a wide range of problems that cannot be blamed wholly on the pulpit. The basic problem besetting preaching today, however, is perceived as a fundamental problem for the Church as a whole. The problem is that the message heard seems a long way from life as lived. There does not seem to be any relevance in the message heard.

Preaching as Irrelevant?

Why the concern for relevance? How does this become the central issue for analyzing the crisis in preaching? As discussed in Chapter I, this is one of the influences of modern media. Here the consumer hears a multitude of messages that profess to make a difference in one's life, to solve personal problems, to provide comfort and luxury, and to make one better suited to be a part of today's society. In addition, these messages are delivered with clarity and speed. In fifteen or even ten seconds monumental social problems are identified, diagnosed and resolved.

From this realm of apparently practical, real-world sorts of advice or models, many people find the "other-worldly" talk from the pulpit on Sunday morning to have less to do with life outside of the church building. There is a growing gap between beliefs expressed and lifted up from the pulpit and the ways of life exemplified by church people on the street. The pace of delivery alone signals a digression from the hectic pace of real world communication. The relative lack of emotional contact suggests a "take it or leave it" mentality. The message heard does not relate to the life lived. Note that the irrelevance is stated to be between the message heard and life as lived in the modern world. Our first question, then, must be is the problem in the content of the message or in the presentation of the message?

What is the content of preaching and is that content relevant to modern life? In Chapter III, I argued that the answers to the first question might range from the behavioral to the doctrinal. It seems, however, that all questions of doctrine, behaviour or whatever else becomes the basis of a specific sermon, preaching must first be understood as encompassing

the Word of God.

God's Word for the Christian preacher is understood to be Christ. Christ is God's ultimate self-revelation, Word made flesh. Christ, then, is the content of preaching; Christ, whose birth, life, suffering, death and resurrection, incarnate God's Word to the world. This message, I argued, is supremely relevant, even today.

Crisis of Communication

If the content of preaching is seen to be relevant, the fault for the seeming irrelevance must, therefore, lie in the presentation of that content. The crisis is one of communication. How must the message be presented in order that it might be heard today?

I believe that the problem was best summed up by Dr. Fred Craddock in a lecture given at Perkins School of Theology in February of 1981. Dr. Craddock, professor of homiletics at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, was speaking on the nature of preaching in a series of lectures that formed the basis of his book *Preaching*, published in 1985.²⁸ The text comes from a recording of those lectures:

*A few years ago, the most common criticism that I heard of preaching, [as a teacher of preachers] ... they would come to me with "Our preacher doesn't preach the Bible...." That by far was the number one criticism. Today the number one criticism is not that.... The number one criticism I hear is this: "Our preacher preaches as though it were not important. Our minister does not give the impression that anything is at stake...."*²⁹

That complaint may seem to some to be a trivial matter. Yet, when assessing the relevance of preaching it is of the utmost importance. What the complaint implies is that the presentation of the message does not match the content, if the content is understood to be vital to every individual. What we witness, through an admittedly unscientific sampling, is a change from a desire for more doctrinal or historical material from preaching (i.e. more Bible) to a desire for more relevance. A change from questions of content to questions of object. The presentation of preaching makes the subject matter seem no longer important. This, I believe, reflects a change in the formula of Word of God presented by preacher received by hearer in the pew. The content of the message, the Word, has not changed in its relevance. Preaching, for the most part has been slow to change. The traditional methods of preaching still hold prominence in the majority of churches. What has changed, and changed drastically, is the hearer, or more precisely, as we have seen, the hearers' context.

In contrast, it might be said that there has been a change in the preacher; that the crisis

²⁸Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).

²⁹Craddock, "Shouting the Whisper," Peyton Lectures on Preaching, Perkins School of Theology, February 1981, audio tape.

of preaching might be seen as a crisis of faith in the preacher. This would be the solution offered by some of the more fundamentalist or evangelical branches of the Church. What is needed is more confidence in the gospel, they would say, and preaching once again becomes the powerful forum for addressing the relevance of the gospel to the hearer. There is some truth in this. I would say, however, that a part of the crisis of faith stems from the fact that communication between pulpit and pew has become blocked. Standard phrases and exhortations no longer effect the responses expected. A further discussion of these issues for clergy and preachers is vital for the future of the Church. But, I still hold that the greatest change has occurred in the hearers' context. The change in this context forces us to ask fundamental questions about the efficacy of preaching. Is there still room for the pulpit? Can the preacher hope to be heard in a media saturated society?

It might also be said that the preacher ought not to focus on the hearers when formulating the message, as the preacher's calling is to the message. The preacher's task, it might be argued, is to be faithful more than it is to be a good communicator. This would be the advice given by many of those quoted in the brief historical survey. James Stewart, for example, argued that the task of the preacher is to remain faithful to the text. "I am insisting on what is paradoxical but true - that the more resolutely and stubbornly you refuse to be deflected from the one decisive theme, the greater variety you will achieve."³⁰ The task of preaching is to maintain a firm grasp on the theme of preaching Christ. The variety and the interest will come from that, Stewart argues. Yet,

*[I]ay listeners tend to think of preaching as "good" or "bad" and not so much as "faithful" or "unfaithful." At the same time, has a preacher been faithful to God and the message if he has failed to communicate his message to his congregation? Doesn't faithfulness include a response to the listening congregation as well as to God?*³¹

It is a false division, I believe, to say that the preacher's obligation is to message and not to hearer. How can one be true to the message if the message isn't heard? Is not the aim of the message to be communicated? Are preachers not to use the appropriate skills and techniques in order to communicate that message? If not communicating the message clearly and with conviction makes it dubious in Augustine's day, is it not also true today?

PREACHING IN A TELEVISION AGE

I believe the preacher can be heard today. However, it will involve changes in homiletical method. These changes have been introduced recently by a number of modern

³⁰James Stewart, *Heralds of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p.69.

³¹Larry LaCouer, "If Aristotle Could Hear You Preach," *Pastoral Psychology*, October 1965, p.16.

homileticians, whose work is appropriate to a television age. Though most of them do not directly claim to be responding to external changes in the hearers' context, it is in the light of the impact of television that these changes take on a new urgency. To be heard today, the preacher must learn new structures and a new way of delivery.

These changes in the public arena give preachers pause. One response would be to simply give up the preaching enterprise as out of touch with communication trends and therefore likely to have little effect upon the Church, let alone on society at large. A second response would be to continue on with "business as usual;" acknowledging that the communication pattern of preaching is unique and traditional and, therefore, to be treasured as the oddity that it is. Perhaps preaching is to be counter-cultural in the sense that it should stand against trends and patterns. While there is much to be admired in such a position, one wonders if, in this scenario, preaching becomes a museum piece rather than an element of a living, active Church mission?

A third response is to see what there is to be learned from communication studies of the modern media context that might enable preaching to be heard without losing its distinctive qualities and position. One element, as we shall see more fully in Chapter V, that has much to offer preaching is the imagination. Television is image dominated and, therefore, has a certain appeal to the imagination. Preaching can recognize the power of imagination for its own unique communication event.

Television, as we have seen, moves us to consider integration. We consider whether our words and images and actions all communicate the same message. In addition, we are forced to look at the environment in which preaching takes place. In medieval Christendom we find a paradigm for mediated theology. Art and architecture embodied the theology which undergirded the thought of the age. In a pluralistic age, however, no one dominant theology is expressed in our culture. One role, therefore, for preachers might be to struggle not so much with the origins of the tradition, which are well worked by now, but to make Christian theology "visual." This means, on one level, employing symbols and artwork in our sanctuaries that capture the eye and support the communication of the message we speak from the pulpit. It also means ensuring that the words used are image laden to strike chords in the minds of the hearers. Imaged preaching can call forth images that enable the hearers to "see" themselves living out the implications and applications of the Word preached. As David Tracy has argued, this brings us right back to imagination, since meaning and application converge in imagination.³² The doing and the communicating of theology share the same space; the

³²See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1981). In a pluralistic age it is imagination, according to Tracy, that will enable dialogue. We approach the universal, or consensus, through the

telling and the living of the story are part of the same exercise.

Person of the Preacher

The realization that the message and the messenger cannot ultimately be separated is one that has come to many preachers. At its most rudimentary, this idea can be reduced to the cliché: *practice what you preach*. Like all clichés, this one is almost embarrassingly simplistic. Its truth is too obvious and its implications almost unbearable. On the other hand, the Christian preacher proclaims the gospel story and not his/her own story, however edifying that might be. The preacher must be able to point beyond him/herself, even while acting as the pointer.

Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) is probably the best known advocate of the necessity of the personality of the preacher in the preaching event. In fact, he defines preaching as "the bringing of truth through personality."

Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of those can it spare and still be preaching. The truest truth, the most authoritative statement of God's will, communicated in any other way than through the personality of brother man to men is not preached truth. Suppose it is written on the sky, suppose it is embodied in a book which has been so long held in reverence as the direct utterance of God that the vivid personality of the men who wrote its pages has well-nigh faded out of it; in neither of these cases is there any preaching.³³

This is, on one level, a call for the individual uniqueness of preaching. Each individual preacher should relate the truth through his/her experiences and understanding, should impress upon the hearer the relevance of the message in the life that is lived before them, and should draw upon the storehouse of images and narratives by which the gospel broke through the details of life into his/her own consciousness. As each preacher interprets, the preaching of the gospel retains a freshness and a variety. On a deeper level, through the variety of personality, the gospel is seen to be effective as it is at work in a human life, sometimes successfully sometimes less so. But the gospel becomes concrete and real in the mind and experience of the hearer.

Richard Baxter (1615-1691), 200 years before Brooks, also claimed that preaching must grow out of an experience of the gospel.

It is the common danger and calamity of the church to have unregenerate and inexperienced pastors; and to have men become preachers before they are Christians; to be sanctified by dedication to the altar, as God's priests, before they are sanctified by hearty dedication to Christ as his disciples; and so to worship an unknown God, and

particularities of our imagination which provides the analogies.

³³Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1907), p.5.

*to preach an unknown Christ, an unknown Spirit, an unknown state of holiness and communion with God, and a glory that is unknown, and likely to be unknown to them for ever. He is likely to be but a heartless preacher who has not the Christ and grace that he preaches in his heart.*³⁴

Some might consider this emphasis on personal knowledge and experience to be too limiting. Indeed the Pietist Peter Bohler advised Wesley that he should "preach faith until you find it, and then because you have it you will preach faith." The implication is that it might not necessarily be the *having* of faith that is essential but the *striving toward faith* that is as important for the preacher. The activity of being engaged on the journey of faith is sought, not necessarily the achievement of certain levels or states.

Another interpretation of the role of personality in preaching is that the preacher brings something vital to the preaching event that is actually beyond the experience of the hearer. As P.T. Forsyth declared, "[t]he Christian preacher is not the successor of the Greek Orator, but of the Hebrew prophet. The orator comes with but an inspiration, the prophet comes with a revelation."³⁵ What the preacher brings is the connection between "the world of action" and the "world unseen," according to Forsyth.³⁶

In all of this we see that a vital ingredient in the preaching event is the person of the preacher. A sermon is not detached from context. That context is both the context of the hearer or the context of the preacher. It arises out of one and impacts the other, and throughout the communication the gospel calls both contexts to account.

The television age puts personality into a different light. Television thrives on personalities. Clive James' television series *Fame in the Twentieth Century* for the BBC, catalogued the variety of personalities who had their hour upon that stage. Some of these personalities rose to fame almost instantly and then disappeared just as quickly. Others have been of more enduring quality. But all have been exposed and examined and studied and adored by the television camera. Television, in its desire to be both popular and new, moves from one face to another to find a personality that will interest the public. Lists of who is "in" (who makes the news, gets their photograph in the papers and centre stage on the talk shows) and who is "out" (who has been forgotten and the subject of the "What ever happened to..." genre of programming) change almost daily.

This public desire for personalities to admire is not confined to the television age. John Chrysostom (347-407) was concerned about the effects of public adulation in his day.

³⁴Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837), p.172.

³⁵Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind* (New York: A.C. Armstrong, 1907), p.4.

³⁶Ibid, p.4.

As a speaker he was without peer, the greatest preacher and biblical commentator of the Greek Church. Yet he warned against the public acclaim sought by every great orator and insisted that preachers should be "trained in the indifference to praise." Such training he understands to be essential in the spiritual formation of the preacher, especially in a rhetorical culture like his own with its "passion for sermons."³⁷

Our culture may not have a "passion for sermons" but it certainly has a passion for personalities. Television needs something upon which to focus: a person, place or thing that the camera or microphone or transmitter can pick-up. That to which the camera gives most of its attention is faces: personalities who populate the screen. The gospel, the Christ and Word of God are more difficult to put on the screen. In the attempts that are made something is invariably lost. At times it is the message of the gospel itself that is lost as the focus shifts to the preacher or expert. As Postman reminds us, people say, "I don't know about God, but Jimmy Swaggart I can see. He sings to me and he prays and he asks me to do things. There is his image right in front of me."³⁸ Even in religious broadcasting, the power of the personality can often overwhelm attempts to preach the message. What is communicated is that the preacher is the message, the preacher is the focus. This is the difficulty that Paul and all those who use autobiography as a means of communicating faith face: keeping the focus on the faith and away from the person of the preacher.

This danger has led some homileticians to argue that there is no room for the "I" in preaching. There is too great a risk that the preaching will become an exaltation of the preacher. Yet, contextuality and experiential preaching demands a point of contact between the truths of the gospel and life as lived. Autobiography is an effective means for providing that contact. Part of the solution is found in intent. McFague argues that autobiography functions like a parable when used to provide a context for the gospel.

*Parables are for bringing people to commitment, and while the goal is less direct in autobiographies, the possibility of commitment is still there for the reader. It is a parabolic or Socratic possibility; that is, not "do as I do," but "see what I am" and then enter into your own soul and discover **your** prime direction, your master form, your center and focus. It is existential theology with a vengeance; it is the **living** of belief, not the talking **about** it or the systemizing of it.³⁹*

There is, however, a difficulty in transferring what is essentially words to images, or fleshing out the idea of faith. The person of the preacher, rather than the gospel message, can dominate the imaginations of the hearers. Examples such as Zeffereilli's *Jesus of Nazareth*

³⁷Lischer, op cit, p.43

³⁸"The Door Interview: Neil Postman", *The Door*, November/December 1989, Number 108, p.36

³⁹McFague, op cit, p.157.

demonstrate the dilemma. The visual images in the film become more definitive, more interpretive than word images. As a result, for many people now, Jesus bears a striking resemblance to Robert Powell. On the other hand, when programmes such as Dennis Potter's *Son of Man* redefine more than just the visage of Jesus, they help to shape the setting and political context in quite clear ways.⁴⁰ When the visual image is a person, like that of the preacher sharing his/her own story in the sermon, the risk is still great.⁴¹

The impetus of the television age is to transfer ideas into images. Often the images that carry weight are those of personalities. This passion for personalities is a passion for individuals who can communicate a range of messages. Media personalities are significant in the determining of public opinion. Their private opinions are sought on matters of which they might have little knowledge, and yet their words are taken seriously by members of the public. These personalities are also "trend-setters" of a sort. Many charitable causes look for personalities to "front" for them, to provide a familiar face to communicate an important message. Sting's advocacy of the plight of the Amazon Rainforest Tribes, Lenny Henry and a host of comedians and comic actors who biannually stir up interest in the needs met by Comic Relief Charities, are but two examples of the media personality proclaiming a public message. The numerous advertisers who seek out personalities to sell their wares is perhaps the more common use of this authority of the personality.

Authority for Preaching

This use of media power, or the authority of personality, has, I believe, affected preaching quite significantly. Authority for preaching has always been a complicated topic. In Wilson's *Concise History of Preaching* the key factor in determining the preaching "eras" is a shift in the understanding of the authority for preaching.

Even in the Middle Ages, when Scripture was the relatively private text of a small educated elite and church control might have been said to be at its peak, the rumblings of challenge were never silenced. When central ecclesial authority was radically overthrown by the Protestants in their Reformation, the foundations of other challenges to subsequent authorities were simultaneously and unavoidably laid. As history has taught us many times, the overthrow of central authority spawns multiple competing

⁴⁰These contexts might be appropriate to the ministry of Christ. The point is not to argue with the interpretation, but to suggest that these programmes often become definitive for the viewers. This concern is at the heart of the furore that surrounded Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*. An element of that debate was not solely one of censorship, but an awareness of the power of the visual image to shape perception.

⁴¹A recent work which provides an interesting slant on the subject of the autobiographical elements in preaching is Richard F. Ward, *Speaking from the Heart: Preaching with Passion* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1992). See especially pp.23-25 on the "preacher as prism."

*claims.*⁴²

In a sense, Wilson could not have better described authority in the television age. Television has changed and clarified the concept of authority for preaching. The multi-faceted, ever changing countenance of television helps to maintain this lack of a sense of central authority. Despite the claims of some that television works to keep the status quo and supports those in power, the experience or perception of television is that it questions or undermines those in authority. In Postman's view this is done by ridicule or trivialization. Everything becomes the subject of entertainment and, therefore, is not of sufficient seriousness to represent a real impression of authority. All institutions in a television society lose status as symbols of authority and become instead objects of scorn. In addition, television's emphasis on the needs of the viewer invites the public to question much of what has traditionally been seen as authoritative. The audience is encouraged to ask, in effect, "what is in this for me?" The concept of authority, consequently, is a change from that which is *owed* by the public to that which is *given* by the public. In a television age, instead of respecting the inherent authority in an institution or an office, the public gives authority to that which will meet their needs most effectively. This is, in one sense, a move from ontological thinking to utilitarian thinking.

As a result of this move, authority is seen in terms of relationship. Those who most effectively connect with me, who speak to me where I am, are those to whom I will give authority. We look to those personalities who give the most entertainment, experience, information, and so forth, to be the spokespersons with authority in our society. The traditional image of preachers has been as those who declare, who "stand outside and direct" or command. By contrast the most effective communicators in televisual terms are those who seem to "stand within and invite." Rabbi Lionel Blue, considered by many to be an effective television and radio presence, has an "authority of vulnerability." He is not afraid to share doubts or fears along with convictions and faith. It is a way of sharing truth and enabling faith. But it is not peculiar to the mass media. The style, with suitable adjustments for the context of the Church rather than the studio and the pulpit rather than the microphone, is also effective for the preacher. The point to grasp is that the cultural impact of the mass media has been such that the old, and to many, familiar styles of preaching, which in their day possessed their own intrinsic authority, no longer do so.

It can also be argued, however, that the understanding of authority for preaching has always been relational. The more external or institutional understanding of authority, which gives preaching its stereotypical tone, is actually an aberration. P.T. Forsyth argued that

⁴²Wilson, *op cit*, p.13.

authority, while external in that it derives from the Word of God, is inward directed. The authority is not in the preaching office, he argued, but in the interaction between the Word of God and the human soul.

Is it not one of the greatest and surest results of modern progress that, if there be an authority, it must be inward, it must be in the soul, it must be by consent? Yes, indeed, that is one of the greatest and best blessings of modern time. ... To internalize authority is to subtilize it, and therefore to emphasize it; for it is the subtler realities that bear upon us with the most persistent, ubiquitous, and effective pressure.⁴³

Authority is given in the interaction, in the "subtler realities" that engage the hearer. David Buttrick echoes this understanding of the inward nature of authority. He claims that to speak of authority in terms of power or wisdom, the traditional understanding of the external authority, is to misunderstand the nature of the gospel. He describes this as an "analogy error." Buttrick prefers the Pauline understanding of authority as presented in I Corinthians.

Notice that in an argument over authority Paul does not point to the immutable sovereign being of God, but to the absurd humanity of a crucified Christ. ... Perhaps Paul's procedure sets a proper precedent, for instead of shoring up scripture's unassailable truth or pumping up a triumphal church or drawing nifty God-analogies, he leads us to Christ crucified and says in effect, "There is your authority." ... The locus of authority then, if there is such, is faith consciousness in which, again and again, we are brought before the cross of Christ by means of a remembered gospel message.⁴⁴

The crucified Christ, claims Buttrick, disables arguments of power and wisdom in favour of weakness and folly. Like Forsyth, Buttrick locates authority internally, in the life and soul of the believer and the community.

The understanding of authority for preaching, though different in content, is not unlike authority as understood in the television context. There is a relational element in that authority is felt and given in that relationship, rather than owed to the institution or the office.

Language for Preaching

The work of the homiletician and the influence of the television age coalesce in a number of significant areas. As we have seen, both in the importance of the person directing the communication and the understanding of authority, points of contact can be found between the demands of a television age and traditional and modern thinking about preaching. As stated earlier, what is new is the sense of urgency with which certain ideas and techniques of preaching are adopted. Though there has traditionally been a range of techniques for

⁴³Forsyth, op cit, p.46.

⁴⁴David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp.245-247.

preaching, certain elements are more congruent and therefore communicate more effectively than others.

In examining language for preaching, certain key characteristics gain significance for preaching in a television age.

Visual

Given the nature of the communication changes, some might argue that if television is the medium of the day then words must make way for picture. There is a truth in this, but not the whole truth. It is still true, as Buttrick says, that "we live in language. Words are not merely stuff to thicken bulky dictionaries. No, words whirl about us; they give life significance and indeed make life possible. We are Homo loquens."⁴⁵ Words can still communicate and, in fact, are essential to human communication. Even television works by integrating words and images. The language in which the modern man and woman live, however, is a language of images. Words draw mental pictures and these pictures communicate experience. Therefore the language of preaching needs to be a language of image. It needs to be "words that evoke."

*The telecommunications age is bringing about a global extension of images and an increasing quantity and density of images for each individual. This has enormous potential for widening our consciousness and for developing communication between peoples. But it is also changing human life and society in unknown ways.*⁴⁶

Preaching language that communicates in a television age becomes more visual. This is not a call for "visual aids" or "multi-media" experimentation in preaching as was practised in the 60's and early 70's. These sorts of experiments misunderstood the nature of verbal images. They provided a picture which became in many instances a symbol, which might illustrate a point or provide a reference. A verbal image, on the other hand, is a construct that allows each individual to come to understanding even as the community works together to shape meaning. Chapter V will look more closely at how these images function in human understanding. But it is clear that "as we begin to read images more closely, we see that they are not mere representations but compressed narratives."⁴⁷ It is this narrative function of images that we seek to find in the language. So a preaching language invites the hearer to construct images that tell their own stories. This language must be descriptive.

⁴⁵Ibid, p.173.

⁴⁶Paul Mann, "Journey into the Image: Religion, the Arts, and Telecommunications," *Reflections on a Theology of Telecommunications: Image, Model, Word* (Dayton, Ohio: Centre for Religious Telecommunications, 1984), p.29.

⁴⁷Ibid, p.30.

Craddock includes a discussion of the preacher's use of description in *Preaching*.⁴⁸ He contends that describing invites hearers to participate in the sermon experientially. The hearer is enabled to "see" what is being said. "We often have difficulty in understanding a purely verbal notion...We feel happier when it is visible; then it's oriented in a way we understand."⁴⁹

Concrete

Language that is aiming toward a description of an image must also be concrete rather than general. It is the concrete that communicates to a wider audience. Common sense would seem to claim the opposite. It should be the general that would be heard by the widest audience. But, in fact, the general is laden with abstract words that do not lead to images, and therefore do not engage listeners. The concrete will register in the minds of the listeners as a specific image. This brings about relevance in that the listener "sees" the connection between word spoken and experience lived.

In Kierkegaard's thought the concrete carries with it the weight of subjective involvement. A general or abstract idea is divorced from human reality and, therefore, not of interest. The concrete image, on the other hand, is one that provides a point of reference to an experiential understanding.

*Abstract thought solves all the difficulties of life by abstracting from them, whence arises its complacent disinterestedness; the concrete thinker, who faces the concrete problem of reality as is, discovers that this problem brings his subjective interest to a climax, since it reveals a future presenting a critical and decisive alternative.*⁵⁰

Accessible

To maintain this connection with the particularities of human experience, the language of the preacher is also the language of the people. The words used must be within the experiences and understandings of those invited to hear and see. This does not mean that sermons must sound like they were spoken in the back alleys and school yards in order to be authentic.⁵¹ But neither should a sermon sound as if it were crafted for systematic

⁴⁸Craddock, *Preaching*, op cit, pp.200-203.

⁴⁹Edward Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan, "Acoustic Space," *Exploration in Communication*, Carpenter and McLuhan, eds. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p.65.

⁵⁰David F. Swenson, *Something about Kierkegaard* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1941), p.152.

⁵¹However, Henry Mitchell argues that Black preachers must use Black slang in preaching in order to be seen as speaking for the people and out of the experience of the people. Others consider this an excuse for bad grammar. But, Mitchell sees Black slang as a language of its own with strict rules and vocabulary. See H. Mitchell, *The Recovery of Preaching* (New York:

theologians using a language unknown outside of the divinity school. If the gospel is to engage people where they live, it must speak in their words. This does not mean that the preacher is tied to commonly held concepts or phrases in everyday usage. Preaching often gives new meanings to familiar words and images, but the newness comes from within the familiarity. This is what Craddock means when he says "sermons should speak for as well as to the congregation."⁵² The preacher uses the words and the images of the people, and often re-interprets them so that the gospel shines through. This is the usage of images as understood in the pre-mass media world. As McLuhan notes, "scribal culture and Gothic architecture were both concerned with light through not light on."⁵³

Image and Emotion

Visual, concrete and ordinary begin to describe the language of television and so the language for preaching. It might be said that the language for preaching is the language of images and not of ideas; or at least of ideas as images. Images in preaching language have similar characteristics as images in television language. The images created in the imaginations of the hearers serve to provide an emotional context functioning primarily through identification.

This is, in a sense, a return to an oral understanding as opposed to a written one. Since the invention of mass printing, orality has come to be understood in terms of verbalizing the written word. However, before printing, oral communication was full of emotion and image, more so than idea. D. Riesman reflects upon the power of the oral tradition.

*Books bring with them detachment and a critical attitude that is not possible in an oral tradition. When a society depends on memory, it employs every device of the demagogue and the poet: rhyme, rhythm, melody, structure, repetition. Since we tend to remember best things most deeply felt, the memorable words in an oral tradition are often those most charged with group feeling and those which keep alive in the individual the childhood sense of dependence, the terrors and elations of the young and something of their awe for the old.*⁵⁴

These are the images that engaged the listeners in a pre-literate world. The similarities between the pre-literate and what some have called the "post-literate" television age include such adherence to images of emotional impact. This imaged understanding and experience

Harper & Row, 1977), pp.96-114.

⁵²Craddock, *Preaching*, op cit, p.26.

⁵³McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (London: Routledge, 1962), p.105.

⁵⁴D. Riesman, "The Oral and Written Traditions," *Explorations in Communication*, op cit, p.110.

of the world around them is what people are encountering today through the medium of television. Preaching needs to respond with a language of life as it is experienced and understood through images. It is through the ordering of these images, or the form of the sermon, that the gospel encounters and transforms the hearers, as we shall see when we turn to an examination of sermon structures.

Humour

That humour is a dominant language in the television age can hardly be argued against. It is the nature of television to be an entertainment medium, and humour is a popular means of entertainment, though not the only one. Critics, like Postman, argue that the greatest danger of television is that it turns everything, from politics to religion to news, into entertainment and thus reduces the seriousness of the subject. To claim that preaching must take into account this form of television language would meet with considerable resistance.

In fact, the issue of humour in preaching has always been problematic. The earliest references to humour in homiletic texts are prohibitions. For example: "Preaching should not contain jesting words, or childish remarks, or that melodiousness and harmony which result from the use of rhythm or metrical lines; these are better fitted to delight the ear than to edify the soul. Such preaching is theatrical and full of buffoonery, and in every way to be condemned."⁵⁵

Another cautionary note was sounded by Robert of Basevorn. "Nothing is known of Robert except that he wrote an influential treatise, *The Form of Preaching*. We know his name only because he reveals it in an acrostic combination of letters from the chapter headings of the book."⁵⁶ In this treatise, Robert attempts to systematize the use of rhetoric for preaching. He outlines twenty-two items for inclusion in the preaching event.

We must come now to our proposal to discuss the ornamentation which is used in sermons by certain of the careful craftsmen. It must be realized that in the most carefully contrived sermons twenty-two ornaments are especially employed. These are: Invention of the Theme, Winning-over of the Audience, Prayer, Introduction, Division, Statement of the Parts, Proof of the Parts, Amplification, Digression, which is properly called "Transition," Correspondence, Agreement of Correspondence, Circuitous Development, Convolution, Unification, Conclusion, Coloration, Modulation of Voice, Appropriate Gesture, Timely Humour, Allusion, Firm Impression, Weighing of Subject Matter. The first fifteen of these are inserted into their proper places once, or at any rate into a few places; the remaining three, and generally Allusion and Firm Impression, can be placed almost anywhere. The element that follows after these,

⁵⁵Lischer, op cit, p.11. From Alan of Lille (c.1128-1202) *The Art of Preaching*, Cistercian Fathers Series, Number 23, trans. Gilian R. Evans (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), pp.15-22.

⁵⁶Ibid, p.219.

*Humour, ought to be used in a few places and very sparingly.*⁵⁷

In such a complex system, it is telling that the one item Robert feels a need to provide some sort of check upon is "Timely Humour." He does imply that such a thing is to be used, but used appropriately.

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) also indicated that humour does have a place in preaching, but only under great restraint.

*Those of us who are endowed with the dangerous gift of humour have need, sometimes, to stop and take the word out of our mouth and look at it, and see whether it is quite to edification.... We need the Spirit of God to put bit and bridle upon us to keep us from saying that which would take the minds of our hearers away from Christ and eternal realities, and set them thinking upon grovelling things of earth.*⁵⁸

The grovelling things of earth relate not just to humour, but to "coarse language" as well. It is curious that Spurgeon chooses to discuss the dangers of humour and coarse language, in the same paragraph. It is no doubt that he considers humour to be one of the vulgarities of language and, therefore, of little use in preaching.

Even today there is little support for the use of humour in preaching. Buttrick complains most directly about the practice of starting with a humorous introduction.

*The real question about humour is why; why do we want to begin preaching with humour? Many preachers will answer the question baldly: "People Really go for humour!" Indeed, they do. Yet, we do not roar with sidesplitting laughter over the deepest issues in our lives - gladness, yes, but "ha-ha," no. Probably preachers use humour at the start of sermons to say, "Look, I'm a funny, likeable person," which is emphatically not an adequate motive. If a sermon requires a hermeneutical orientation of giggling joy, perhaps, laughter will be useful at the start. Otherwise, the preacher may wish to avoid guffaws.*⁵⁹

"Perhaps," he declares somewhat begrudgingly, humour might have some place. But only rarely. And it must be under tight control. "All in all, our two rules stand: (1) Congregations should laugh only when you want them to laugh, and have good reason for their bemusement; and (2) If you are a naturally funny person, your problem is control; if you are not a naturally funny person do not try!"⁶⁰ The image of the preacher attempting to dictate to the participant hearers what they should and, more importantly, should not find amusing is

⁵⁷Robert of Basevorn, *The Form of Preaching*, trans. Leopold Krul O.S.B. in James J. Murphy, ed. *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp.132-133.

⁵⁸Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2nd series (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1887), p.8.

⁵⁹Buttrick, op cit, p.95.

⁶⁰Ibid, p.147.

humorous itself.

Some types of humour do need to be suppressed.

[T]here are kinds of laughter that can devastate preaching. Laughter prompted by sarcasm is seldom helpful. Sarcasm is a form of veiled hostility; it is essentially murderous. Thus when people laugh at witty sarcasms, they will usually laugh out of shared hatreds. Such laughter in a sermon is rather clearly alien to the gospel.⁶¹

Buttrick is quite correct to point out that humour can indeed be destructive rather than constructive and such uses have no place in preaching the Christian gospel. In addition, even a more gentle humour can have somewhat dubious intentions.

When preachers justify humour in the pulpit, they will often do so by claiming "My people like it," which, of course, justifies nothing. Usually, the phrase "My people like it" can be translated more honestly "My people will like me." When laughter is prompted by an underlying "My people like me because I'm funny," it will almost always escalate until sermons are rocking with laughter, and the profound currents of the gospel are diverted.⁶²

There is no question that the use of humour by a preacher in order to win friends is to be avoided. But is this indeed what is happening? Buttrick makes a rather large jump from a preacher reading an audience and attempting to speak in their language to one who is insecure enough to use gimmicks for popularity. No doubt there are those preachers who are looking to be liked above all. But there is more to the utilization of humour than that.

It is somewhat odd that Buttrick, who claims that the authority for preaching comes from the foolishness of God, would be so dismissive of humour in preaching. Of course laughter for laughter's sake might indeed divert the "profound currents of the gospel." But laughter as a way of avoiding taking one's self too seriously can be healing. The image of the fool is the one who is able to deflate self-importance and self-obsession. Surely, as preachers, a part of our task is to take people out of themselves long enough that they can see the humour in selfishness. John Killinger discusses the uses of humour in preaching. Though he is talking about humorous illustrations, his judgments on the power of humour are valuable.

By its very nature, humour often carries insights about life and living that are extremely useful in a sermon. ... And humour is disarming. It slips up on our blind sides and reveals truths we weren't expecting. It deals effectively with sensitive issues, provided it does not make an opponent the butt of a joke. It simplifies complicated situations and makes an easier access to profound ideas.⁶³

Humour has a way of slipping past our defence and communicating larger truths. It can also create a common space where social differentiations are no longer as important. The

⁶¹Ibid, p.146.

⁶²Ibid, p.147.

⁶³John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching* (London: SCM Press, 1985), p.112.

preacher who begins with a humorous introduction may be trying to communicate that he/she is not speaking as one above the community, but one from the midst of the community. The image of Christ as the clown has great appeal in modern society.

The worry seems to be that humour is a diversion from the seriousness of the gospel. Humour suggests "mere entertainment." Entertainment is not generally a word used in homiletical circles. A sermon that attempts to be entertaining is seen as not doing its job. There are, however, other views. Despite the complaint of the critics, it is possible that entertainment is not an empty exercise. Colin Morris examines the concept of entertainment.

*To entertain is to occupy the mind agreeably. Strictly defined, therefore, entertainment offers an experience that is meant to be an end in itself - it has no higher aim than to pass the time as beguilingly as possible. In fact, no experience could be as vacuous as that. When people judge an entertainment programme as to have been good or bad, they are exercising their critical faculty, which presumably is an educative thing to do. When they discuss with their work mates what they have seen on television the night before, entertainment is performing a social function.*⁶⁴

To claim, as does Buttrick, that humour then diverts from the seriousness of the gospel is to misunderstand how the enjoyable activity of laughter works to make hearing an experience that is remembered. Humour and entertainment are not "mere diversions." More is going on that might appear on the surface. "Entertainment of whatever kind is an appeal through the sense to the soul, and is intended to have a tonic or re-creational effect. ... [A]n entertainment programme may be assumed to have said "Yes" to life if at the end of the programme people feel better for having watched or heard it."⁶⁵

Surely preaching, at times, is about saying "Yes" to life. Or, if we wish, our preaching should be presenting the life of faith in such a way that we might elicit a "Yes" in laughter. This does not mean that all sermons should be light and humorous. There is occasion to say "no" to life as lived in modern society. But to exclude humour from the range of human experience available to preachers is to miss a great opportunity to communicate to the hearer in the television age.

Preaching as Dialogue

The thrust of the language for preaching as described above is to provide an encounter between preacher, gospel and hearer. The goal is to engage the hearer in a dialogue. "Every act of human communication has both a content and a relationship dimension."⁶⁶ For the

⁶⁴Colin Morris, *Wrestling with an Angel* (London: Collins, 1990), pp.142-143.

⁶⁵Ibid, p.143.

⁶⁶Myron Chartier, *Preaching as Communication* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), p. 25.

most part, preachers are taught to emphasize the content dimension of the unique communication event called preaching. The work centres on the message: exegeting the text, shaping the structure, honing the images and illustrations. Then the sermon is delivered without much thought to the relational dimension of the event. There is no doubt that the core of preaching is the communication of the Word of God, as discussed in the previous chapter. But, as also argued above, if the sermon does not communicate, is not received, understood and acted upon, then proclamation cannot take place.

The relational dimension of communication is usually thought of in terms of "speaking to the real needs of the congregation." This is a vitally important task of preaching. As Farmer and Fosdick argued, preaching is a dimension of personal/pastoral relationships. The effect of this consideration of congregational input, however, is to make the hearers part of the content dimension. Again, an important part of sermon preparation. Yet this "exegesis of life" as some have called it, does not address the fullness of the relational dimension of the preaching event.

Television research is also concerned with communication that relates. John P. Robinson and Mark R. Levy explored the effectiveness of news communication. Briefly summarized, the Robinson-Levy project began with a telephone survey that asked individuals how much they remembered of the main news stories of the week. The main news stories were chosen by a panel of journalists and broadcast news writers. This panel also determined the main points of the stories by suggesting what it was from those stories that they felt people ought to know. Working from this list, the researchers asked the respondents if they heard the story and what if anything could they remember from it. Questions also considered the particular media source of the news.

The findings from this survey are quite interesting. First of all, "only 30 to 40% of the week's most important news is getting through to the audience."⁶⁷ This figure is the high end of the scale, i.e., those who received the most information from the news. Television news has a variety of tools at hand to get its message across. These tools include various expert witnesses, film of exotic locales and action sequences, computer graphics to outline important points, familiar "grim but comforting" newscasters, even background music to direct attention and add emotional content. Yet with all of this, the majority of the news is quickly forgotten.

Robinson and Levy then attempted to discover how to significantly increase comprehension and retention of news information. Some of their findings point to cross

⁶⁷Robinson and Levy, "Interpersonal Communication and News Comprehension," unpublished paper originally presented to the 40th annual meeting of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, New Jersey in May 1983, p.16.

media reinforcement, human interest narrative and to the creation of a "news elite," a subgroup of better informed people. The most significant finding, however, was that "this study demonstrates that controlling for news interest and education, public understanding of the news increases as people talk about it."⁶⁸ Those who heard or saw a news item and then discussed the meanings and implications, were better informed about the events than those who kept their insights to themselves. As the news encouraged dialogue, interest and action grew as a result.

The question then arises: how does the preacher encourage dialogue? Preaching can be considered dialogue in two ways. The first is in the sermon and preaching event itself, what might be called "internal dialogue." The second is by creating opportunities for conversation outside of the preaching event, which might be called "external dialogue."

Internal Dialogue

Internal dialogue is the process of engagement that takes place during the preaching event. Again, various attempts at "experimental" dialogue preaching have been tried. Here the preacher moves out of the pulpit and attempts to open up a verbal dialogue with members of the congregation. This is met with varying degrees of success. There is value in attempting a variety of innovations in order to open up a dialogue in preaching. The danger is that the innovation becomes the event, which runs the risk of eclipsing the message. However, something simple such as preaching from a new place, will often break the ice enough to open ears grown dull by familiarity. Generally, however, internal dialogue in preaching refers to the process of engaging listeners who remain, for the most part, silent.

As we have seen, the language for preaching in a television age includes image. As the preacher describes, the hearer is invited to recreate the image in his/her mind. The dialogue ensues as the hearer redefines the image to more adequately suit his/her particular circumstance. From there we move to agreement or disagreement as the image "rings true" in the hearer's consciousness. This process of hearing and recreating in imagination or consciousness is what Kierkegaard describes as "the self-activity of a personal appropriation."⁶⁹ The hearer works out, from the images provided in the sermon, the implications for his/her life and thus carries on the dialogue of preaching.

A sermon leaves room for discovery. Craddock claims that the sermon ought to give

⁶⁸Ibid, p.16.

⁶⁹Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, D.F. Swenson and W.L. Lowrie trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p.217.

people something to do.⁷⁰ The more the preacher attempts to lay out all the answers in a neat, easily digestible fashion, the less the listener feels engaged by the message. The preacher should avoid the "communication of results," as Kierkegaard argued. Instead, a sermon should invite hearers to make their own connections, to follow a pattern of thought or a movement of plot, much in the same way that a viewer follows the exploits of a favourite television character. We shall explore the varieties of sermon structure later.

Internal dialogue is also instigated by content. Here is where the "exegesis of life" is a stimulus to dialogue. The sermon attempts to touch ground where the people stand, knowing their needs and hopes, concerns and questions, and attempting to embrace life as the people in the pew embrace it. In this way the hearer's experience is that of one who is known, a participating member in the preaching event. As the hearer identifies his/her questions being answered and concerns raised, there is a recognition that the personal and private experience takes place within a community context. Dialogue is inherent in a true community.

External Dialogue

Though the experience of hearing one's questions answered is a part of the internal dialogue of preaching, the process of listening to the questions and concerns is engaging in the "external dialogue" of preaching. The internal dialogue is confined to the preaching event. It is a way of engaging with real people as they hear the sermon. The external dialogue is the on-going communication of the life of the Church of which preaching takes a momentary place.

If we imagine the communication of a particular congregation to be represented by a continuous line, the preaching event would be a small section repeated at regular intervals along that line. Other sections of that communication continuum would include the individual pastoral conversations between minister and parishioner, small group educational or social events, church fetes and other small or large gatherings. The ongoing communication would also include the various other media which feed into the life of the church: the parish newsletter, the denominational mailings and videos, as well as a whole range of public, "secular" media that become a part of the consciousness and identity of the community of the Church. Preaching, then, is but one area of input out of the many that each member receives and to which he/she contributes.

With this understanding, we can see preaching as an uncompleted act of conversation. Just as in a conversation, each partner moves from speaking to listening, so in the conversation of the Church all the partners take on the roles of speaker and hearer. The preacher, at

⁷⁰Craddock, *Preaching*, op cit, p.21.

various times, could be seen to instigate a conversation, to continue one, or at times bring one to some sort of resolution. Here the preacher can not be seen to be standing "six feet above contradiction" since he/she is participating in an ongoing dialogue.

The key to maintaining a true sense of external dialogue is to ensure that all "partners" in the conversation have recourse to contribute as speakers as well as hearers. Opportunities for discussion can be built in to the community life or the educational process of the Church. There are many ways of doing this. The newsletter or parish paper, depending on its frequency, could carry questions and issues that the sermon had addressed or plans to address. Ideas that are shared must first be ideas that are understood or at least examined. This would also encourage the listeners to feel that they could enter into debate, that the preacher is asking for input and not pontificating from the mountain top, unassailable in his/her certainty.

A further approach would be to set up a small group to help with sermon preparation. An active, energetic group of interested lay persons could tackle preaching texts and discuss subjects that would then be incorporated into a sermon. The preacher's role would be to listen and share in this pre-dialogue. After hearing, perhaps more clearly than ever before, the concerns and thoughts of representatives of the congregation, the preacher could speak more confidently and directly to those concerns from the pulpit. The added benefit is that after a few weeks of this, the average lay person's appreciation of preaching would be substantially transformed. Therefore, the make-up of the group should be changed regularly, in order to give a larger number of people the experience of participating in the preaching process without asking for an onerous long term commitment.

Another popular method for lay involvement in the dialogue of preaching is to organize sermon "talk back" sessions. Here the preacher leads a forum that allows the congregation to explore further themes and ideas from the sermon. The dialogue begun by the preaching event is continued in another arena.

It is important to remember that all of these ideas and suggestions are not mere gimmicks to encourage comprehension. Instead, defining preaching as dialogue is a way of addressing the nature of the Word of God and the function of that Word in the people of God. Dr. David Switzer reminds us that

*preaching is an interpersonal process, not merely an act done by one person in the presence of, and to, a group. The words which are spoken by the preacher are in their human sense (psychologically) dynamic; they are expressions of the preacher as a person, and, in one way or another are responded to by persons. Christian faith declares that in these human acts, God is also speaking his Word, and it, too, is dynamic, a self-expression.*⁷¹

⁷¹David K. Switzer, *Pastor, Preacher, Person* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p.69.

To those who see the media as constructing a world that is increasingly impersonal, where the television is the dominant means of one-way information, the Church must have a vision of the body of Christ as a fellowship that interacts, that communicates in dialogue, listening as much as, or more than, speaking. On the other hand, to those who see the media as a source for engagement, as responding to people where they are, meeting their needs, and involving them in a participatory experience, the Church must be as engaging and as participatory in order to allow the freedom to respond fully in doubt or in faith.

Structures for Preaching

The dialogue of preaching is sustained by the use of structures that allow the hearer space to engage, experience, imagine, resolve and respond. The television age demands a level of engagement, as we have seen. But more than that, a theological understanding of the preaching task encourages the preacher to allow the hearer to participate in the preaching event. Homileticians have been responding to this challenge by exploring the function of the sermon structure.

The discussion of forms or structures for preaching is not simply a matter of technique. In Chapter III it was argued that communication practice reveals a theology. Preaching practice, as an act of communication, also reflects a theology. In addition it communicates that theology as it communicates the message or content. As Craddock argues

[f]orm shapes the listener's faith. It is likely that few preachers are aware how influential sermon form is on the quality of the parishioner's faith. Ministers who, week after week, frame their sermons as arguments, syllogisms armed for debate, tend to give that form to the faith perspective of regular listeners. Being a Christian is proving you are right. Those who consistently use the "before / after" pattern impress upon hearers that conversion is the normative model for becoming a believer. Sermons which invariably place before the congregation the "either / or" format as the way to see the issues before them contribute to oversimplification, inflexibility, and the notion that faith is always an urgent decision. In contrast, "both / and" sermons tend to broaden horizons and sympathies but never confront the listener with a crisp decision.⁷²

Thus form, or structure, communicates to the hearer. The argument of this thesis is that television's structures shape the viewers interpretations and understandings of the world around them. Craddock argues that preaching, regularly heard, can have a similar effect. It is also possible that sermon form becomes a secondary language in a larger world of communication. Regular church attenders become accustomed to altering their listening habits from what they use most of the time, to a special Church/preaching reception mode. This could contribute to the impression that what takes place in the church is of a different order and, therefore, not of direct relevance to the rest of the hearer's life. Despite what may be

⁷²Craddock, op cit, pp.173-174.

happening to human communication outside the church, patterns are locked into place and parishioners expect to hear certain things in certain ways on a Sunday morning. Countering this level of expectation is a difficult task. "With most listeners, a change of form is equivalent to a change of content. 'But it didn't seem like a sermon,' they said of the new minister's message, which was no less biblical, no less relevant, no less theologically sound than those to which they were accustomed."⁷³ It takes a brave preacher to embrace changes in preaching structure, even if the end it to improve the dialogue of preaching. As is said of many new technologies, new forms for preaching may be a more of a hindrance, at first, than a help. Challenging the expectations of the hearers is a long involved process. The end result, however, is better communication including more participation, greater relevance and opening up of new possibilities for experience and understanding. It is important that a call for change in preaching structures not be seen as limiting preachers, but providing access to a new range of structural elements that will aid the communication process.

Inductive Movement

There are a variety of forms proposed and much disagreement over the validity of others. The common element is an almost total abandonment of the traditional deductive, "three points and a poem" form of sermon. "The realization has long since occurred that the old conceptual preaching simply is not heard by most of those in attendance."⁷⁴ The problem is that in a deductive approach the conclusion, or the "result" to use Kierkegaard's word, is offered at the beginning and is then elaborated upon. The audience's participation is minimal. It is a presentation of ideas, often in the form of doctrinal truths leading to exhortations of behaviour. Why should a congregation respond to such a passive display of ideas when their televisions at home invite them to engage in the story of exotic characters, encourage them to solve crimes with great detectives, experience the human pains in historical events, or solve all their problems with a new washing powder? Ought not the gospel be as engaging as washing powder? "Sermons should proceed or move in such a way as to give the listener something to think, feel, decide, and do during the preaching."⁷⁵

Preaching needs movement. This is the common thread in all of the new forms for preaching. Buttrick has even named the key element in the construction of a sermon a "move." There are various ways of putting movement into a sermon.

Craddock, in a sense, began this debate with his emphasis on inductive preaching. The

⁷³Ibid, p.174.

⁷⁴Eslinger, op cit, p.11.

⁷⁵Craddock, *Preaching*, op cit, p.25.

inductive method is basically the old deductive method turned on its head. The sermon's focus, for Craddock, is a theme sentence based on a biblical text. This theme sentence provides the congregational point of contact with the text. "The contribution to the movement and power of a sermon made by the restraint of a single idea can hardly be overstated."⁷⁶ Of the variety of reasons why the unity of a single theme is to be valued Craddock argues that "having a single theme provides the assurance of where one is going in the message, which is the key to movement."⁷⁷ In addition, Craddock believes that this restraint brings forth the imagination to the particularities of the situation. The process of inductive preaching is to move along with the people from an awareness of the text to an understanding of the text. The starting point is generally understood to be the hearer's context. From the particularities of human experience, the inductive sermon moves toward an experience of the gospel. The end point is the arrival at an intersection of gospel and life. This style of preaching does not deductively provide solutions or answers but inductively seeks applications. Though the movement of the sermon itself seek to arrive at the intersection, in preparation the preacher may actually begin there. The theme sentence that Craddock defines is essentially that intersection. It could also be understood as the sermon in a sentence. The object of the preaching event is to enable the congregation to make their way from where they are to where the gospel invites them to be. But rather than delivering this "result" to the hearers, the preacher encourages them to follow the paths for themselves. This is done in part by asking the questions the hearer will ask about the theme sentence, and partly by allowing the hearer to anticipate the resolution. "The preacher utilizes a climactic arrangement so as to arrest and hold the hearer's attention until the hearer is as involved in the message as is the speaker."⁷⁸ It is this process of engagement that the inductive structure is designed to elicit. When the congregation is invited to move with the preacher "then it is their conclusion, and the implication for their own situations is not only clear but personally inescapable."⁷⁹

Narrative

Like inductive preaching, story or narrative preaching is concerned both with movement and engagement. It is, some argue, the means by which human beings receive and interpret the world. The gospel comes to us as story, in the accounts of Jesus' life, death and

⁷⁶Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p.100.

⁷⁷Craddock, *Preaching*, op cit, p.156.

⁷⁸Ibid, p.166.

⁷⁹Craddock, *As One ...*, op cit, p.57.

resurrection. Our own lives are lived in story, event follows upon event forming some sort of narrative. And, as we have seen in Chapter I, story dominates the public discourse through television.

E.A. Steimle, and others, claim that preaching is the act of making the gospel story encounter our personal story.

*At the most profound level of symbolization - where experience becomes meaningful - we relate our stories to the story. If we were pressed to say what Christian faith and life are, we could hardly do better than hearing, telling and living a story. And if asked for a short definition of preaching could we do better than shared story?*⁸⁰

So preaching becomes an act of narrative, with all the story-telling devices as plot, characterization, suspense, etc. But "stories are not included to hold interest; they show up because we associate God's grace with social history and personal human pilgrimage."⁸¹

Some people question this process of story-telling and preaching. If "social history and personal human pilgrimage" are included, what governs the narrative? On one level the source of all our human narratives, at least for the Christian, is the Bible. We read the biblical text to enter into a living interpretive encounter. To distil a biblical text into main points is to misunderstand the text. We are called to "communicate not just the subject matter of the story, the 'point' of the story, but also the dynamics of the story, the narrative mode of the story. Then our hearers are not robbed of the experience of the text, but are transformed by a genuine experience of the text."⁸² The fullness of the text can only be transferred through a narrative that interfaces with personal and communal narratives.

But this interpretation of Bible as story might be seen to limit the written texts. Searching the Bible for narrative texts might limit the scope of biblical genres. "Will the new preacher/storytellers limit themselves to a homiletical canon composed chiefly of Bible stories and texts with strong images?"⁸³ While this comment is a good warning for narrative preachers to be alert to a possibly limited Bible, it misses the crux of narrative preaching. That crux is that life is narrative and that everything that one encounters, whether it be event or idea, becomes a part of that narrative, or an image lived. Forgiveness is understood, for example, only when it is experienced as given or received. Then the concept is part of the narrative, and thus part of the story for telling. "When our/my story is connected

⁸⁰E.A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal and Charles L. Rice, *Preaching the Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp.12-13.

⁸¹Buttrick, op cit, p.118.

⁸²Gail R. O'Day, *The Word Disclosed: John's Story and Narrative Preaching* (St. Louis: CPB Press, 1987), p.13.

⁸³Eslinger, op cit, p.29.

appropriately with the story of God, there is revelation. It is a sacramental moment when ordinary human reality discloses the presence of God. Through the words of the story, the Word of God becomes present. In that moment, it becomes a sacred story through which God speaks."⁸⁴

Journey in Time

Plot appears in Eugene Lowry's work on preaching, but not strictly as story. There is a narrative quality to this form, but it varies from story in that the images used do not always follow a specific story line. Lowry speaks of the sermon as an event in time and not in space. Space implies a static construct, a building of one idea upon another. "But a sermon is not a logical assemblage; a sermon is an event-in-time which follows a logic born of the communication interaction between preacher and congregation."⁸⁵ This logic is a logic of movement. Lowry suggests that we compare the process of working with ideas to that of working with experience. "Is it not true that when we juggle those notes on paper, we are doing something akin to architectural work - attempting to determine *where* the ideas *fit*? For our task is to have them properly *in place*. Suppose instead, that rather than order ideas - spacing them, as it were - we imaged a sermon as *ordering experience*?"⁸⁶

The implications of such an interpretation of preaching, as functioning in time and not space, are many. Lowry claims that preaching ought to be seen as organic. By attending to movement rather than thought, the preacher works to shape the process of the sermon rather than organizing the ideas. The sermon which results will be of a distinctive nature. "If the preacher is ordering ideas, the resultant structural form will likely be an *outline*. If the preacher is ordering experience the resultant process form is a *plot*."⁸⁷

There are distinct stages in Lowry's "plot", following patterns of both drama and story. Beginning with a problem, or an "itch" as Lowry names it, we move through the analysis of the problem, to a disclosure of a possible solution, to experiencing the solution in action. It is a movement from problem to solution, from "itch to scratch". While this form may seem

⁸⁴Thomas E. Boomershine, *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), p.21.

⁸⁵Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), p.12.

⁸⁶Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship Between Narrative and Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), p.13.

⁸⁷*Ibid*, p.22.

to be one of ideas,⁸⁸ it is ideas in images. This sermon form moves through image. Seeing the problem, and experiencing the solution are what makes this form live. The goal of preaching the plot structure is to create, instead of understanding, a happening. By this, Lowry means that preaching provides the community of faith an experiential encounter with the Word of God. In this encounter, the Word of God interacts with the inner being of the hearer to bring about transformation. As Frederick Buechner wrote in *Telling the Truth*:

*So if preachers ... are to say anything that really matters to anyone including themselves, they must say it not just to the public part of us that considers interesting thoughts about the gospel and how to preach it, but to the private, inner part too, to the part of us where dreams come from, both our good dreams and our bad dreams, the inner part where thoughts mean less than images, elucidation less than evocation ...*⁸⁹

Phenomenological Approach

Another form of the idea in image is Buttrick's phenomenological approach. He recognizes, first of all, the power of language. "Language constitutes our world by *naming*, and confers identity in the world by *story*."⁹⁰ Preaching, he argues, participates in the naming, or perhaps re-naming, of the world. The function of preaching is to create and then help maintain a "faith consciousness" in the life of the community.

This faith consciousness is enlivened by preaching that "does not persuade in the sense of arguing the truth of the gospel; preaching sets the gospel in lived experience, genuine experience, so that the truth will be acknowledged."⁹¹ As with his understanding of authority discussed above, so too Buttrick's view of preaching is that it is a relational, inward directed process of evoking the images of faith within the life experience of the faith community.

As such preaching has a task. "The language of preaching, like the language of scripture (much of which is also preaching), is performative; it is a language intending *to do*."⁹² For Buttrick the question is not one of a central theme, but one of a movement. What is the text trying to do or where are we supposed to move? These are the guiding questions. One arrives at an answer by plotting the episodes or "moves" within the text and then forms the sermon by that pattern. A sermon is a series of moves. These moves will contain images

⁸⁸See Eslinger, op cit, p.86.

⁸⁹Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), p.4

⁹⁰Buttrick, op cit, p.11.

⁹¹Ibid, p.33.

⁹²Ibid, p.98.

"because an idea in abstract is no idea at all."⁹³ The moves must all be constructed upon rigid structures and linked together by an internal progression. His method is inductive in that it ends up in a new place, with a new understanding or new depth to the faith consciousness. In the next chapter we shall return to Buttrick's structure and language for preaching.

Other Considerations

This is only the barest of outlines of the various new forms for preaching currently being proposed and is not intended to be an exhaustive explanation of any (Buttrick used almost 500 pages to explain his method). It is important to begin to see new models for preaching that take into account the drastic communicative change in our society. These forms attempt to provide preaching a new hearing. All of them involve two key elements of modern media communication: image and movement.

Similarities can be seen between various types of television messages and these forms of preaching. Narrative is perhaps the most obvious example with many television paradigms also taking a narrative mode. But a comparison is easily made between, for example, advertisements and Craddock's inductive preaching. In both the movement of the communication is from where the people are to where they need to be to find solution, new life and/or comfort.

Perhaps television has other models to suggest. An example is the music video with its series of seemingly unrelated images flowing into a suggestion of emotion or perspective. Could preaching take on an episodic structure full of images and emotions united by a repeated refrain, overriding symbol or even background music? Or perhaps the common television device of the "teaser" could be used in preaching. At the beginning of a sermon, or even earlier in the service before the sermon, "hints" of what is to come but without full disclosure are given.

This mining of television for effective structures for preaching must not be seen as a gimmick approach. Some of the suggestions might have the effect of being seen as an innovation of more curiosity value than communicative value. The emphasis of the search for effective models of preaching communication is to enable the dialogue of preaching to intersect with the hearer's ongoing life dialogue, of which television takes a significant place.

Illustration

What of that traditional homiletic device: the illustration? Surely it will still be needed

⁹³Buttrick, from a video titled "A Phenomenological Method," Duke University Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina, April 1984. Cited in Eslinger, op cit, p.145.

since an illustration is an image. There is a yes and no to this. Illustrations often image ideas like an ornament decorates a Christmas tree. They might provide colour and beauty, but they are not integral to the idea itself.

On the other hand, language and form that is image oriented will be illustrative and will not need anecdotes or stories put into the text. Here again we hear McLuhan's description of scribal culture as concerned with light through not light on.⁹⁴ Illustrations, used properly, must be integrated into the movement of the text to become the imaged idea, rather than to merely illuminate it.

Attention Span

Much has been made of the effect of television on the average viewer's attention span. The implication is that sermons must of necessity be much shorter. The hearer cannot bear a sermon longer than ten or twelve minutes, it is argued.

There is certainly some truth in this. Attention spans have been affected adversely. Children who are heavy viewers of television have more difficulty in school than those who are not. Reading skills also tend to diminish as television watching increases.⁹⁵

The result of this, however, is not necessarily that all sermons should become "sermonettes." What is difficult to sustain is attention to a long deductive address largely couched in a conceptual language. It is difficult to maintain the attention of the hearers with an abstract treatise on the gospel. But this has always been the case, I would argue. Rhetoric has from the beginning included devices designed to regain the wandering attention of the hearer. Speech teachers have always talked about putting "rest breaks" in the course of a long address to give the audience time to catch their breath and get back on track. Communication theory has long plotted the rise and fall of attention during any sort of oral address.

It may be true, as Postman argues, that television has made it more difficult than it has been in the past for anyone to listen to anything for long periods of time. But then it would be hard to explain the popularity of two and three hour films, television programmes from 30 to 90 minutes long and the growing popularity of story-telling for both children and adults.

The argument may be that film and television have a variety of attention grabbing effects that preaching alone in the pulpit cannot match. But the argument of this chapter is

⁹⁴McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, op cit, p.105.

⁹⁵See for example Barrie Gunter and Jill L. McAleer, *Children and Television: The One-Eyed Monster?* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.122-124. Gunter and McAleer also claim, however, that television watching produces different levels of attention in children. The more interested they are in the programme the more attention they will give (see pp.32-34). Similarly, preaching can be given different levels of attention depending on how engaging it is.

that the preacher also has a range of techniques that can enable a more engaging communication event. Buttrick states quite plainly that "when congregations drift off into wanderings of mind, it is *always* the fault of the speaker."⁹⁶

Sermon structures that require no involvement on the part of the congregation will have difficulty holding attention. But sermons that encourage participation, experience and dialogue will be able to retain not just attention, but interest as well.

It is important to state again that what we are talking about is the need for renewal of form and of language. What is not heard is a message using outdated terminology and packaged in an obsolete form. What is not relevant in much of the preaching heard today is structure and language. The message is as relevant today as it has ever been. Yet it is not perceived as such by the world at large.

Delivery

The alien quality of language and form is only part of the reason. The other element is the delivery of the message. The criticisms referred to earlier in Craddock's lecture do not point to what is simply a structural problem, but a performative one as well. Indeed, the litany that confessed that preaching was not important, and that nothing was at stake, went on to state: "Preaching for our preacher is not an act of passion."⁹⁷ Delivery is difficult to discuss in a paper or book. Most texts on preaching say little if anything about the delivery. A common item for discussion under the heading of delivery is the "manuscript-notes-extemporaneous delivery" debate. This is an important issue that needs consideration as it shapes both the preacher's and the hearers' perception of what preaching is about.⁹⁸

Yet, preaching is an oral event, an event in time, says Lowry. A written sermon is not a sermon. Only when it is preached does it become a sermon. The delivery, therefore, is as vital to the sermon as the preparation. This is especially true in a visual, image-oriented society. Does what the congregation see compliment what they hear?

Here the preacher appropriately turns to the theatre for information. How does one use the voice to carry passion? How does one move the body to correspond with words? Television is incarnating materialism and selfishness with clarity and power, can the preacher incarnate Christ with less?

This causes some preachers to be uncomfortable. Is a preacher to be an actor? An actor deals with fantasy and dreams, but a preacher is dealing with truth. Surely what is

⁹⁶Buttrick, op cit, p.39.

⁹⁷Craddock, "Shouting the Whisper," audio tape, op cit.

⁹⁸See Craddock, *Preaching*, op cit, pp.214-222.

needed is a straightforward humble sincerity, not an emphasis on dramatics. However, actors learn to use their instrument, voice and body, to the fullest of its potential. Just as a pianist practices scales and rhythms and tempos, so the speaker learns to modulate the voice. Changing rhythms, varying pitch and volume, altering rate and timing all serve not to disguise the message but to enhance it. The same with movement. A static preacher conveys non-involvement with the message, whereas movement adds emotion and punctuation. With an audience used to the moving pictures of television and films, body movement for interest and accent can only increase the ability to hear the message. Body communicates messages beyond the words. "The gestures of visual man are not intended to convey concepts that can be expressed in words, but inner experiences, not rational emotions, which would still remain unexpressed when everything that can be told has been told. Such emotions lie in the deepest levels."⁹⁹ Is the "act of passion" evident in the movement and in the voice? Is the oral event of preaching a unified whole, or are conflicting messages sent and received? Questions such as these provide preachers with a check list for delivery (see Appendix G for another checklist).

Craddock claims that "the most consistently effective delivery is by reexperiencing the message as it is being spoken."¹⁰⁰ The sermon becomes a live event and not a performance. Clyde E. Fant calls this faculty of making the sermon a new event rather than a performed piece "conversational preaching."¹⁰¹

Delivery is important because of the nature of the message. More work is certainly needed in enabling preachers to be aware of the presentational aspects of their preaching.¹⁰² The key is that the preacher must do all that he/she can in the presentation of the message to assist the hearer. "If 'faith comes from hearing,' then we must strive to be heard."¹⁰³ The preacher's message is an image of Christ, the Christ who engages the lives of people at a basic level. The points of contact for people are on the experiential level. The message of the gospel might be heard intellectually, but it will not be integrated until it is lived. The message must be seen to be vital, must convey that everything is at stake through the images and presentation of the sermon. The delivery is a key to an experience of the

⁹⁹Carpenter, "The New Languages," op cit, p.170.

¹⁰⁰Craddock, *Preaching*, op cit, p.218.

¹⁰¹Fant, *Preaching for Today* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp.171-179.

¹⁰²See Ward, *Speaking from the Heart*, op cit, esp. Chapter 4, "Establishing Congruity Between Your Personal and Preaching Persona," pp.63-87. Ward includes some effective exercises in his book that emphasize the importance of delivery for communication.

¹⁰³Buttrick, op cit, p.211.

message.

CONCLUSIONS

Television and other visual media have brought about a change in the listening and viewing habits of the person in the pew. Traditional structures and language for preaching are no longer as relevant for communication. Preaching must address this change in the communication context by emphasizing the relational and experiential structures. Preaching language that communicates is visual, concrete, accessible and emotive. The delivery is conducted so as to provide integration between sight and sound, and to communicate a deeper dimension than the words alone can convey.

What has not changed, and will not change is the content of the message. New forms for preaching do not mean an abandonment of the biblical text as witness to the Christ. Christian preaching participates in the Word of God and communicates the experience of that Word to God's people.

Preachers have a high calling to fulfil. For, "at their most truly prophetic they speak things that ... even they themselves [do] not entirely understand, because they are things that are of truth itself, rather than of particular truths, truth itself which cannot finally be understood but only experienced."¹⁰⁴ ^{They speak a} truth, a Word lived, incarnated in image that can be grasped and made of a part of one's life even if not fully understood. By incorporating forms of popular culture, there can be a new hearing for preaching. And the Word can be seen and known in the life of the community of faith. The goal for preaching, then, is to enable the hearer to encounter the gospel. This encounter takes place both individually and communally in the activity of human imagination. The process of imagination is the next step in formulating a homiletic for the television age and the focus for the next chapter.

¹⁰⁴Buechner, op cit, p.21.

V

A MODEL FOR PREACHING IN A TELEVISION AGE: PREACHING AS AN EXERCISE IN IMAGINATION

It is clear from the previous chapter that homiletics must make some sort of response to the television age. The shift from orality to print to image makes new demands on preaching. As we have seen, modern homiletics is attempting to address these issues on a variety of fronts. Changes in structure and language at the forefront, these innovations seek to enable better communication between pulpit and pew.

Quite a bit of the innovation is oriented around technique and, therefore, often put methodological issues above theology. It is important to remember that there always have been and continue to be a variety of valid structures for preaching. Inductive and deductive, narrative and propositional, each of these structures may facilitate communication in varying contexts, though it is clear from the earlier chapters that some structures are more compatible to a television age than others. In addition to asking structural questions, then, we must also look beyond the techniques of preaching to find a way to unite *logos* and image.

A ROLE FOR IMAGINATION

It is becoming increasingly clear to many modern homileticians that it is through imagination that we shall find a way of blending words and images. Theologians have been exploring the function of imagination in religious belief and understanding for some time.¹ Homiletics is drawing upon this work and reclaiming its own history of thinking about the place of imagination in preaching. Yet, many preachers are reluctant to turn to imagination as a means of communicating the gospel from the pulpit. As Thomas Troeger says

[i]magination is not always a welcome guest in the household of faith. Even preachers who say they want to become more creative often acknowledge discomfort about using their imaginations. Why is the pulpit ambivalent about using the imagination?

*Is it because theology is supposed to deal with the truth, while imagination, at least in everyday speech, suggests fantasy, dreams, unreality? We dismiss illusions, saying, "It is all in your imagination." Is this why preachers resist the imagination at the same time that they desire its powers?*²

¹See Stanley Hauerwas, ed., *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989). This work includes a collection of essays on a wide range of subjects dealing with narrative and imagination. It is a good source work. See also John McIntyre, *Faith, Theology and the Imagination* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1987); Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989); James P. Mackey ed., *Religious Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986); and Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

²Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), p.99.

Troeger's questions are important ones. The popular perception of the function of imagination is to enliven play. It is for children and therefore not of sufficient gravity to deal with the matters of faith and practice. At the very least imagination serves as a harmless pastime that enables enjoyment. But at worst imagination is a self-delusion that substitutes fantasy for reality, and artificiality (and, therefore, lies) for truth.

IMAGINATION IN HISTORY

Plato and Imitation

The history of the understanding of Imagination is a long and complex one.³ One doesn't have to look hard to find those who will express the commonly held view to which Troeger referred. Plato, in the *Republic*, expressed his belief that truth is absolute and that art is mere illusion. He described his position with the statement that art, which he defines as imitation, "is a beggar wedded to a beggar and producing beggarly children."⁴ His complaint was that imitation was a way of avoiding truth and, therefore, morally suspect. In addition, the arts arouse emotions which have the effect of clouding pure reason. "And with regard to sexual desires, and anger, and all feelings of desire and pain and pleasure in the soul, which we say follow all our actions, you observe that poetic imitation produces all these effects in us. They should be withered, and it waters them and makes them grow."⁵ Reason, to function purely, needs the emotions to "wither." But art, poetry in particular, feeds the emotions and "makes them grow."

With arguments as compelling as these, Plato had no recourse but to call for a ban on all forms of art from his perfect republic. "Let it be our defence now that we have recurred to the subject of poetry that it was only to be expected that we should expel poetry from the city, such being her nature. The argument compelled us."⁶ Another translator renders those final words as "reason compels us." And reason, Plato had already argued, was the highest state of the human soul. At the end of Book VI, he categorized the states of the soul. The four segments to which he refers are different aspects of mental activity that each person is capable of producing. "Now assume with me that corresponding to these four segments there are four states which arise in the soul. To the highest segment assign intelligence, to the

³For a more complete assessment of the classical understanding of imagination see E.J. Furlong, *Imagination* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961).

⁴Plato, *The Republic*, A.D. Lindsay, trans. (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1976), p.306.

⁵Ibid, p.310.

⁶Ibid, p.311.

second understanding, to the third faith and to the last imagining."⁷

Despite Plato's certainty regarding the power of reason to guide the soul into a perfect state of moral behaviour, even he recognized the power of imagination. He considered this power a derogation of both the laws of morality and the rational cognition of the world. But that it had powerful effect he could not deny. It would have been easier for him to talk of the uselessness of "imitation" or art if he did not have to acknowledge such a great effect. It is too easy, he complains, to "feel her magic charm, especially when she speaks with Homer's lips."⁸ Homer, along with the dramatists Aeschylus and Sophocles, represents that strand of thought that held art and imagination to be the transforming power. That it could be used for good or for evil was not denied. But while Plato saw this as reason for banning the artists, Homer saw this as the challenge of his art.⁹

Aristotle and Metaphor

Aristotle seemed to straddle the line between acceptance of the power of imagination and elevation of reason as the supreme mental activity. It might be argued that he reclaims "imitation" as the foundation of moral education (in his *Ethica Nicomachen*) and as the instrument of character formation (in *Politica*). But he is perhaps best known as the originator of the concept of "art as catharsis" (in *Poetica*).

In this light, Aristotle seemed more willing than Plato to see that imagination is a way of approaching truth. His methodology was through metaphor. "All words which make us learn something are most pleasant; now we do not know strange terms and proper terms we know already. It is metaphor that above all produces this effect."¹⁰ And further, "it is a great thing to make a proper use of each of the elements mentioned, and of double words and rare words too, but by far the greatest thing is the use of the metaphor."¹¹ Metaphor, as we shall see more fully later, is but one instance of the use of imagination. Metaphor is primarily

⁷Ibid, p.206.

⁸Ibid, p.311.

⁹See recent works on the power of Homer's oral discourse: Michael N. Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), esp. Introduction, pp.xix-xxv; and John Peradotte, *Man in the Middle Voice: Name and Narration in the Odyssey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). The latter work includes an interesting discussion on naming and personal/moral identity in Homer's work.

¹⁰Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, John Henry Freese, trans. (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1927), pp.395-397.

¹¹Aristotle, *The Poetics*, W. Hamilton Fyfe, trans. (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1932), pp.89-91.

a way of seeing connections, of putting together two unrelated images or ideas and "creating" something new or a new way of seeing the original images or ideas. Aristotle's use of metaphor in his *Rhetoric*, is an acknowledgement of the power of imagination to move beyond logical argument. Metaphor involves a leap from one "reality," or understanding, to another.

But despite Aristotle's seeming enthusiasm for metaphor and imagination, he also held that as beautiful and important as this capacity was, it was ultimately dispensable. After all metaphors, for Aristotle, were ornaments, mere words. Other words could be substituted without significant loss of meaning. Though he "wrote the book" on rhetoric, Aristotle did not see that metaphor and, therefore, imagination were consequential when it came to knowing or understanding. Rhetoric, for Aristotle, is the process whereby truth is communicated in such a way that the hearer is persuaded or convinced. As such a variety of techniques were employed. At the heart of rhetoric is the use of the imagination in metaphor and simile, in the emotive power of words and in the use of illustration and narration. Yet, these "techniques" for communicating truth were secondary to the essence of the oration. And, as Aristotle himself said, these "ornaments" are dispensable. These seeds of suspicion led to the decline of rhetoric as anything other than making pretty speech. And imagination, which drives both rhetoric and metaphor, became philosophically suspect.

Aquinas and "Phantasmata"

In the middle ages imagination was rarely a topic of consideration. As discussed in the previous chapter, there were a number of important figures who were engaged in imaginative preaching of different types. In addition to his defense of rhetoric as the means for communicating the gospel, Augustine wrote of the difference between the literal and figurative understandings of the Bible, and thus about how imagination is used in interpretation.

Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa*, posited that imagination was a necessary step between perception and understanding. "When anyone tries to understand something, he forms to himself certain images (*phantasmata*) by way of examples, in which he observes as it were what he is searching to understand."¹² These "phantasmata," or the images the mind uses for the process of understanding, can be quixotic. As Aquinas stated, "Imagination can be false since it represents even absent things, and by taking the imaginary to be real we deceive ourselves."¹³ This danger of deception was very real to Aquinas and caused him to repeat

¹²St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: A Concise Translation*, Timothy McDermott, ed. (London: Methuen, 1989), p.131.

¹³Ibid, p.47.

that "Imagination and reason [were] in conflict,"¹⁴ and that it is reason that forbids or allows imagining.

Imagination in the Enlightenment

Logic and Rhetoric in Ramus

But it was with the dawning of the Enlightenment that the Platonic preference took the ascendant. Paul Scott Wilson identifies Peter Ramus as an instigator of imagination's decline in status.

*Peter Ramus (1515-1572) sought to restore logic and to clarify its difference from rhetoric. He introduced a dichotomy that formerly had not existed. He assigned to rhetoric all matters of "style," "dress," and "delivery." He assigned to logic all matters of "invention" and "arrangement" or argument. Rhetoric became the property of imagination; logic became the property of reason and intellect.*¹⁵

This dichotomy, that echoed Plato's denigration of "art" and elevation of "truth," grew stronger as numerous thinkers reinforced the division. These philosophers, says Wilson, "conceived of the human soul as possessing a number of attributes that could be ordered in a hierarchy of 'faculties.' In this 'faculty' understanding of human psychology, Imagination and Reason are distinct and separate, and Imagination is inferior to Reason."¹⁶

Bacon and Reason

Francis Bacon stated his preference for the "unvarnished truth" quite clearly.

*"[F]or men begin to hunt more after words than matter; more after the choiceness of the phrase, and the round and clean composition of the sentence, and the sweet feeling of the clauses, and the varying and illustration of their works with types and figures, than after the weight of matter, worth of subject, soundness of argument, life of invention or depth of judgement."*¹⁷

Thus rhetoric, described by Bacon as being more ornament than substance, is of a lesser order than logic and the scientific method. These attitudes have cropped up in modern history as well, the common pejorative "it's just rhetoric" is but the simplest example. As a result of this split between rhetoric and logic or imagination and truth, Bacon saw religion itself as somehow lower than science. "For we see that, in matters of faith and religion, we raise our

¹⁴Ibid, p.126.

¹⁵Paul Scott Wilson, "Beyond Narrative: Imagination in the Sermon," *Papers of the Annual Meeting*, (Louisville, Ky: Academy of Homiletics, 1992), p.132.

¹⁶Ibid, p.132.

¹⁷Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, G.W. Kitchen ed. (London: Bell and Daldy, 1861) p.36.

imagination above our reason; which is the cause why religion sought ever access to the mind by similitude, types, parables, visions, dreams."¹⁸ All that was worthy of Bacon's contempt from the rhetoricians of his day were the very methods he claimed for comprehending matters of belief. Here again, then, the hierarchy was established with believing below knowing.

Locke and Associative Imagination

Wilson claims that one of imagination's foremost detractors was John Locke, whose epistemology further expressed reason's ascendancy.

*John Locke (1632-1704) helped to frame the predominant eighteenth century view of imagination. He identified wit with **imagination** and saw it as the power to see **similarities**; he identified judgement with **reason**, the power to see **differences**. Because imagination was as likely to produce fictions, dreams, visions and emotions as it was likely to assist reason, and because it was akin to an instinctive or sensory power, it tended also to be suspect as a wild, unpredictable faculty that threatens natural order, needs tight control, and that it should, if necessary, be minimized.*¹⁹

Locke, as regards imagination at least, was an Empiricist philosopher who saw that imagination's role was "associative." The associative process is one where experiences imaginatively evoke ideas and thus become united with them. The problem, iterated above, was that the associations were difficult to control. Imagination, then, is a lower order mental process than logic which has greater control over experience.

Addison and "Pleasures of Imagination"

Empiricists after Locke maintained this position. Joseph Addison, for example, while not as derogatory as Locke toward imagination, recognized this fundamental hierarchy. Imagination was tied to a specific sensory experience. "We cannot indeed have a single image in the fancy that did not make its first entrance than through the sight."²⁰ These experiences were then ordered by imagination in some fashion which implied that imagination was a cognitive faculty of the mind. "The pleasures of the imagination, taken in the full extent, are not so gross as those of the sense, nor so refined as those of the understanding. The last one, indeed, more preferable, because they are founded on some new knowledge or improvement in the mind of man"²¹

¹⁸Ibid, p.183.

¹⁹Wilson, "Beyond Narrative...", op cit, p.133.

²⁰Joseph Addison, "The Pleasures of the Imagination," *The Essays of Joseph Addison*, Vol. II, James G. Frazer, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1915), p.178.

²¹Ibid, p.179

Addison, however, like Plato before him, had to recognize that imagination has an appeal greater than its "status" might suggest. "[Y]et it must be confessed, that [the pleasures] of the imagination are as great and as transporting as [reason]. ... a description in Homer has charmed more readers than a chapter in Aristotle."²²

Vico and the New Science

In a similar way Giambattista Vico shared this Empiricist hierarchy somewhat ambivalently. He wrote in his *New Science*, "The first nature was a poetic or creative or, as we may even call it, divine nature. ... the imagination is most powerful in those in whom reason is weakest The second nature was heroic The third nature was human, an intelligent and therefore modest, benign and reasonable nature, which recognizes conscience, reason and duty as laws."²³ Reason, the "human" nature, is the sign that human mental development had reached its peak. And yet, the language Vico employs indicates that this climb to the peak is also a descent from the heights of communion with the divine. The creative, or imaginative nature, is the divine nature. Works of art continue this communion beyond the human plane. "Where in the vernacular we improperly call statues and paintings *pensieri degli autori* [the thoughts of their authors], it may properly be said of God that all things are *pensieri di Dio* [the thoughts of God]."²⁴

Baumgarten and Aesthetics

In 1750, Alexander Baumgarten was stretching the concept of imagination and its relation to rationality. Baumgarten was a student of Christian Wolff who argued that the senses and the imagination are incapable of providing genuine cognition of the objects being considered, whether that be nature or art. In addition, rational reflection, it was argued, was always correcting and ultimately replacing the sense and/or imaginative impressions.

Despite this tradition, Baumgarten produced *Reflections on Poetry*. In order to remain true to his teacher, Baumgarten argued that poetry is cognitive, but the cognition employs both the sensory and imaginative. He defined a poem as "a perfect sensate discourse."²⁵ Poetry provides insight into the world that could not be conveyed any other way. The ideas

²²Ibid, p.179.

²³Giambattista Vico, *Vico: Selected Writings*, Leon Pompa, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.251.

²⁴Ibid, p.68.

²⁵Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), p.39.

that poetry provides are "clear," in that they refer to specific events and experiences, but are "confused" in that the impressionistic language often obscures rational thought.²⁶ The "clear and confused" nature of poetry is contrasted with the "clear and distinct" nature of rational discourse.

From this, Baumgarten was able to make judgements as to the value of a poem by how far it moved from confusion to clarity. This value he named the "aesthetic value." From this work, then came the whole branch of philosophy known in modern thought as Aesthetics. The field of Aesthetics is concerned with the nature of artistic taste and the recognition of beauty. For many aesthetic thinkers, imagination is a key to this process. The Empiricists argued, as mentioned above, that imagination was used associatively to unite the experience of viewing, reading or encountering art and nature with critical judgements as to their value or worth.

Hume and Belief

This "associative" theory controlled the philosophy of imagination in Britain until David Hume. Hume considered that imagination had a fundamental role in the generation of commonsense beliefs. His *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* divides impressions into two classes.

*Here therefore we may divide all the perceptions of the mind into two classes or species, which are distinguished by their different degrees of force or vivacity. The less forcible and lively are commonly denominated Thoughts or Ideas. The other species ... let us call them Impressions ... all the more lively perceptions when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will.*²⁷

Imagination works to shape not just impressions of an object, but a relationship with the object as well. The implication is that imagination works in concert with cognition to generate emotion.

*Whenever any object is presented to the memory or senses, it immediately, by the force of custom, carries the imagination to conceive that object, which is normally conjoined to it; and this conception is attended with a feeling or sentiment, different from the loose reveries of the fancy.*²⁸

This emotive connection with the object leads to belief. "I say, then, that belief is nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination

²⁶See *ibid*, p.42.

²⁷David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding, and an Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, L.A. Selby-Bigge, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1894), p.18.

²⁸*Ibid*, p.48.

alone is able to attain."²⁹

Belief, however, for Hume, is superior to imagination ("But as it is impossible that this faculty of imagination can ever, of itself, reach belief..."³⁰). The "faculty" of imagination enables the process that leads to belief. But it is a dangerous ability that can produce fictions as well as belief. And it is belief, in the end, that leads to discernment. "Belief is something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgement from the fictions of the imagination."³¹

Alison and Emotional Response

In aesthetics, Archibald Alison, also recognized the importance of emotion and experience in generating judgements and beliefs. The ability to connect these experiences and emotions to an object or event determines an individual's artistic taste.

*The nature of any person's taste is, in the common life, generally determined from the nature or character of his imagination, and the expression of any deficiency in this power of the mind, is considered as synonymous with the expression of a similar deficiency in point of taste.*³²

The ability to recognize beauty or the sublime is directly related, according to Alison, to the imagination. The more an individual is able to utilize the imagination the more he/she is able to experience the beauty of the natural or artistic world. "[T]here are many other instances equally familiar, which are sufficient to shew [sic], that whatever increases this exercise or employment of imagination, increases also the emotion of beauty or sublimity."³³

The "emotion of beauty or sublimity" is further enhanced by other constituent experiences. When fully appreciative of beauty, the observer is engaged in more than observation.

The simple perception of the object, we frequently find, is insufficient to excite these emotions, unless it is accompanied with the operation of mind, unless, according to common expression, our imagination is seized, and our fancy busied in the pursuit of all those trains of thought, which are allowed to this character or expression. Thus when we feel either the beauty or sublimity of natural scenery, - the gay lustre of a morning in spring, or the mild radiance of a summer evening, the savage majesty of a wintry storm, or the wild magnificence of a tempestuous ocean, - we are conscious of

²⁹Ibid, p.49.

³⁰Ibid, p.49.

³¹Ibid, p.49.

³²Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, Volume II (Edinburgh: Bell and Brafute, 1811), p.4.

³³Ibid, p.23.

*a variety of images in our minds, very different from those which the object themselves can present to the eye.*³⁴

In imagination connections are made between what is being viewed and a wealth of past experiences. These past experiences then colour the viewing of the object in such a way that it is no longer the same, abstract object or event, but is now invested with our experience. "The first circumstance, then, which seems to distinguish those trains of thought which are produced by objects either of Sublimity or Beauty, is, that the ideas or conceptions of which they are composed, are ideas of Emotion."³⁵ How we view a work of art or a scene of natural beauty is affected by how we feel about it. Our emotional reaction is constituent in our understanding and appraisal of the object. Our feelings become, claimed Alison, part of the objective, as well as subjective, appearance of the work or scene. In our imaginative interaction, the work or scene is a different one, uniquely our own.

The aesthetic objective, then, is to free the imagination to interact with the world in order to appreciate beauty and sublimity. Alison entreats us to engender

*that state of mind, ... most favourable to the emotions of taste, in which the imagination is free and unencumbered, or in which the attention is so little occupied by any private or particular object of thought, as to leave us open to all the impressions, which the objects that are before us can create.*³⁶

Thus Alison recognizes the limitations of an associative view of imagination and connects imagination to transcendent experience of art. As we view, our feelings create a new, or "higher," reality.

Kant and Constitutive Imagination

Alison, however, was not the only one moving from an associative view of the imagination to a more constitutive view. "In 1781 Immanuel Kant initiated what he called a 'Copernican Revolution' in European philosophy."³⁷ Kant, and Hegel to an extent, argued that imagination was a part of a creative process of understanding.

For the imagination is very mighty when it creates, as it were, another nature out of the material that actual nature gives it. We use it to entertain ourselves when experience strikes us as overly routine. We may even restructure experience; and though in doing so we continue to follow analogical laws, yet we also follow principles which reside

³⁴Ibid, p.5.

³⁵Ibid, p.75.

³⁶Ibid, p.10.

³⁷O.B. Hardison Jr., ed., *The Quest for Imagination* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Press of the Case Western Reserve University, 1971), p.vii.

*higher up, namely in reason.*³⁸

The principles of reason, however, cannot be completely separated from the faculty of imagination. Imagination, for Kant, "makes reason think more when prompted by a certain presentation."³⁹ These presentations are the starting point of conceptual thought. "Such presentations of the imagination we may call ideas. They are inner intuitions to which no concept can be completely adequate."⁴⁰

That "no concept can be completely adequate" meant, for Kant, that there was a fundamental difference in the results of imaginative conception and that which is driven by reason. The function of imagination is not to give us a more complete understanding of a object, but instead reveal the aesthetic attributes of the object.

If forms do not constitute the exhibition of a concept itself, but are only supplementary presentations of the imagination expressing the concept's implications and its kinship with other concepts, then they are called aesthetic attributes of an object.

*Through these attributes, unlike through logical attributes, we do not present the content of our concepts of the sublimity and majesty of creation, but present something different, something that prompts the imagination to spread over a multitude of kindred presentations that arouse more thought than can be expressed in a concept determined by words. These aesthetic attributes yield an aesthetic idea, which serves the mentioned rational idea as a substitute for logical exhibition, but its proper function is to quicken the mind by opening up for it a view into an immense realm of kindred presentations.*⁴¹

Such a description seems to imply that for Kant imagination had an important role, not just in aesthetics but in human understanding as a whole. Yet, he argued the opposite. It was understanding that controlled the imagination, rather than imagination leading to understanding.

*When the imagination is used for cognition then it is under the constraint of the understanding and is subject to the restriction of adequacy to the understanding's concept. But when the aim is aesthetic, then the imagination is free, so that, over and above that harmony with the concept, it may supply a wealth of undeveloped material for the understanding ... But the understanding employs this material not so much objectively, for cognition, as subjectively, namely to quicken the cognitive powers, though indirectly this does serve cognition too.*⁴²

For Kant the imagination was a means to serve an end. The imagination, either bound by

³⁸Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Werner S. Pluhar, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p.182.

³⁹Ibid, p.183.

⁴⁰Ibid, p.182.

⁴¹Ibid, pp.183-184.

⁴²Ibid, p.185.

understanding or free in aesthetic experience, is a "faculty" of the rational mind. Imagining serves understanding.

The Romantic Imagination

The Romantics, however, while acknowledging their great debt to Kant, consider imagination to be the distinctive mental operation by which thought and experience may be united, and thus the ground of both aesthetic activity and of all true insight into the human condition.

Coleridge and the Creative Imagination

One of the most notable of the Romantics was Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In the thirteenth chapter of his *Biographica Literaria*, Coleridge defined imagination as "the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. ... It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate ... it struggles to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead."⁴³ In other words, imagination is that faculty that enables a human being to reason by making connections between seemingly dissimilar ideas. For Coleridge, imagination, far from being inferior to reason, was in fact what made knowing possible. And indeed it is the process most akin to the creative powers of God. He recognized that human creations were of a lower order and identified human acts of imagination, such as art and rhetoric, as Secondary Imagination. But this process of "creative juxtaposition" was an imaginative act in that the result of the reconciliation gave a new identity that was unknowable without imagination.

Coleridge connected thought and feeling in analyzing sensory experience. In fact, he would not separate them. "I feel strongly and I think strongly, but I seldom feel without thinking or think without feeling."⁴⁴ This sensory experience was a mixture of rationality and imagination.

Edwards and Imaginative Perception

Jonathan Edwards develops this theory of sensory experience that leads to imaginative understanding. As Troeger points out

Edwards develops the role of imagination in addressing the gap in John Locke's epistemology - namely, how to explain the mind's orderly experiencing of reality when it depends on sense impressions. Edwards came to acknowledge that "the true character

⁴³Coleridge, *Biographica Literaria*, J. Shawcross ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p.202.

⁴⁴John Spenser Hill, ed., *Imagination in Coleridge* (London: Macmillan Press, 1978), p.12.

of God" is known through our "imaginative perception," which supplies something that our "discursive or conceptual reason cannot know."⁴⁵

The Romantics, on the other hand, saw the senses and imagination as distinct but equal means for experiencing reality. What Edwards saw as a way of knowing, for example, Schleiermacher saw as a way of owning.

Schleiermacher and Inner Experience

For Schleiermacher, imagination gave an individual the capacity to claim as his/her own objects or persons out of reach. "In the future as in the past, I shall take possession of the whole world by virtue of inner activity,"⁴⁶ Schleiermacher wrote. Imagination, the inner activity, enables participation in the experience of the "whole world" even if that experience is denied to the senses. Complaining about the excessive rationalism of his German contemporaries, Schleiermacher saw the over-reliance on sensory experiences as a way of limiting the full development of the moral being.

Yet men are such creatures of the senses in respect to morality that they do not even trust themselves unless some overt act testifies to the truth of their feelings. He who puts such limitations on himself must live to no purpose in the great society of mankind.⁴⁷

Instead, the romantic was ready and willing to embrace both sensory experience and imagined experience as contributing to personal development. As Schleiermacher's translator Friess points out, "it does not much matter what particular items fall into these two classes (sensory and imagination); hence the confusion of categories, hence the indifference to the distinction between fact and fancy."⁴⁸ It was this romanticism that led Schleiermacher to sing the praises of such a faculty as imagination in his Soliloquies (*Monologien*).

Oh that men knew how to use this divine power of the imagination, which alone can free the spirit and place it far beyond coercion and limitation of any kind, and without which man's sphere is so narrow and precarious!⁴⁹

The key to this historical reflection is to realize that for the Romantic thinkers

⁴⁵Troeger, *Imagining ...*, op cit, p.109. Quotes come from an unpublished paper by Sang H. Lee, "Imagination and the Increasing Reality in Jonathan Edwards" given at the AAR Meeting, 1973.

⁴⁶Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, Horace L. Friess, trans. (Chicago: Open Court Pub. Co., 1926), p.82.

⁴⁷Ibid, p.81.

⁴⁸Ibid, p.xlv.

⁴⁹Ibid, p.81.

imagination is not a dispensable ornament of language alone. They claimed that, rather than a tool of illusion and deception ("it's all in your imagination"), "imagination is leading us to an acknowledgement of reality, not an escape from it."⁵⁰

IMAGINATION, UNDERSTANDING AND LANGUAGE

This thread, running from Coleridge through Schleiermacher, is picked up by modern theologians like David Tracy and Sallie McFague. These theologians consider imagination through the specific tools of analogy and metaphor. To talk about metaphor is not to exhaust imagination, but to narrow the confines somewhat. It is difficult, in the end, to make clear distinctions between the imagination and a number of imaginative constructs. Metaphor (like narrative, simile, image-making, and other creative arts) is a way of putting the imagination to work. The process of creating metaphors, then, is an imaginative process.

Tracy speaks of the *analogical imagination* which implies that understanding only comes through analogy. We know about or of only as we are able to make comparisons. As Tracy says, "Who you are I know only by knowing what event, what focal meaning, you actually live by."⁵¹ This imaginative process of finding connecting analogies is the only way of communicating especially across cultural or religious differences. We shall return to this idea when we begin to explore the corporate nature of homiletical imagination.

Imagination: Metaphor and Subjectivity

McFague explores *metaphorical theology* and claims that "whether consciously or unconsciously, all people live by metaphors."⁵² It is the inevitability of metaphor that fascinates McFague.

*What is at issue, of course, is not just metaphor as a useful (or even a necessary) means of communicating what we already know. This would be allegory, not metaphor. Rather metaphor is a way of **knowing**, not just a way of communicating. In metaphor knowledge and its expression are one and the same; there is no way **around** the metaphor, it is not expendable.*⁵³

The work of social researchers George Lakoff and Mark Johnson comes to similar

⁵⁰Troeger, *Imagining ...*, op cit, p.28.

⁵¹David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1981), p.454.

⁵²Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p.55.

⁵³McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p.4.

conclusions similar to that of the theologians McFague and Tracy. Their explorations into language and how it is used in societies and cultures lead them to claim "that metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words. [They] argue that, on the contrary, human thought processes are largely metaphorical."⁵⁴ But metaphorical describes not only mental processes but the entire conceptual system which includes behaviour as well as thinking. Thus imagination, at work in metaphor, is at the root of human understanding. As Lakoff and Johnson argue "many of our activities are metaphorical in nature. The metaphorical concepts that characterize those activities structure our present reality."⁵⁵ Metaphor is that application of imagination whereby human beings give meaning to their experiences and thus give meaning to their world. This is the process to which Troeger refers when he claims that imagination leads us to a more suitable comprehension of reality rather than an escape. Or as Lakoff and Johnson claim:

*The idea that metaphor is just a matter of language and can at best only describe reality stems from the view that what is real is wholly external to, and independent of, how human beings conceptualize the world - as if the study of reality were just the study of the physical world. Such a view of reality - so-called objective reality - leaves out human aspects of reality, in particular the real perceptions, conceptualizations, motivations, and actions that constitute most of what we experience. But the human aspects of reality are most of what matters to us...*⁵⁶

Imagination and Human Consciousness

Jean-Paul Sartre argued a similar line in *The Psychology of Imagination*. One of his overriding questions was whether it is possible to be human without imagining.

*Can we conceive of a consciousness which would never imagine and which would be completely absorbed in its intuitions of the real - in that case the possibility of imagining, which appears as one quality among others of our consciousness, would be a contingent enrichment - or rather, soon as we posit a consciousness, must it be posited as always being able to imagine?*⁵⁷

In other words, Sartre is asking whether imagination is extraneous to human consciousness or integral to it. When he talks of the "real," he refers to the physical or objective reality of the world. Imagination, claimed Sartre, is the ability to "posit an hypothesis of unreality."⁵⁸ In

⁵⁴George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), p.6.

⁵⁵Ibid, p.145.

⁵⁶Ibid, p.146.

⁵⁷Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (London: Rider and Co., 1950), p.201.

⁵⁸Ibid, p.205.

order to create "unreality" in the imagination, a consciousness must be able to transcend the realm of physical reality. This is, in part, a recognition of the subjective experience of the world. What is "real" are the concrete elements surrounding us; what is "unreal" are both the images in my mind as I encounter these objects and my subjective reaction to them. "From this it follows clearly that all creation of the imaginary would be completely impossible to a consciousness whose nature it would be precisely to be "in-the-midst-of-the-world".⁵⁹ To live "in-the-midst-of-the-world" is to live by what the eyes can see and the hands can feel. It is to deny any spiritual reality and thus the possibility of faith.

However, "for a consciousness to be able to imagine it must be able to escape from the world by its very nature, it must be able by its own efforts to withdraw from the world. In a word it must be free."⁶⁰ If we consider that human beings are free, in mind as well as body, then we must allow for the freedom of imagination. The very essence of human freedom demands the ability and, therefore, the option to imagine.

*We may, therefore, conclude that imagination is not an empirical and superadded power of consciousness, it is the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom... The unreal is produced outside of the world by a consciousness which stays in the world and it is because he is transcendently free that man can imagine.*⁶¹

To speak of the "unreal," then is not to deny the world, but to experience it as fully human. It is to see connections, interpretations and potential, all of which do not "exist" in the "real" but are surely a part of the "human aspects of reality" of which Lakoff and Johnson spoke.

It might be argued, then, that the use of imagination and the imaginative construct of metaphor in communication is part of what makes us human and to deny the place of imagination in preaching, theology, or indeed any human communicative arena is to attempt to deny the humanity, or the subjective reality, of the persons engaged in that act.

Imagination and Expression

Our language must reflect both the objective and subjective reality of our context. Or, as McFague argues, language must both express and communicate.

Metaphorical or imagistic language has the peculiar quality of both expressing and communicating at the same time. Glossolalia, speaking in strange tongues, expresses but does not communicate; logical or highly conceptual language communicates precisely but it is not highly expressive. Only metaphorical language, because it sets the familiar in a new context, does both - it can express more than the familiar and yet

⁵⁹Ibid, p.206.

⁶⁰Ibid, p.207.

⁶¹Ibid, p.209.

*at the same time communicate because it uses terms known to us.*⁶²

It is also important at this stage to stress that much of the current work cited in the field is at pains to avoid a rigid dichotomy between reason and imagination. The effort is rather to undo the work of the Enlightenment thinkers who established their hierarchy and maligned imagination in the process. This is what led to the "objective view of reality" mentioned above. On the other hand, to exalt imagination to the extent that rationality disappears from human discourse is to invite unintelligability. Instead, a way is sought to incorporate imagination into rationality, and to infuse reason with the imaginative resources of the human experience. Lakoff and Johnson see metaphor as that which will unite reason and imagination.

*Reason, at the very least, involves categorization, entailment, and inference. Imagination, in one of its many aspects, involves seeing one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thing - what we have called metaphorical thought. Metaphor is thus "imaginative rationality." Since the categories of our everyday thought are largely metaphorical and our everyday reasoning involves metaphorical entailments and inferences, ordinary rationality is therefore imaginative by its very nature. Given our understanding of poetic metaphor in terms of metaphorical entailments and inferences, we can see that the products of the poetic imagination are, for the same reason, partially rational in nature.*⁶³

Imagination in Language

This definition of metaphor is a little different than the one I have been arguing. Lakoff and Johnson see metaphor as that which drives imagination. I have argued that metaphor is one of the many tools of imagination. The latter is more along the lines of Kenneth Burke's analysis of imagination in his *Grammar of Motives*.⁶⁴ He sees metaphor as one of the "tropes" of language. Other tropes include metonymy or reduction, synecdoche or representation, and irony or dialection. The distinctions may seem minute and all of these tropes of language seem metaphorical, in that one thing is understood in terms of another. In metonymy the incorporeal is understood in terms of the corporeal, in synecdoche a part stands for the whole, and irony involves a tension between opposites. But all of these tropes are a function of the imaginative process of the mind. They function as concrete language tools of imagination enabling understanding and interpretation.

Part of the difficulty is a semantic one. In Lakoff and Johnson, "metaphor" becomes that process of mind which enables "imagination." McFague's terminology, "metaphorical

⁶²McFague, *Speaking in Parables...*, op cit, p.16.

⁶³Lakoff and Johnson, op cit, p.193.

⁶⁴Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1945), pp.503-517.

theology," also points to metaphor as a process of thought. Wilson, on the other hand, sees imagination as the more all-encompassing term.

*I have found it most helpful homiletically to think of imagination not as a particular figure of speech (e.g. simile, metaphor), nor as a form of speech (e.g. poetry or story), nor as one kind of logical thought as opposed to another (i.e. induction versus deduction). Rather, it is a mode of thought that contrasts logic and yet which is its necessary complement.*⁶⁵

"Faculty" or Process

Despite these semantic differences, Wilson, McFague, and Lakoff and Johnson would all agree that imagination and/or metaphorical thinking/theology is not a technique per se. It is, instead, a mental process. The Enlightenment view of imagination as an associative "faculty of the mind" still persists. Mary Warnock, for example, considers imagination to be a faculty, or a technique of thinking, though an important one: "I have also come very strongly to believe that it is the cultivation of imagination which should be the chief aim of education,"⁶⁶ she writes. She reminds us that "we use our imagination in our ordinary perception of the world."⁶⁷ This "use" of imagination, however, is an associative one; as we see, we create images in order to comprehend. Her model for this understanding is Hume. "It is to be noticed that Hume actually defines ideas as images. From the outset, then, he regards imagination, the image-making faculty, as playing a crucial role in our thinking."⁶⁸ Such a view, while perhaps more developed in Warnock, resounds with Locke's warnings that while sometimes an effective tool, the imagination is too dangerous to use too often.

John McIntyre, on the other hand, agrees that imagination is not a "faculty" but a process.

*While it may have been the practice in medieval philosophers to regard imagination as an isolable faculty of the mind, where even a writer as circumspect as Mary Warnock refers to imagination as a "power of the mind;" nevertheless, what has now emerged is that the imagination is the whole mind working in certain ways... In much the same way, I would not regard "reason," as I have said, as a separate faculty of the mind, but rather as the whole mind working in identifiable ways - arguing from general principles to specific conclusions, or from collections of cases to universal judgements, or assessing the relevance of alleged evidence, or the validity of conclusions, and so on.*⁶⁹

⁶⁵Wilson, "Beyond Narrative...", op cit, p.136.

⁶⁶Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p.9.

⁶⁷Ibid, p.10.

⁶⁸Ibid, p.15.

⁶⁹John McIntyre, *Faith, Theology and Imagination* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1987), p.159.

Imagination is not, for McIntyre and the Romantics, a tool or mental power, but is instead a way of looking at the world. This "mode of thought," imagination, enables persons and societies to structure their understanding of reality into certain patterns. These patterns then weave together to become a perceptual grid by which individuals define themselves and identify the communities which share in their perceptual grid.

THE PERCEPTUAL GRID

In other words we can understand communities, societies, and cultures by identifying the metaphors by which they understand themselves. Gibson Winter discovers that "certain metaphoric networks become dominant in a total society, shaping modes of thought, action, decision and life."⁷⁰ Troeger refers to the "mythological images and stories" as the individual building blocks out of which these metaphoric networks or perceptual grids are created.

By "mythological images and stories" I mean those metaphors, symbols, and narratives from which a group draws its reason for being, sustains its current life, and envisions and realizes its future. These mythic-poetic realities constitute the "landscape of the heart", the nexus of meanings that filters out interpretation of the world and shapes our patterns of response and creativity.⁷¹

Lakoff and Johnson agree that the perceptual grid shapes the deepest held beliefs of a society. "The most fundamental values in a culture," they write, "will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture."⁷² The cultural metaphoric networks become the lens through which we see the world. And even our physical experiences are understood in these cultural terms, and the dividing lines between what is an "actual experience" of reality and what is a culturally conditioned interpretation can become obscured. As Lakoff and Johnson state,

It can be misleading, therefore, to speak of direct physical experience as though there were some core of immediate experience which we then "interpret" in terms of our conceptual system. Cultural assumptions, values, and attitudes are not a conceptual overlay which we may or may not place upon experience as we choose. It would be more correct to say that all experience is cultural through and through, that we experience our "world" in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself.⁷³

⁷⁰Winter, *Liberating Creation: Foundations of Religious Social Ethics* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1981), p.6.

⁷¹Thomas H. Troeger, "The Social Power of Myth as a Key to Preaching on Social Issues," in *Preaching as a Social Act: Theology & Practice*, Arthur Van Seters, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), pp.205-206.

⁷²Lakoff and Johnson, *op cit*, p.22.

⁷³*Ibid*, p.57.

Metaphor and Reality

We are indeed bound by these perceptual grids. But metaphor, like culture and language, is not immutable. There is a constant state of flux as our grid is influenced by new metaphors and reshaped into a new understanding. New metaphors can create new reality. It takes more than a simple overlay to effect much change, however. But by "seeing" our experience in a new light, the new metaphor works its way into our perceptual grid and brings cultural change. The creation of the new reality "can begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of a metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it."⁷⁴ Lakoff and Johnson, for example, claim that much of what is seen as the Westernization of the developing world is brought about by the introduction of certain metaphorical phrases such as "Time is Money". These new metaphors emphasize particular behaviours and suppress others. And "the acceptance of the metaphor, which forces us to focus 'only' on those aspects of our experience that it highlights, leads us to view the entailments of the metaphor as being 'true'."⁷⁵

Media Metaphors

In order to understand our community, then, we must discover what metaphorical systems have dominance. The thrust of the earlier chapters was to stress that the mass media, and primarily television, have great influence over the structures of communication. The patterns and structures by which we come to understanding are, increasingly, defined by this medium. The argument in this chapter is that the structures and the content begin to coalesce. The inundation of images from the mass media become the metaphors by which we work out our perceptual grids. It is as our imaginations are captured by image and story that our beliefs and perception are changed. In other words, the reigning metaphors, the ubiquitous narrative, the dominant images, all of which resonate within our individual and collective imaginations, originate in television and other media.

Image-making and Imagination

James Wall explored one manifestation of this process in March of 1992 as he examined the tumult surrounding the release of Oliver Stone's film *JFK*. He quotes from reviewer and historian Richard Heffner when he writes that "what really disturbs Stone's critics is that he represents a new and powerful kind of historian, one who is 'fully determined

⁷⁴Ibid, p.145.

⁷⁵Ibid, p.157-8.

to have his own way with the pictures inside our heads."⁷⁶ And Stone himself reportedly sees this shaping of perception as his task. "We want to ... get into the subconscious ... and certainly seduce the viewer into a new perception of ... what occurred in Texas that day."⁷⁷ We recoil from this language and sense the sinister effects of manipulation or even propaganda. Yet, if the view that imagination through metaphor is what drives our understanding of reality is right, then all human communication is an attempt to shape "the pictures inside our heads." And though the media story-tellers, like Stone and his ilk, "will set our national agenda, interpret our national future," Heffner sees this as merely the extension of what "the scribblers themselves had done until these last sputtering days of the 20th century."⁷⁸ The scribblers being the "lords of print", that other mass medium which does not seem to carry such ominous overtones for most of us. Perhaps our unease comes not from the idea of subjective communication, but from the effectiveness of certain media to communicate on such a level. While preachers struggle to touch on the reality of human experience, film-makers and television producers do it as a matter of course.

Media Messages and Imagination

A further source of unease may arise when we attempt to assess the content of the media's communication. Ronald Allen observes that the increasing influence of technology, of which electronic media is only a part, has brought about a shift from the more organic root metaphors to metaphors of a more mechanistic nature.⁷⁹ As our scripture text is written primarily in an organic or agricultural mode, it might seem increasingly distant from modern culture. As discussed earlier, these root metaphors not only change language, but also the way of thinking and acting. The mechanical or technological root metaphors, for example, lead to an emphasis on production rather than relationship. The "bottom line" or the utility of things and people become the standards by which they are judged. The marginalized in a technological society are those who are no longer "useful."

As mentioned in Chapter I, William Fore is just one of many who have complained that the dominant metaphoric network of the mass media represents a value system to which

⁷⁶James M. Wall, "The Pictures Inside Our Heads," *The Christian Century*, March 18-25, 1992, p.291.

⁷⁷Ibid, p.291.

⁷⁸Ibid, p.291.

⁷⁹Ronald J. Allen, "The Social Function of Language in Preaching," *Preaching as a Social Act...*, op cit, pp.167-203, see esp. p.170.

"the whole weight of Christian history, thought and teaching stands diametrically opposed."⁸⁰ Fore characterized the "dominant myths of television" in the United States as including the following: "The fittest survive; Happiness consists of limitless material acquisition; Consumption is inherently good; Property, wealth and power are more important than people; and Progress is an inherent good."⁸¹ Others, media producers chiefly among them, would challenge such a generalized list of "media myths." But whether we agree with this list or not, it is difficult to argue that the "landscape of our hearts", as Troeger calls it, has been redesigned by modern media. Much of this change has taken our society unaware and now seems normal. Neil Postman reminds us that "the world as given to us through television seems natural not bizarre."⁸²

PREACHING AND IMAGINATION

The question that follows from this exposition is how far must the preacher employ imagination in attempting to communicate to a community thus defined. It is clear to writers such as Troeger that unless the preacher can risk entering "the landscape of the heart where these images are stored, no ecclesiastical pronouncement or pulpit proclamation - however well reasoned and argued - will budge people from the dominant mythological world that provides them with the spiritual essentials of meaning, purpose, security, and a sense of the sacred."⁸³ Yet, as persuasively as this is argued, the question is not as easily answered as we might assume. By ignoring imagination and the metaphorical systems that shape self-understanding, the preacher runs the risk of a lack of relevance or of answering questions that no one is asking. On the other hand, if the preacher gives free rein to imagination and attempts to tap into the cultural images most prevalent in a society, he or she might be accused of compromising the uniqueness of the Christian message or indeed of allowing the image to obscure the *logos*.

Historical Reflection

Preachers have been struggling to steer a course between gospel and culture since the beginning of the Church. In the last chapter, we have spoken of Augustine and his insistence that speakers of truth should employ as rigorous and effective a means of communication as

⁸⁰Fore, "Mass Media's Mythic World: At Odds with Christian Values," *Christian Century*, January 19, 1977, pp.34-35.

⁸¹Ibid, p.34.

⁸²Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (London: Methuen, 1986), p.81.

⁸³Troeger, "Social Power...", op cit, p.210.

speakers of falsehood. In addition, the poetic sermons of Romanos the Melodist, John of Damascus and others reflect a desire to give imagination scope within preaching. But mention is also made of Cyprian's argument that preachers should aim at a chaste simplicity of truth and not eloquence. We see in this an anticipation of the philosophical debate exemplified above in Coleridge and Bacon for example. The men and women referred to in that earlier chapter by and large represent those preachers who saw imagination as a key element in preaching and set about implementing their belief.

Beecher and "Bi-polar" Imagination

But it was not until the late 19th century, Richard Eslinger believes, that "the place of imagination in modern preaching was fundamentally staked out and would persist with little alteration for the next hundred years."⁸⁴ Eslinger sees that in many ways the understanding of the use of imagination reflected the Enlightenment view of the dominance of reason and truth. "This homiletic orthodoxy was thoroughly grounded in a model of argumentation, trading in propositional *truths*, and insisting as well that the preacher must possess a *lively imagination*."⁸⁵ It is Henry Ward Beecher, founder of the Lyman Beecher lectures on preaching in 1872, who identifies imagination as "the most important of all the elements that go to make the preacher."⁸⁶ Beecher's understanding of the function of imagination is quite complex. Eslinger identifies a "bi-polarity" in Beecher's thoughts on imagination.

*On the one hand there is an objective orientation in the task of imaginatively bringing near some truth or sense of moral duty which is found to be at first some distance from the "audience." On the other hand, that which is brought near is often sublime in its essence and is in principle beyond the grasp of human perception or rationality alone. The preacher's imagination must somehow cover both the objective and subjective polarities of imagination, according to the issue at hand.*⁸⁷

This bi-polarity seems to overcome many of the problems identified by the philosophers in that it maintains a firm grasp of the objective nature of reality and allows imagination scope to affirm that concreteness, while at the same time there is an awareness of the subjective experience of reality that may not be accessible by any means other than the

⁸⁴Richard Eslinger, "From Beecher to Buttrick: Imagination in Modern and Post-modern Homiletics," *Papers of the Annual Meeting ...*, op cit, p.11.

⁸⁵Ibid, p.11.

⁸⁶cited by Edward F. Markquart, *Quest for Better Preaching* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), p.160.

⁸⁷Eslinger, op cit, p.13.

imagination. Yet this bi-polarity is heavily weighted toward one end of the spectrum. Though Beecher claimed that imagination is an important, if not essential, element in preaching, he would maintain that its role is a supportive and ultimately limited one.

*The primary task of the sermon is to traffic in the great ideas and moral truths of the religious sphere. Imagination's task is to make these truths more vivid and present, bringing them into subjective awareness by translating them into images. The priority is on a rationalism which trades in "main ideas," "messages," and "moral truths."*⁸⁸

Thus rationalism reigns and imagination, though applauded and desired, is confined. And, as Eslinger notes, "liberal interpretation took shape around a rationalist hermeneutic (the interpreter sought for a message, an idea) yet of necessity needed to achieve an inspired leap of imagination into the world beyond the text. Amazingly, this odd conjunction of rationalist and Romantic commitments persisted for over a century in American pulpits."⁸⁹

Bushnell and the Grand Analogy

Contemporary with Beecher, however, was another preacher whose understanding of imagination is echoed in the current theologians Tracy and McFague. Horace Bushnell, in such essays as "Our Gospel, a Gift to the Imagination" and "Preliminary Dissertation on the Nature of Language as related to Thought and Spirit," puts imagination, by means of analogy, in the centre of his theological method. Between our moral behaviour and God there is a "grand analogy, or almost identity,"⁹⁰ claimed Bushnell. This analogical understanding is reflected in human language and therefore is central to interpretation of written texts, including, and perhaps especially, the Bible. Wilson relates that for Bushnell

*All of the Bible - its histories, parables, epistles, even its prepositions - is poetry and metaphor, signifying something beyond itself. ... Knowing how difficult it was to reduce a poet's meaning to a few words, he found it amusing that Christians would try in doctrine to reduce "the grand poem of salvation" to "a few dull propositions." Imagination is essential if we are to understand symbol; to discover the core of Christ's message, who is himself "the metaphor of God; God's last metaphor!"; and to engage the people in the vitality of God's Word.*⁹¹

So like Coleridge and Schleiermacher, Bushnell saw in imagination a way of comprehending reality as valid, if not in some ways more appropriate, than reason. But

⁸⁸Ibid, p.13.

⁸⁹Ibid, p.14.

⁹⁰Horace Bushnell, *Forgiveness and Law, Grounded in Principles Interpreted by Human Analogies* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, & Co., 1874), pp.120ff.

⁹¹Paul Scott Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), p.141.

though we might see Bushnell as willing to sacrifice reason to imagination, in practice his preaching reflected an informed rationality. As Wilson notes, for Bushnell, "imagination was not the opposite of doctrinal reflection, it was the opposite of abstract doctrinal formulation that was disconnected from experience."⁹² It is this understanding of the use of imagination for preaching that will remain the most helpful, as we shall see.

Nature and Grace in Sittler

Joseph Sittler, like Bushnell saw imagination as the core to faith.

*Imagination in its proper meaning is never an addition, it is an evocation. It is perception, not piquancy. Its work is not cosmetical or decorative; it is a function of percipiency. It is exercised not only in the perception of new qualities in things, but also in the discovery of hitherto unseen relationships between things.*⁹³

Sittler claimed that it was imagination that enabled the preacher to unite the "double character of Christian communication." The duality to which he refers is that of living in nature and in grace simultaneously. In this sense, Sittler's thinking is not unlike Sartre's depiction of the transcendent freedom of the imagination to move beyond living "in-the-midst-of-the-world."

*When once it is acknowledged that man is a creature of nature who nevertheless cannot settle for the natural and that he is an object of grace who nevertheless must celebrate grace in the natural - it is at the same time settled that any adequate theological explication must forever be two sided; that is, dialectical. Its statements will always have to walk the knife edge at the frontier or fuse together the magnitudes of nature and grace.*⁹⁴

The purpose of preaching, for Sittler, was not to easily overcome the divide between nature and grace. A part of Christian life is living in the tension that this duality causes. The preacher cannot gloss over the anxiety of living "in the world, but not of the world."

*Preaching dare not put into unbroken propositions what the tormented peace of simultaneous existence in nature and grace can utter only in broken sentences. What God has riven asunder let no preacher too suavely join together. ... The salvatory power of the word of God is eloquent precisely at the embarrassed halt. Where grammar cracks, grace erupts.*⁹⁵

Richard Lischer analyses Sittler's impact on imaginative preaching:

For Sittler the imagination is much more than a twister of texts or a turner of phrases. One of its functions is to fuse the theological what and the rhetorical how of each text, indeed, to show the inevitability of the how. ... Because humanity lives fully in the

⁹²Ibid, p.146.

⁹³Joseph Sittler, *The Ecology of Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p.46.

⁹⁴Ibid, p.47.

⁹⁵Ibid, p.56.

overlap of nature and grace, the religious imagination must be true to both, even if that fidelity means the loss of symmetry and polished assurance. Sittler offers preachers a succinct definition of the imagination: "Imagination is the process by which there is reenacted in the reader the salvatory immediacy of the word of God as this word is witnessed to by the speaker."⁹⁶

Defining imagination as the process of reenactment resonates with R.G. Collingwood's "historical imagination," which we shall examine later in this chapter. In essence, for Sittler, the imagination is the process whereby the subjective reality of the gospel is made part of the consciousness of the hearer in the act of preaching today.

Imagination in Modern Homiletics

Perhaps led by Sittler's Beecher lectures of 1959, today there is an increasing interest in imagination for preaching. Yet, the question remains as to whether the picture is any more clear than it was in Beecher and Bushnell's day. Troeger believes that the shift reflected in David Tracy's theology is echoed in modern homiletics.

Just as systematic theology reveals "the shift from the speculative reason of classical patristic, medieval and later idealist theologies to the more troubled, more modest reflections of the post-Kantian critical reason of modern theologies," so, too, does homiletics give evidence of transforming its models and hence its rules and norms for creativity.⁹⁷

Imagination as employed in story and narrative preaching, for example, is seen by Charles Rice as vital to the preaching process.

Image evokes image, story calls forth story, life speaks to life... but all of this depends upon the exegete / interpreter / preacher's capacity to live in the symbol, in this case in the very language and images of the text, to dwell in the house which the text provides. That capacity, an act of the imagination, is of the essence in forming sermons.⁹⁸

Even the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (USA) advocate the use of imagination in preaching. "The more we can turn to the picture language of the poet and storyteller, the more we will be able to preach in a way that invites people to respond from the heart as well as from the mind."⁹⁹ And Wilson finds in McFague's understanding of Jesus' parables an insight into imagination and preaching.

⁹⁶Richard Lischer, ed., *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition* (Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1987), p.243

⁹⁷Troeger, *Imagining...*, op cit, p.29

⁹⁸Charles Rice, in *Preaching Biblically*, Don Wardlaw, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p.104.

⁹⁹The Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* (U.S. Catholic, 1982), p.25.

Preaching may adopt the art of Jesus' parables, inviting the hearers to participate, involving them in what is being proclaimed, and looking for the completion of the preaching in their own lives. What Sallie McFague says of the parables may also be true of sermons and homilies: "They are not primarily concerned with knowing but with doing."¹⁰⁰

But it is probably David Buttrick more than any other homiletician today who has placed imagination at the heart of the preaching enterprise. Though he has his critics, his phenomenological approach to preaching, which is discussed elsewhere, relies heavily upon imagination. His description of imagination at work reflects Lakoff and Johnson's concept of "imaginative rationality."

The patterned grid of images, examples, and illustrations is designed to function with the structural "argument" of the sermon. Older homiletics basically viewed illustrations as support for particular ideas. . . Instead, we are suggesting that images, examples, and illustrations are woven into content and provide an underlying image grid for an entire sermon; they function similarly to the clusters of images in a poem, forming in consciousness along with a meaningful structure.¹⁰¹

As preaching creates or develops or taps into "consciousness" or "faith-consciousness" the hearers participate in "God's self-disclosure and saving grace now."¹⁰²

Imagination and Faith

This is crucial to the whole enterprise of imaginative preaching. In the end, it is not an attempt to communicate the preacher's ideas more completely or successfully. Rather it is a way of approaching an experience of the Spirit. This is what drives Troeger's employment of imagination in preaching.

Imaginative theology employs the visionary and integrative capacities of the mind to create theological understanding. It uses the powers of observation to become receptive to the Holy Spirit, who works upon our consciousness through patterns of association and juxtaposition. Imaginative theology in the pulpit utilizes those patterns to evoke similar reflections in the listeners.¹⁰³

The connection between faith and imagination is a vital clue to discovering the practical application in preaching. It is possible to assent to most of what we present here and still maintain that imagination is something only for the artistic few. And yet, for some, the

¹⁰⁰Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), p.25.

¹⁰¹David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p.163.

¹⁰²Ibid, p.116.

¹⁰³Troeger, *Imagining...*, op cit, p.26.

use of the imagination in matters of faith is not an option. Rather than suggesting that it might be helpful if we were able to imaginatively construct images of God, or of faith in action, McIntyre, for example, suggests that at the centre of questions of communicating faith is the imagination.

One temptation we have, I am convinced, to resist, and that is to approach parable as if it were no more than a form of analogy. ... [A]nd it is a danger to which we have equally to be alert, when we choose to equate religious language with metaphor. However, whether we speak as the Bible and New Testament scholars do of parable, or with the philosophers of religion of metaphor, either way, we are instantiating imagination at the heart of questions about the nature of our knowledge of God, and about how we speak of the God whom we thus know.¹⁰⁴

Our religious language, of parable or metaphor, is not a way of communicating what we already know, but it is a new or a deeper way of knowing. It is not an extraneous, or even an helpful, option to explore the work of the imagination. It is instead a part of the nature of faith.

IMAGINATIVE PREACHING

Exploring the process of moving from acceptance in principle to the practice of imaginative preaching is no doubt the dilemma facing many preachers. How in practice do we "challenge the reigning metaphors of secularist national culture with the images and narratives of faith?"¹⁰⁵ The process needs to be, as it has ever been in preaching, one of observation and application.

Observation

"The first step in preparing for this task is to sharpen our consciousness of those assumptive metaphors that shape and rule our own hearts."¹⁰⁶ Part of this process was discussed above as we listened to people like Fore and Postman who alerted us to the assumptive world of the media. We heed the analysis and begin to perceive the overwhelming dominance of certain myths and messages in our culture. But in addition to listening to others, it is important that the preacher becomes cognizant of his or her own experience of the media. The extent to which she or he is shaped by this world will be reflected in preaching. So, "one of the chief tasks of homiletics is to make the innocent eye the alerted eye, the eye that probes and detects the shadowed depths of our mythological worlds and is

¹⁰⁴McIntyre, op cit, p.151.

¹⁰⁵Thomas H. Troeger, "The Social Power ...," op cit, p.210.

¹⁰⁶Ibid, p.208.

aware of its own distortions and blind spots."¹⁰⁷ This is not merely a matter of watching more television, but exploring the roots of these accepted metaphors as they appear in other media, from consumer culture to church architecture. In addition, the preacher needs to be aware of the prevailing metaphors inherent in language and ecclesiastical structures. For example, feminist theologians and biblical scholars, such as Rosemary Ruether and Phyllis Trible, are attempting to alert us to the male dominated features of our culture. And Christine Smith, and others, alert us to the gender issues in homiletical methodologies.¹⁰⁸ In a similar way, the writings of theologians and homileticians from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds can alert our eyes to the limitation inherent in our ways of looking at our world.

Once the preacher is more attuned to reading the metaphoric network around him/her and the community, it then becomes possible to share this experience in preaching. And what is shared is not the result of the preacher's investigations, but rather the process. In this way, as the preacher moves from "the innocent eye to the alerted eye," the congregation can join in this journey of transformation.

Exercising the Imagination

We are now moving from observation to application. The preacher shares an experience, allowing her/his imagination to engage the imaginations of the hearers. Some preachers may allege a lack of imagination. But Wilson claims that imagination can be learned. "Many people associate imagination with artists and think of it as a gift one either has or does not have. But much of what we consider as imagination or art is a skill."¹⁰⁹

Some, like E.J. Furlong, emphasize the need for conscious effort to produce imaginative creativity.

*Creation, we may say, is to some extent a matter of natural endowment, to some extent deliberate endeavour. We can achieve novelty by conscious striving and preparation. But for outstanding success we need the kind of mind to which new patterns or successions of ideas, come with unusual ease.*¹¹⁰

The difficulty may be that preachers may be striving for "outstanding success" and would rather not risk the failure. Creativity is better left to certain arts, rather than the preaching act. Furlong, however suggests that creativity is a process that can be employed in any

¹⁰⁷Ibid, p.209.

¹⁰⁸See Christine M. Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989).

¹⁰⁹Wilson, *Imagination*, op cit, p.16.

¹¹⁰E.J. Furlong, *Imagination* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), p.84.

endeavour. "The activities that can be performed with imagination are, then, activities that allow some freedom in the use of the relevant material. They need not, as we saw, be what are usually reckoned as artistic materials."¹¹¹

Imagination in preaching is a process of employing freedom with the relevant material. Enabling this process is, according to Eugene Lowry, an exercise of the will.

*Skill is teachable, the logic goes, but art is a gift. I happen to both believe and yet not believe this conclusion. Certainly some people have intuitively fallen into patterns of artistic preparation that result in creativity. Not knowing precisely what the variables are, these creative people often are unable to identify them for the sake of others. Yet, I believe some of these variables are in fact identifiable. Moreover, I believe creativity is not something one has, but rather something one allows - that is, creativity is not a unique active resource one calls on directly by intention, but rather a passive capacity - shared in considerable degree both by those labelled "creative" and those not so labelled. In short I am suggesting that creativity is not a thing given to a few, but a possible result for the many.*¹¹²

Creative Juxtaposition

The imaginative process, as defined by Coleridge, repeated by many writers and echoed by Wilson, is a creative juxtaposition of seemingly dissimilar ideas. For the preacher it offers ways of making connections in the minds of the hearers, using familiar images and experiences to reveal new truth. Wilson contends that imaginative preaching enables a more holistic experience of the gospel.

*Imagination of the heart ... is similar to other acts of meaning in the communication process. We may understand it as the bringing together of two ideas that might not otherwise be connected and developing the creative energy they generate. ... Imagination may at times be a kind of wordless mystery that will involve pictures or other forms of mental sensory images. ... But in general we may understand that imagination is released by an ability to use polarities in language to create fresh ideas.*¹¹³

These "fresh ideas", if effectively used, work their way into the perceptual grid of the community to attempt to redefine reality along the lines of the gospel. Wilson invites preachers to explore the full extent of this creative process and to overcome our excessive rationalism that gets in the way of an appreciation of these exercises. For example, recognizing Ricoeur's distinction between the "is" and the "is not" of metaphor, Wilson stresses that

in trusting our imagination and that of our hearers, we need not pay undue attention to the "is not." The "is not" frequently is what we bring to a juxtaposition of opposites because our literal way of thinking tends immediately to say, "It cannot be. It is not.

¹¹¹Ibid, p.83.

¹¹²Eugene L. Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), p.93

¹¹³Wilson, *Imagination...*, op cit, p.32.

The two are not identical."¹¹⁴

"Logosomatic" Language

Troeger, on the other hand, encourages the preacher to be aware of the whole context of the preaching event in order to see the effect of imagination at work. In addition to exercises already mentioned (such as becoming more aware of one's context), Troeger emphasizes the experiential nature of imaginative language. He calls "this form of speaking 'logosomatic' language, because it proceeds from the creative ordering power of reality, the logos, as it works in and through our bodily (somatic) existence."¹¹⁵ There are a variety of elements in this idea of "logosomatic" language. One element invites the preacher to be aware of the sense impressions of the words of the sermon; not just what they mean but how they feel. He also draws attention to the aural quality of preaching. The sounds that the speaking voice make have an input into the communication beyond that of the words themselves. "The conceptuality of our sermons often make a less lasting impact on the listener than the sound in which the gospel is declared."¹¹⁶

Socializing Imagination

Ron Allen also sees the oral event as an integral part of imagination at work in the sermon. "The delivery of a sermon has a social effect. Indeed the mode of delivery embodies both the content of the sermon and the way in which people relate in the Christian community."¹¹⁷ This social effect is communicated in part through the images contained in the sermon.

*The illustrations and references to people and groups in the sermon have a particularly important social function as well. Those who appear, and do not appear, signal to the listeners who is important, who is not, who is valued, and who is ignored. The manner in which people and groups are pictured sends a clear message as to which social behaviours are approved and which are not.*¹¹⁸

"Types" of Imaginative Preaching

We listen to all of the suggestions and exercises and begin to have some sort of picture in mind as to what imaginative preaching might look like. Though by its very nature there

¹¹⁴Ibid, p.44.

¹¹⁵Troeger, *Imagining...*, op cit, p.56.

¹¹⁶Ibid, p.70.

¹¹⁷Allen, op cit, p.184.

¹¹⁸Ibid, p.183.

will not be one form of imaginative preaching. Structurally it will be as varied as the preachers themselves. In addition, imagination has many different aspects. McIntyre identifies twelve different ways in which the imaginative process of mind works.¹¹⁹ Some of these "types of imagination" include the process of sensitivity and selection in which Troeger encourages preachers to engage. McIntyre also discusses the "communicative" role of imagination, which is similar in some ways to Troeger's "logosomatic" language.

Historical Imagination

Another of the types, which has been briefly mentioned earlier is Collingwood's "Historical Imagination." McIntyre calls this "Contemporanising," and defines it as "making the past present."¹²⁰

Collingwood considers that historical imagination can "do for the historical consciousness of today what Kant's transcendental analytic did for the scientific consciousness of the eighteenth century."¹²¹ The process is essentially one of "creating" a more complete picture of the past in order to understand and interpret historical behaviour and experience. "This act of interpolation is in no way arbitrary or merely fanciful; it is necessary or in Kantian language *a priori* ... What is in this way inferred is essentially something imagined."¹²² The imagination provides the detail of historical life. For Collingwood, this is not an extraneous detailing of non-essentials, but the very essence of history. The imaginative construct of historical events becomes the authority by which other historical extrapolations are made.

The crux of this process for preachers is that in addition to making the past of the gospel "come alive" in the hearing of the sermon, in the imaginative construct the past becomes linked with the present. What we are, as the people of God, is seen in what "we" have been as the people of God.

Historical thinking is that activity of the imagination by which we endeavour to provide this innate idea with detailed content, and we do this by using the present as evidence for its own past. Every present has a past of its own, and my imaginative reconstruction of the past aims at reconstructing the past of this present, the present in which the act

¹¹⁹McIntyre, op cit, pp.159-168. See also Th. Ribot, *Essay on the Creative Imagination*, Albert H.N. Baron, trans. (London: Kegan Paul, 1906), pp. 184-220. Ribot identifies seven "types."

¹²⁰Ibid, p.165.

¹²¹R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p.233.

¹²²Ibid, p.240.

*of imagination is going on, as here and now perceived.*¹²³

The historical imagination is not simply about the past, but it is about the past as it intersects with the present. Preaching, similarly, is not simply about events two thousand years ago, but about those events as they impinge upon the living of faith today.

Empathetic Imagination

Making connections is one effect of imaginative preaching. Connections between past and present are made in historical imagination. Connections between persons in their individuality is a function of what McIntyre calls "Empathetic Imagination." Alfred Margulies expressed the importance of empathetic imagination in therapy. The crux of empathy, says Margulies, is to be as fully present in the moment as humanly possible. The imaginative therapist, or imaginative preacher, attempts "to maintain an evenly hovering attention, to suspend the world, ... [to achieve] the capacity to go against the grain of needing to know."¹²⁴ What is suspended is the intellectual distance from the experience that thinking people have created. The reason demands that the observer stands apart so as not to be influenced by the emotion of the event. This distance affects how we interpret events and may even, according to Margulies, keep us from seeing or knowing what is actually taking place. "Once we have learned how a thing is *supposed* to be, we experience it differently - and never again directly. Maturity places an obscuring veil of understanding between us and the world."¹²⁵ Empathy, on the other hand, demands an experiential encounter. "To know fully *what* we are doing, to feel it, to experience it all through our being, is much more important than to know *why*." To do this we must "deconstruct the body of one's elaborate contributions to perception."¹²⁶ The aim of this exercise is "*Einfuhling*, which is sometimes translated "empathy," means literally, "feeling into something."¹²⁷

The "something" into which the imaginative preacher feels is the inner context and existence of the hearers. Gerard Manley Hopkins named this inner context "inscape." The process by which the inscape attempts to connect with the wider experience of the human community is "instress."

¹²³Ibid, p.247.

¹²⁴Alfred Margulies, *The Empathic Imagination* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), p.12.

¹²⁵Ibid, pp.7-8.

¹²⁶Ibid, pp.14-15.

¹²⁷John Patton, *From Ministry to Theology: Pastoral Action and Reflection* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), p.34.

*But the external world and the interior world of the self are not entirely separate. Our bodies are both a part of ourselves and part of the external world. In this sense of "inscape" and "instress" Hopkins finds the interior world of consciousness appropriating the exterior in its most particularized, individualized form. Inscaperefers to the utter individuality and distinctiveness that marks each individual existence, its "thisness," haecceitas. Instress refers to the fusion of the inscape of a given being with a given human consciousness in contact at a given moment with that being in all its uniqueness.*¹²⁸

This process of "instress" is the human attempt to make contact with the wider world, to know and to be known. The empathetic imagination attempts to connect with the inscape of others in the process of instress. It brings a "... sensitivity to the differentiation or particularity that constitutes the internal world, to the deeply interiorized, individual, isolated, yet communally oriented self."¹²⁹ In imagination one individual can "feel into" the isolated interior of another individual. "'Instress' suggests Coleridge's well-known unifying, detail fusing 'imagination' as contrasted with mere fancy or fantasy. As Coleridge often did, Hopkins is attending not only to such energy in the human interior but also to the energy concentrated in a given being or beings in the external world as well."¹³⁰ Thus the communal orientation can be realized through this empathetic interaction which "is a dialectic, a creation of the relationship, a continuous coming into being of *possibilities* requiring further exploration."¹³¹

Features of Imaginative Preaching

There are a number of other "types" of imaginative process. These include an evocative role and the creating of world views, both of which will be touched on later in this chapter. Throughout all of these types, however, there will be some common features that will appear in one degree or another.

Resonant Images

First of all there will be something to "see." Images in preaching involve verbal constructs which invite congregations to draw pictures in their heads. To this end they will be of various types. These verbal images may, as we have seen, connect with common images in the life of the community: re-presentations of advertising images perhaps, or references to

¹²⁸Walter J. Ong, SJ, *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p.156.

¹²⁹Ibid, p.154.

¹³⁰Ibid, p.17.

¹³¹Margulies, op cit, p.12.

popular characters from film and/or television. At times we may find effective sermons being preached in these media. We may find concrete depictions of grace at work in human existence, of the realities of repentance, or an individual working out salvation with fear and trembling. To ignore these popular images that support the Christian faith in some way is to ignore the universality of the human condition and the activity of God. Though these images may be few, and be vastly overwhelmed by the glorification of the darker side of life, when they do appear it is more than worth our while to draw attention to them.

It is not necessary to re-tell the whole plot of a programme or to tell all about the character or situation. "To tell a small part of the story, sometimes even to use a single word or image, is to evoke the meaning, memory, and power of the whole."¹³² We can rely upon the collective consciousness of the hearers to understand the reference. Even if certain individuals have not seen the specific programme or film, they will understand the genre and be able to make the appropriate connections. However, this type of image making in preaching is a minor one and is not unlike the traditional understanding of illustration, where an idea is given a visual referent serving a function somewhat like an effigy.

Reconstructive Images

More commonly, imaginative preaching employs verbal images to *reconstruct* the pictures in the head. The preacher offers a new image to replace or to recast the old ones. Sometimes these images will be presented as narrative or descriptive in structure. For example, the preacher tells a story that attempts to look at present reality in a new way, drawing attention to the patterns of prejudice or instances of injustice that have become so much a part of our understanding of the world that they no longer seem to be the insidious manifestations of human sin that they are. Or perhaps the preacher retells the story and removes these elements so that the practice of living in Christian community becomes "more real," a genuine possibility. Here the preacher works to describe a Christian vision of the world, one that has elements of the world as we know it but is "perfected" by the gospel. It is a way of depicting the living out of faith. These descriptions need to be specific enough to counter the images already present in the minds of the community, but with sufficient gaps so that the congregation has work to do in filling in the details. The idea is to leave the story the freedom to become the story of the hearer and not remain the story of the teller. This is a complex process and many who are reluctant to use narrative are aware of the power of story to take control from both teller and hearer. Such fears seem to misunderstand how stories work. A story can be said to have power only as it engages a hearer's reality. The power is

¹³²Allen, op cit, p.168.

not inherent in the story but in the experience of hearing and applying or accepting the truth of that story for one's own life. The power comes not from the story as it is, but from the story as it becomes "my story" or related in some way to "my story." The gospel story, for example, might be said to have inherent power. Yet that power is only effected when it actually engages in the life of the hearer to bring about transformation. This process of engagement, then, is central to both story and imaginative preaching.

But narrative is not the only means of imaginative preaching, as Wilson is keen to point out. Other forms of discourse can also relate to the pictures in our heads. Metaphor is perhaps chief among them. Here, new understandings of reality flower in the minds of the hearers as new images beget a new spring. The Bible is full of metaphors that attempt to point toward one reality in terms of another, and in the process both are transformed. The metaphor of the wedding feast for the reign of God both gives us a grasp of the kingdom and a new appreciation of meal time. The preacher's task, then, is to discern new metaphors that similarly redefine and concretize the gospel and our everyday life in the 1990's. This is not to say that the biblical images are now passé or empty. But that, whether by overuse or distance, many of them have ceased to communicate the freshness that can startle us into a new experience. Though we worry about the level of biblical illiteracy in modern society, many of the metaphors and images from the text have become so much a part of our language that many people would be surprised to discover their source. Popular culture is quick to make use of biblical vocabulary for new messages and in the process devaluing (or at least revaluing) certain key concepts central to the faith. This does not mean that these words are now of no use to us in imaginative preaching. It does mean that they might carry new connotations for some of our community of which we might not be aware. The word "salvation," for example, appears regularly in popular music from all sorts of contexts. Some of these might be quite compatible and even invigorating to Christian faith, others may not be. The task remains for the preacher, and the community of faith as a whole, to infuse our core images with an immediacy and vitality, whether these images be thousands of years old or newly created.

Images will abound, not, primarily, to hang onto ideas like ornaments on a Christmas tree, but to re-present and re-define. The move towards imagistic language reflects both our theology and our understanding of communication. Our theology is incarnational, at its heart is Word and Image, or, as Dillistone says, story and picture. In communication "symbol is the critical concept. What atom is to physical science and cell to biology, symbol becomes for communications. ... Communication is the creative process of building and reaffirming

through symbols, and culture signifies the constructions which result."¹³³ If this is the root of communication, then not only will symbol (word, gesture, image) be at the core of our preaching, but the community, working together, will engage in the creative process of redefining symbol and thus reshaping culture. And it is the gospel that guides the process of reshaping, foreshadowing the Kingdom of God towards which we aspire.

Feelings

This transformation will not take place by means of rationality alone. Images, verbal or pictorial, do not primarily appeal to the intellect. Imagination in preaching will engage the heart. It will involve feelings. Many preachers are reluctant to speak in such terms for fear of becoming sentimental or, worse, emotional manipulators. Yet to preach to the heart is not to ignore the head. Instead, we look to the Old Testament for a reinterpretation of heart. As Wilson says

*in Old Testament literature, the heart is understood as the seat of the emotions, the intellect, the will, and the spiritual life. ... The heart is the place of personhood. When we use the phrase "imagination of the heart," we want it to retain something of the Hebrew sense of heart, therefore, of coming close to the ground of our being.*¹³⁴

Indeed, feelings are not something we should be shy of approaching or embracing. Can we say we have understood something if it hasn't been felt as well as considered? Educationalists will tell us that the best kind of learning is experiential learning, learning that feels. Kevin Vanhoozer finds in Ricoeur's philosophy a significant place for feeling as a way of connecting with the world.

*A feeling is much more than an "emotion." It is a way of orienting oneself in the world. Feelings relate us to the world in quite a different manner than does knowledge. At the same time, Ricoeur insists that feelings are intentional acts that have intentional objects or referents. Whereas knowledge tends to make the subject feel "distant" from the object, feelings "involve" us with things on another level. The mystery of feeling for Ricoeur is that we have to do not only with subjective states but with our profound connection to beings and Being.*¹³⁵

Experiential Dialogue

In Chapter IV, the concept of preaching as dialogue was outlined. In that

¹³³Clifford G. Christians, "What Does Communication Science Say About the Communication of Faith" (unpublished paper presented at Yale Divinity School, February, 1992), p.6.

¹³⁴Wilson, *Imagination...*, op cit, p.19.

¹³⁵Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.61-2.

understanding preaching becomes a way of involving the whole community and not just the preacher. Throughout the current chapter we have attempted to talk about imagination as the means whereby the preacher can make connections; between preacher and congregation, between gospel and life, between culture and Kingdom of God. By definition, then, this must involve feelings. The hearers must be seen as whole persons and not just heads. As Walter Wangerin has said,

*when you do that, you invite, as well, the wholeness of the hearers. Then not only their analytic minds, but their laughter shall be in the pew; and by their laughter, their lungs and their consternation; their bodies, their sympathy, their emotions, their distress, their inadequacy, their male- and femaleness, their parenthood -- their experience! You will be inviting them as people (not only as students)...*¹³⁶

As the preaching event engages, as the hearer moves from being separate to being involved in the preaching, as imaginations are engaged, then feelings are aroused, connections are made and transformation can begin to take place. Rather than being frightened of this prospect, preachers, whose own feelings are engaged, can provide space in the preaching event for the experiences of the congregation. This is not, however, a call for preacher to aim for an emotional effect. This deliberate attempt to dictate a specific emotive response is an unhealthy manipulation. Instead, in an atmosphere of trust and respect, the community is allowed the freedom to be human in the preaching event, and to approach with a whole heart the speaking and hearing the Word of God.

Transcendent Reality

Imaginative preaching will be full of images, rich with experience, connected with the community's prevailing metaphors, but offering a reinterpretation. Imaginative preaching redefines existence, because as the gospel images impact the pictures in our heads a new reality emerges. Preaching is about transformation, about offering a vision of a world not seen with the eyes of the body but the eyes of faith. As Sartre's explication revealed, imagination is that process whereby the human mind is set free from the confines of the "real," and able to experience the transcendental.

This is not to say that preaching is about "pie in the sky." Imagining the "unreal" is not to abdicate from present existence. On the contrary, imagination expresses human freedom.

[Imagining] is free in the special sense of giving rise to multiple options, directions and routes. To be free in this fashion is to realize freedom of mind to the fullest. For the human mind thrives on variation, even as it seeks unification; and imagining, more than any other mental act, proceeds by proliferation: it is the primary way in which the mind diversifies itself and its contents. Mind is free - is indeed most free - in

¹³⁶Walter Wangerin, "Preaching" in *Ragman and Other Cries of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), p.77.

imagining.¹³⁷

The freedom and dialogue of imaginative preaching enables a constructive and realistic world view to emerge from the community. This world view stands in the present and interprets the world as it is experienced by the various members of the community. This experience is limited since humans are finite beings. But the encounter is with the world all the more real for that limitation; because part of what we experience is our own weakness, our own inability to fully comprehend the other. That frustrated desire to know and to be known drives our imagination as individuals and sparks our vision as a community.

Christian World View

The creation of a world view is not a by-product of imaginative preaching; it is the aim. Imagination is an act of freedom, but the freedom is not unconnected to the purposes of the gospel. The gospel is the "restraint" upon the imagination. This restraint is not understood to be a limitation as much as a definition. It is the perspective out of which imagination works. As Sartre noted, "the freedom of consciousness must not be confused with the arbitrary. For an image is not simply the *world-negated*, it is always *the world negated from a certain point of view*...."¹³⁸ The realm of the transcendent reality is defined by the gospel. And the gospel provides the guide to the imagination. It is, then, in the Kantian sense, bound imagining. "Bound imagining is imagining which is done in the context or service of some ongoing or overarching activity."¹³⁹ This binding, however, works in both the cognitive and the aesthetic senses described by Kant.¹⁴⁰ By this I mean that imaginative preaching sometimes aims clearly toward understanding. At other times, as in Kant, imaginative preaching "may supply a wealth of undeveloped material for the understanding. ... But the understanding employs this material not so much objectively, for cognition, as subjectively, namely to quicken the cognitive powers, though indirectly this does serve cognition too."¹⁴¹ In other words, imaginative preaching is bound by the gospel, but at times the result is to provide "undeveloped material" that the hearer employs both subjectively and objectively to come to some sort of understanding. This process may take some time and

¹³⁷Ed Casey, *Imagining* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp.200-201.

¹³⁸Sartre, *op cit*, p.207.

¹³⁹Ed Casey, "The Image/Sign Relation in Husserl and Freud," *The Review of Metaphysics*, XXX, December 1976.

¹⁴⁰See Kant, *op cit*, p.185.

¹⁴¹*Ibid*, p.185.

be reinforced in the external dialogue of the community.

Over time the point of view from which imaginative preaching takes place helps to create a world view out of which a community defines itself. Sharing in a world view enables us to act as a community. Allen identifies three objectives of a world view:

*(1) It provides the community with a sense of order and security in the face of chaos and death. The Christian community, for instance, confesses that God has overcome chaos. (2) It answers the questions of identity, Who am I? Why am I here? I am a person who has been brought by Jesus Christ into a covenantal relationship to the God of Abraham and Sarah. (3) It orders social life. The conviction that God is by nature just, causes the Christian community to seek justice in all social relationships.*¹⁴²

Communal Identity and Imagination

This is the communal aspect of preaching which invites preacher and hearer to share in a common act. Making things common is, in the end, what communication is all about. Christian communicators are putting the gospel into the common space so that it becomes not the preacher's story, but our story. Communication, as we have seen, is increasingly being understood as fundamentally a dialogical process. The old transmission models are no longer seen as adequate. Theologically those models are suspect as well. Incarnation is God's attempt to establish dialogue by entering into our world and experiences. Paolo Freire has offered new models of communication that echo this theological language.

*Efficient communication requires the Subjects in dialogue to direct their 'entering into' towards the same object. It requires that they express it by means of linguistic signs belonging to a linguistic universe common to both so that they can have a similar comprehension of the object of communication.*¹⁴³

Thus we see that the preacher's task is to participate in a dialogical process with the community, entering into the same "object" which is the gospel, or "faith-consciousness" as Buttrick names it. Imaginative preaching is a process of "imagining with" and not primarily "imagining for." In actual process there may be an element of the latter, but this must in the end function as a catalyst for the imagination of the community. It may be a slow process as congregations are reluctant to move from the position that claims that preaching is the minister's task. But as the dialogue of preaching grows, as the preacher begins to imagine with the congregation, then preaching becomes the community's task and functions as one of the dynamics around which the community shapes and defines itself. This binding together and participation in a common vision is one antidote to our electronic culture which, as Clifford Christians asserts, "dislocates us from both space and history. It ruptures historical

¹⁴²Allen, op cit, p. 168.

¹⁴³Paolo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973), p.141.

consciousness and pushes us into world citizenship ill-equipped to play that role. Without specific anchors in time, space, or eternity, we are ripe for electronic picking, coopted [sic] by mass media images."¹⁴⁴ The gospel images, re-imaged in imaginative preaching, serve to counter balance the deluge of mediated images. Yet, even a renewed understanding of communal imaginative preaching seems but a small response to the powerful machine of modern culture.

Cultural Resistance

It may be too great a task to stand against a tide of images, some of which we can support and claim, but much of which we must oppose as antithetical to a Christian world view. In the face of such overwhelming forces, Christian conversation appears powerless. Yet, participation in that common world view or image structure is the first step toward change. For David Tracy understanding the analogous guides to one another's life enables us to make contact. From there "if we converse, it is likely we will both be changed as we focus upon the subject matter itself - the fundamental questions and the classical responses in our traditions. That analogical imagination seems and is a very small thing. And yet it does suffice."¹⁴⁵ And especially, we might add, if those fundamental questions are grounded in the gospel.

Cultural Transformation

We claim our world view and understand its human limitations. And we are changed in the process. But this internal transformation is not the end of the process. As Sallie McFague asserts, "To become aware of the metaphors that govern basic perspectives is, among other things, a political act, for the possibility of change both at the personal and public levels depends upon consciousness of hidden metaphors..."¹⁴⁶ As we attempt to redefine ourselves and our participation in culture, we are engaging in a process of change that has a social effect. Our stance toward modern culture is in many regards similar to that of the first Christians. Just as we stand against the overwhelming power of modern media, so those few first Christians stood against the Roman Empire. Wayne Meeks reminds us of the effect of those small bands of believers.

Those odd little groups of Christians in a dozen or so cities of the Roman East were engaged, though they would not have put it quite this way, in constructing a new world.

¹⁴⁴Christians, op cit, p.11.

¹⁴⁵Tracy, op cit, p.91.

¹⁴⁶McFague, *Metaphorical Theology...*, op cit, p.55.

*In time, more time than they thought was left, their ideas, their images of God, their ways of organizing life, their rituals, would become part of a massive transformation, in ways they could not have foreseen, of the culture of the Mediterranean basin and of Europe.*¹⁴⁷

Their communal imagination reshaped, not just their interior landscape, but the world which surrounded them. Duncan Forrester notes that this process of the Church working to shape the larger society was at work in Europe. "Benedict is one of the patrons of Europe, who through his development of monasticism shaped and unified Europe. The significance of this is that a serious attempt to live the Christian life, to *be* the Church made a vast, but indirect, contribution to the development of Europe."¹⁴⁸

Many modern Christians are bemoaning the loss of the Church's power to transform society. They look for pronouncements and the taking of social and political stands by the leaders of the various religious bodies, and are usually disappointed. But Troeger believes that this is a fundamental misunderstanding of the Church's power to transform. "Such power derives primarily not from defining Christian positions on specific problems of civil governance, but rather from the mythological world that is inscribed in the heart by the community's corporate ritual."¹⁴⁹

Forrester describes this transforming power as part of the very nature of the community itself. Rather than working from the centre of society, the Christian community lives and works on the margins.

*Such communities are not bolt-holes for the timid, but by their very existence, by the way they structure their common life, by the nature of their celebrations, a constructive protest against the established order, "the rule of the barbarians." They are demonstrations of the viability of another way, which insistently by their very existence question the adequacy of the community in which they are set. They point to a better way, and are themselves signs, instruments, and proleptic and partial manifestations of the kingdom.*¹⁵⁰

The mythological world or the perceptual grid or Christian world view is what empowers transformation. Working from the inside out, the community redefines itself and reshapes society. The nature of the Christian community, thus defined, demands an outward orientation. "This community is accordingly a parallel society, an alternative way of life. But it is not a ghetto, for the very notion of living within the truth is inescapably concerned with

¹⁴⁷Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p.192.

¹⁴⁸Duncan B. Forrester, "The Place of the Church in Europe," unpublished paper, p.10.

¹⁴⁹Troeger, "Social Power...", op cit, pp.210-211.

¹⁵⁰Forrester, op cit, p.10.

the welfare of others. The community is thus responsible for the world and for others."¹⁵¹

CONCLUSIONS

Imaginative preaching, and imaginative theology behind it, can help to drive this power to change. On the other hand, "if theology becomes overly abstract, conceptual, and systematic, it separates thought and life, belief and practice, words and their embodiment, making it more difficult if not impossible for us to believe in our hearts what we confess with our lips."¹⁵² As theology becomes overly conceptualized, preaching moves away from imagination to an over emphasis on rationality. The result is that "the transforming power of the church declines whenever it loses its religious imagination, ... its ability to envision and communicate images of an alternate reality that can break the rim of normative consciousness."¹⁵³

McFague believes that "Christian belief must always be a process of coming to belief - like a story - through the ordinary details of historical life."¹⁵⁴ This process is kept alive, she says, by parabolic metaphor which "keep *in solution* the language, belief, and life we are called to, and hence they address people totally."¹⁵⁵ Grasping this concept involves a certain amount of letting go. Only by letting go of certain aspects of rationalism (of always looking for the point of the parable, the idea behind the image) can we begin to experience the transforming and even healing power of imagination. In community, imagination works to create images and symbols, world views and stories that offer a new identity and new meaning.

It might be argued that this understanding of imaginative preaching is more like art than proclamation. That may not be a bad thing. Especially if we accept the definition of art with which R.G. Collingwood concluded his work *The Principles of Art*. Here art is seen as an agent of transformation, working in community much like imaginative preaching has here been described.

We can perhaps detect one more characteristic which art must have. ... [i]t must be prophetic. The artist must prophesy ... in the sense that he tells the audience, at the risk of their displeasure, the secrets of their own hearts. His business as an artist is to speak out. ... But what he has to utter is not ... his own secrets. ... The secrets he must utter are

¹⁵¹Ibid, p.12.

¹⁵²McFague, *Speaking...*, op cit, p.1.

¹⁵³Troeger, "Social Power...", op cit, p.211.

¹⁵⁴McFague, *Speaking...*, op cit, p.3.

¹⁵⁵Ibid, p.1.

*theirs. The reason they need him is that no community knows its own heart: and by failing in this knowledge a community deceives itself on the one subject concerning which ignorance means death. For the evils which come from that ignorance the poet as prophet suggests no remedy because he has already given one. The remedy is in the poem itself. Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of the mind, the corruption of consciousness.*¹⁵⁶

Underneath, we can hear the call for preachers to tell forth, to communicate a common story, to re-image a world view. Substitute *imagination* for *art* and *the preaching community* for *artist* and we may say amen to that.¹⁵⁷

Imaginative preaching resonates with our theological reflections on communication and preaching. In addition, it is congruent with the communication structures and dominant language of the television age. The question for the next chapter is whether this understanding of and these structures for preaching spontaneously arise in preachers as they attempt to communicate to a community living in a television age. Are preachers already responding to these communicative changes or does the "media gap" intrude into the pulpit?

¹⁵⁶R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), pp.335-336.

¹⁵⁷As an attempt at a practical application of the implications of this chapter, two sermons, with critique are submitted in the Appendix E.

VI CASE STUDY: OPINIONS AND PRACTICE OF PREACHING

NEW COLLEGE STUDENTS

The two groups of New College students were involved, on various levels, in the study of preaching. The smaller group (Group A) was made up of students who had little experience of or direct teaching in preaching. The second group (Group B) was made up of students exploring the details of the subject of preaching. Most had some preaching experience in attachment, and a few had quite considerable preaching experience as lay preachers or missionaries.

The purpose of this part of the case study was to assess whether the students felt any tension between communication in the television age and communication from the pulpit. It was, in part, to determine whether students engaged in the study of preaching are sensitive to the changing nature of communication in society.

When I embarked on this study I expected that the students, and particularly those for whom television was a major leisure time activity, would express a dissatisfaction with preaching as it was being presented from the pulpits today. In a similar way, I expected that the students' images and strategies for their own preaching ministry would be more concerned with the images of communication outlined in the preceding two chapters of this thesis. The fact that neither of these expectations turned out to be accurate does not undermine the thesis as much as underline the scale of the problem of preaching in a television age.

ATTITUDES TOWARD PREACHING

As Hearers

All of the students, but one, attended worship regularly. By examining the responses the students made to the preachers they were hearing, it was possible to discern the images of and priorities for preaching that the students hold.

The students were asked whether they were personally satisfied with the preaching they heard. In a session with Group B, this idea caused some considerable discussion. "What does satisfied mean?" asked one student. "It must mean 'does it do the job,' don't you think?" declared another. Though some of the students were reluctant to accept such a "utilitarian" idea of preaching (preaching is what works), the group as a whole was willing to respond to this concept. Preaching that both was faithful to the contexts (gospel, local church, 1990's Scotland, etc.) and that served to evoke a response could be seen as *satisfactory*. But even the eight of the seventeen students who claimed to be satisfied with the preaching they heard did not want to state that it was always of the highest standard, and that some aspects (particularly

the evoking of a response) were especially difficult to assess. It proved very difficult for many of the students to speak personally, to say "I was moved by a sermon" or "I responded in this way." They much preferred to assess how they believed the rest of the congregation responded to preaching.

As we move then to an examination of the students' assessment of the preaching that they heard, the distinction between those who were satisfied and those who were unsatisfied will be an important one.

Assessing Preaching

Looking first at the two groups together, we can see that the students were largely supportive. Given a list of positive and negative adjectives, the students were asked to describe the preaching they heard. As reflected in the graph (Figure 1), the positive statements ranked higher than the negative ones, though some were close. *Informative* was given the highest approval, followed closely by *Inspiring*. Even *Entertaining* came out slightly ahead of any negative statement. Oddly enough, however, the negative statement that closely followed was *Boring*. This, in part, reflects the divide among the students between those who were satisfied and those who were unsatisfied with

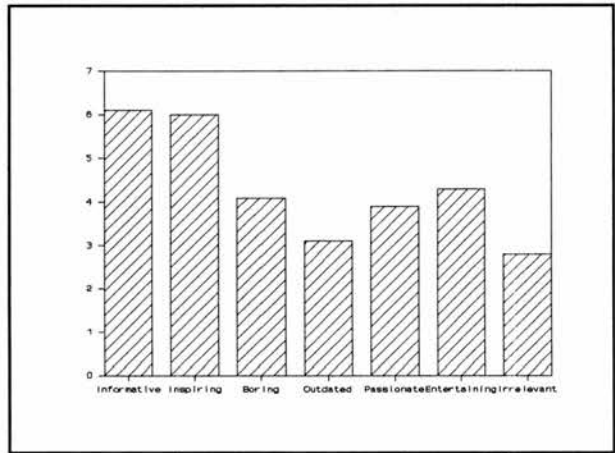


Figure 1 Student Assessment of Preaching

preaching. The only positive statement that did not receive approval among the students was *Passionate*.

The whole issue of "passion" or emotion in preaching raised concern amongst both groups of students. "Preaching is about giving options or ideas, not about manipulating emotions." Many students had great difficulty in talking about emotion without talking about manipulation. The one seemed to lead inexorably to the other. "It's a very dangerous thing to start playing with the emotions." There was no talk about playing with *minds*, or the manipulation of *ideas*, but emotion in preaching was something that was either "played with," or used to manipulate. One Group B student, after preaching a largely narrative sermon in class, raised the issue of preaching "that engages the whole person. Surely, we are more than just minds. The gospel hits us where we live, our hearts as well as our heads." While the other students wanted to agree with this image of preaching, they also wanted to emphasize that the

mind must direct the process at all times. The emotions must not gain ascendancy. "I don't want my congregation to lose control because of something I say, or worse, the way that I say it," declared one student. Losing control was for many of the students the likely, if not inevitable, result of introducing emotions into preaching.

It is also curious that the students had much less trouble talking about preaching as *Entertaining* than they did in talking about preaching and emotions. "Entertainment" was seen by many of the students as "the spoonful of sugar that can help the medicine of the gospel go down." Though this comment brought great derision, the complaint was more on the depiction of the gospel ("The gospel isn't medicine!") than it was on the description of preaching. The students were not, however, advocating a "stand-up comedy" school of preaching. It was often said that "we are forced to consider our 'performance' because of television. But that doesn't mean we must become performers."

If we examine the responses of the students who stated that they were unsatisfied with the preaching that they hear, we get, of course, a very different picture. Yet we can begin to see some patterns. As reflected in Figure 2, the word most often cited, by a considerable margin, as a description of preaching was *Boring*. And, naturally, the word receiving by far the fewest citations was *Entertaining*.

On the other hand, the students who were satisfied with the preaching they heard were overwhelmingly positive. The negative term with the most affirmation, though considerably lower than the lowest of the positive terms, was *Boring*.

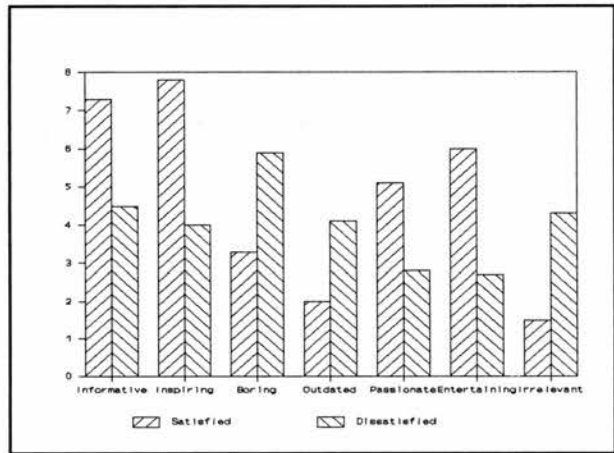


Figure 2 Student Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction

Figure 3 reveals that, in general, the Group A students were more negative than the Group B students. In Group B all of the positive terms were cited well above any of the negative ones. Though there was a considerable gap between the positive responses and the negative ones, *Boring* was cited more often than any other negative term.

There seem to be a number of reasons why Group B was more consistently positive than Group A. The most obvious is that there was a higher percentage of students in Group A who claimed to be unsatisfied with the preaching they heard. In Group A over half were unsatisfied, while in Group B less than a third were unsatisfied. It is also the case that the Group A students who were unsatisfied were inclined to be more consistently negative than

were those in Group B who were unsatisfied. This points to a second element in the disparity in responses: awareness of the complexity of the preaching task. In a later section, we shall look at how prepared the students feel to approach the preaching task themselves. But already we can see that those with more experience are less inclined to be critical of other preachers.

It is, perhaps, worth highlighting that in both groups the negative term receiving the most mention is *Boring*. Like the somewhat reluctant acceptance of *Entertaining* as a valid description of good preaching, the verdict of *Boring* as the most damnable offence is, I believe, a significant reflection of a television society that appears even in this somewhat rarefied sphere.

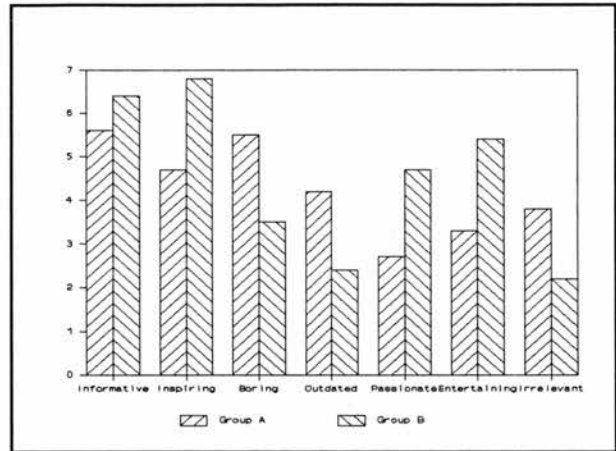


Figure 3 Student Groups A & B

Complaints of Preaching

All of the students were asked to judge the appropriateness of a number of standard "complaints" about preaching. The students were asked to be more critical of preaching whether they were initially positive or negative concerning the preaching that they heard. As expected, the former were less inclined to find fault than the latter. In Appendix C there is a much more complete assessment of the students' responses to these complaints about preaching. There are a few salient points from this exercise worth highlighting.

The single most cited complaint is that the preaching they hear is *Not Exciting*. Even those favourable to the preaching, were still inclined to agree with this statement. As outlined in both Chapter I and Chapter IV, communication that is most acceptable and interesting is that which engages with the whole person. As long as preaching is detached from emotion, separated from experience, we can expect that even the most supportive congregation members will declare that preaching is "not exciting." Preaching does indeed suffer in comparison with the most common programmes on television. These students are not, I believe, immune to that effect and, therefore, quite naturally notice the lack of "excitement" in preaching.

In a similar way the issue of relevance comes to the fore. In Chapter IV attention was drawn to a shift in emphasis from content to relevance in sermon critique. Here we see the students acceptance, to a degree, of that assessment. Although there did not seem to be any lack of comprehension, there was concern raised about a lack of relevance. These students,

like most members of local congregations, have been exposed to innumerable advertisements, for example, that strive to make the most obscure products supremely relevant to everyday life. It is no surprise that they might be expecting a similar relevance to the gospel as they hear it preached from week to week.

The fact that a number of students complained that sermons were, in general, too long reflects quite a bit of current communication research. The decline in attention span, as referred to earlier, does seem to have some effect in all sorts of communication events of which preaching is but one. If we tie in the complaints about the lack of excitement and of relevance, then it is no surprise that many students' sense of preaching time is that it is inordinately long.

What does seem surprising is that a number of the students were just as adamant that sermons were too short. This seems against the common wisdom of the media age. Television communication deals in three minute (or three second) soundbites, according to some critics more interested in making impressions than arguments. Sermons are designed to do something different and, it would seem therefore, ought to take more time. Yet, we might also see that the desire to have more time devoted to preaching might be seen in some ways congruent with a television society. It could be argued that since television programmes are 25 to 50 minutes in length in order to tell a whole story, sermons should also have time to develop the "plot," "storyline" or theme. A sermon, in other words, should not be compared to a soundbite, but to a programme that is made up of smaller components. Even the most traditional structures for preaching do not depict sermons as one seamless whole, but rather as a series of thoughts building an idea or argument. About half of the students sensed a lack of input in the preaching they heard, sermons were too short. Part of this sensation might be due to the fact that, for some of them, the parts did not come together to build a sermon but were disjointed soundbites.

It is, of course, also possible that the students' complaint is not a reflection of television influence, but a reaction against it. Television trivialises by dealing with serious subjects too briefly, sermons should take more time to expound an idea. This "preaching as counter-culture" idea is also reflected in the students argument against the preacher as performer. Though the students were concerned about presentation, they did not, for the most part, want to talk about preaching as performance. They saw this as a reduction in the potency of preaching. "We don't want to be wrapped up only in image," more than one would declare. The dichotomy, for some of the students, was between ideas that carry sufficient seriousness and images that were "fluff" or mere presentation. It must be said that the students in Group B had a more sympathetic view of image, particularly at the end of their course. For some of them, however, too many negative connotations remained.

Positive Aspects of Preaching

In addition to being asked about the negative aspects of the preaching they heard, the students were asked to make some positive assessment as well. The students, as a whole, were much more positive about the logic or idea oriented elements of the preaching than they were about the story or image elements. They were, for example, more willing to consider that the preaching they heard *Made Sense* than to claim that it contained *Good Images* or *Stories*. In general, however, the students were willing to be more positive than negative about the preaching that they heard. A more complete explication of student responses to the positive aspects of the preaching they heard can be found in Appendix C.

As well as assessing the positive qualities of the preaching, the students were asked to make some assessment of the communicative event as a whole, including the non-verbal elements of the preaching moment. The detail of the responses can be found in Appendix C. Two items deserve mention.

The concepts least favoured by the students were *Presence* and *Conveys Mood*. The students were not convinced that the preachers they heard were able or even willing to engage the emotions. As mentioned earlier, the students themselves were not at ease with the whole notion of emotions in preaching. This perhaps is reflected in their reluctance to appreciate it in the preachers they heard. On the other hand, it is also likely that the preachers they were hearing shared this reluctance and tended to avoid emotion in preaching. This would naturally have an effect on a sermon's ability to convey a mood. So it is not surprising that these students would rate it as the lowest attribute.

The idea of *Presence* caused other difficulties. Though overall the students were somewhat positive about *Presence* in preaching, a few were greatly concerned about the implications of such a concept. "The idea of pulpit presence raises images in my mind of a certain type of authoritarian preaching. I don't want to 'tower over' a congregation, and I don't want the preachers I hear to impose an authority on me." The issue of authority was a troubling one for most of the students. The very word seemed to imply a certain authoritarianism that was essentially a battle of wills. The idea that *Presence* meant necessarily some sort of imposition was prevalent among both groups of students.

In a class session the Group B students examined various models of authority for preaching. Despite this, authority (and by implication *Presence*) meant influencing people against their wills. Some students went so far as to say that "I don't want to be seen as an authority at all. I would rather be seen as one of them, with the same doubts and questions and inadequacies. The congregation might be the authority, but not me." As stated in Chapter IV, this, I believe, is a key difficulty facing preaching in the television age: the place and understanding of authority. This issue shall also be important when we examine the teaching

of preaching in Chapter VII.

As preachers

The students were asked to describe their own images of preaching, to get some sort of picture of what they understand their task as preachers to be. This was done in two stages. First, the students responded to certain questions and statements about preaching. This was a continuation of the process in the sections above. The second stage was an interview where each of the students explored their understandings of preaching. Here it was possible to get closer to understanding the motivations for, as well as the images of, preaching prevalent in the student group.

Preaching Ability

Each student was asked to assess her or his own preaching ability. Most of the students (10 out of 17) modestly placed their ability in the average range. Four students had high confidence in their preaching ability and three had low confidence. Three of the four with high confidence and all three with low confidence are from Group B. It is the students who have been exposed to more teaching in preaching who attempt to make more precise statements about ability. Those who have less exposure to the discipline see preaching as an act that all can perform equally well.

The students with high confidence and those with low confidence are all in their 20's or 30's. All of the students over 40 consider themselves to be about average in their ability to preach.

All of the students with high confidence in their ability to preach were from the more liberal end of the theological spectrum. Those with low confidence, on the other hand, were from the more conservative end. There are, no doubt, a number of reasons why this might be the case. In this group of students, however, the more conservative students had a much more exacting definition of preaching than those who were more liberal. Preaching could be seen as a daunting prospect for some of the conservative students and, therefore, some of them were much more cautious in determining their suitability for the task.

Elements of Preaching

The students were asked to assess the importance of a variety of "elements" of preaching. These elements included ways of conceptualizing as well as methods of structuring sermons. In Appendix C the students' responses are recorded in more detail. There are, however, two findings that merit a mention here. The first is the fact that for the majority of these students the element of *Humour* was seen as almost non-essential. The second is the

relation between the high status given to *Ideas* and the lower status given to *Images*.

The low position given to a concept like *Humour* is consistent with the findings across the range of students when talking about preaching and with the students' view and use of television, as described in Chapter II. Yet, these students were not expressing an anti-entertainment bias against television. Neither were they expressing an overwhelming need to preach about the sins and weaknesses of the human condition. Still, humour was consistently seen as an area best avoided in preaching, much like comedy was an area best avoided in television viewing. This points to a study that must go beyond the scope of this thesis: Do we have, or do we need a theology of humour?¹ Can preachers continue to ignore what is an effective communicative device?

The other finding was the general preference of *Ideas* over *Images*. There is, however, a curious situation with regard to the favouring of *Images*^{over} *Ideas*. For example, the most important element of preaching for the students who were dissatisfied with the preaching they heard was *Image*. *Ideas* and *Logic* were much less important. The students who claimed to be satisfied with the preaching they heard, on the other hand, place *Logic* and *Ideas* at the top of their list. *Illustration* (that which relates more directly to an idea) follows somewhat behind, and *Image* is even further behind. The implication of this is that those who come to the sermon event looking for ideas or arguments are able to find them and are thus satisfied. Whereas those who come looking for images, for ways of seeing their experience related to the gospel experience, are more likely to be frustrated in that desire. Though it was impossible, in this study, to make statements about the preaching to which the students were exposed, it is useful at this stage to put a marker against this apparent lack of images in preaching. When we turn to the Edinburgh Preachers later in this chapter we can test out this assumption.

SELECTED STUDENT PREACHERS

In addition to the class sessions and a few group discussions, each student participated in at least one in-depth interview. The ultimate goal was to discern for each student both the understanding of preaching and some sense of how prepared they were for preaching in a television age.

As each student was treated individually, the transcripts represented here (incomplete due to space restrictions) were chosen in order to highlight different findings.² The students

¹Colin Morris, for example, in an unpublished lecture given at "The Media and Theological Education Conference," University of Edinburgh, 11 September 1991, has called for the need to investigate this area.

²A more complete transcript for each student can be found in Appendix D.

depicted below represent what might be seen as a progression from some very unformed yearnings to preach, through a more traditional understanding of the preaching task, to a desire to break out of established patterns into a new understanding of the possibilities for preaching. I am not trying to suggest that all students must undergo this "progression." Nor do I suggest that those discussed later are or will be better preachers than those listed earlier. The ordering, however, does represent a shift of thought along the lines of the argument I am trying to make in this thesis: that certain methods and/or structures for communication not only "work better" but represent a stronger theological foundation for the preaching task. Some of these students, I believe, reflect this re-prioritizing of the preaching task.

Call to Preach -- Amanda

Amanda is a single female in her early forties who has started theological training after a number of years in another career. A conservative Christian who, though having a long term commitment to the Faith, came to it later in life. She is a heavy television viewer with a generally positive approach to that medium. She enjoys the entertainment aspects of television as much as, if not more than, the educational functions, listing fictional programmes as her clear favourites. She does believe that television and the communication of the gospel are compatible and indeed this communication already takes place on programmes such as *This Is The Day*. Amanda would not, however, see it as her task as a pastor to recommend television programmes to her congregation.

Amanda is not satisfied with the preaching she hears, stating that most of the time it is "confused and without a clear point." This makes her somewhat unique amongst the students, as for the most part the rest of the students saw that understanding was not a problem in the preaching they heard.

She is somewhat ambivalent about her own preaching ability, frightened of the responsibility and yet eager to make the attempt.

- TRANSCRIPT -

Interviewer: Tell me about the process that led to the decision to train for ministry

Amanda: I just felt this pressure inside, of being pushed onwards.

...

And round about this time, perhaps a year or two later, I began to find that, I can only put it like this, words, words became very precious to me. And I wanted to write. I wanted to -- to spout poetry and all sorts of stuff. ... What had been happening was that a pressure was coming that I wanted to express Christ in words. I wanted to make things vivid and real and alive. And I began to realize but it's not enough, this writing out. ... I'm needing to say this to people, I need to help people. I'm wanting to try and make the Christian faith live ...

And I found as I looked around me, I would see things happen, just ordinary little things, pictures, images and they all related to the Christian Faith and to theology.

...

I realized how deeply I cared. ... And I suddenly felt a real -- compassion, I suppose, a sense

that I wanted to just be alongside His people, and I wanted to help them be -- stop being afraid and relate to one another, be real with one another. I wanted to serve them.

I: How do you define a "decent sermon?"

Amanda: Well, it would have had to have made sense. Often I'd heard, not a lot, but it seemed divorced from life. ... And it made it all seem quite unreal sometimes not very coherent. So to me all these things apart from passion, which is not very easy to describe or explain, at that particular time I would have said would have been a part of good preaching. Or as I put it "a decent sermon." Just something that made a great deal of sense to me. Nothing I had heard made sense to me.

I: What would you say the purpose of preaching is then?

Amanda: I don't know what I would have said then. Now, I think the purpose of preaching - - it's to -- help make real, help make relevant things of the faith, to -- help people encounter the living reality that is in the Bible, that the Christian faith is about, that Christ is about, to make that link, as it were, to link it with real life, with real people. That to me is preaching. Or coming close to preaching.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Amanda has a great desire to communicate Christ and a great love of the people with whom this communication will take place. Her own early experience in the faith is obviously an important guide for her as she attempts to make connections with others and the faith. This "pressure" would not let her go.

Amanda wants to communicate. What is less clear is the format and indeed the precise content of the communication. "To express Christ in words," and "to help make real -- things of the faith" both come close to expressing this desire that works like a "pressure" in her to preach. And, indeed, as purposes of preaching go these are really quite good. Yet she seems less able to make clear how the connections are to be made.

Though unclear about structures for preaching, some of Amanda's instincts are actually appropriate to a television age. She speaks of "seeing things around, little things" from which she draws images of the faith. This process of concretizing the abstractions of faith is one of the key elements of preaching in a television age. In addition her desire to "make contact" implies a need for experiential preaching.

All of this is still somewhat formless, as Amanda confesses. But she seems sensitive to a new range of communication styles. Though it is impossible to draw a direct correlation, it is interesting that her own viewing of television is enjoyable and important for her.

Preaching as Teaching -- Sarah

Sarah is a married female, over 50, who also has come to theological training after a number of years in another career. She considers herself "middle of the road" theologically and has been involved in the Church since her teen years. Sarah watches little television, yet

still has a generally positive approach to that medium. She enjoys the entertainment aspects of television as much as the educational functions, yet tends to prefer factual programmes in her limited viewing. She does believe that television and the communication of the gospel are compatible, but cannot name a programme that meets her criteria for the task. Sarah might have occasion to talk about television as a pastor, but would be more likely to talk about genre or subject matter rather than any particular programmes.

Sarah refused to rate the preaching she hears, stating that such a process "seems unfair to the preacher." She is, however, generally positive in her assessment, only complaining that the sermons are often too long and occasionally unexciting or not relevant to her.

Though claiming little or no experience in preaching, Sarah is still somewhat confident about her ability to preach. She quite consistently considers Image and Illustration as the most important elements for preaching and the communicative aspects of preaching of prime importance in the preaching task.

- TRANSCRIPT -

I: Do you have any preaching models?

Sarah: Yes, um -- [A well-known Anglican] ... It was a type of teaching preaching. He always had a sort of light touch, there was humour there. It wasn't something forced upon you. It sort of came from life experience. Yet it gave a high priority to scriptures.

I: Do you see yourself as trying to fit into that kind of mould?

Sarah: I wouldn't dare to copy anybody.

I: But we have to have structures in mind as we prepare, do we not?

Sarah: Yes I would like to work to -- I would like to have the scriptures being prominent. To do it without the scriptures at all I would have to be -- to feel very sure that the Lord was giving me a message. And I don't think that I would attempt that. To attempt to preach without a scripture base. ... And also I realize that life experience is important, and that people are very good to share of themselves. Something they find difficult, their own weakness, I think, that comes over quite genuinely.

I: What would you say the task of the preacher is?

Sarah: To say to a particular congregation what God wants to say to them. If you listen to God and if you are working with people that there will always be something to say that will be relevant to a lot, or a good proportion. Because God wants to communicate with people.

I: And what kinds of things would you use in that communication, what would you feel is worth speaking about?

Sarah: (long pause) Well, presumably, in Church you are preaching to Christians, so it needn't be an evangelical message all the time. But it will be to do with life generally. And the Christian life particularly. Realizing that I myself may not be more Christianly advanced, spiritually advanced than some of the people in the congregation. You know, having the humility to say "we" rather than "you."

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Like Amanda, Sarah has some clear desires to communicate, and even some ideas of what that communication might contain: "what God wants to say to them." In fact, she claims that the main purpose of preaching is biblical teaching. She seems to allow for other purposes for preaching, but teaching comes out most strongly for her. Again, while it is difficult to be precise, the fact that for Sarah television is used as an educational tool is consistent with her views on preaching. Communication is about information, she might say.

Sarah is not, however, completely divorced from the realities of communicating information in a television age. Connections must be made between where the hearers are and the message. This teaching must be related to "life experience." Her preaching model is important because it gives her a freedom to use humour that other students do not recognize. Yet, also like Amanda, she is less clear as to how that communication might be done.

Preaching as Encouragement -- Jane

Jane is a married female in her early forties. Her return to theological training comes after years of volunteer work in the Church as well as her years of raising a family. She considers herself a theologically moderate Christian who grew up in the Church. Jane is a light television viewer with a more mixed view of the medium. She does, for example, see much potential for good in television, but also a tendency to destroy family life. Television, for Jane, must be an educational medium. She is willing to admit that television and the communication of the gospel may be compatible but is not aware of any current programmes that do so. She might find herself recommending television as a pastor, but only rarely being positive and more often pointing out that television is an enormous waste of time.

She is somewhat confident about her own preaching ability. She does not, however, differentiate between image laden and idea oriented language, seeing both as equally important for preaching.

- TRANSCRIPT -

I: Do you have any preaching models?

Jane: My parish minister is a ten-minute, very relevant sort of sermon man. And I sympathize with that way of preaching. I like that. So, I found that the 30 minute expository sermon was not my cup of tea and not really the kind of preaching I intend to indulge in.

I: What would you say the purpose of preaching is?

Jane: It's trying to encourage people. Mainly, I think it is encouraging people in their faith. Encouraging them to get on, to hold on. It's got a teaching function as well. But I think that's secondary. It's going to be a way of making everything come together. A way of addressing people's needs. I'm hoping that the preaching comes out of the whole pastoral situation. So it can be all of a piece and somehow the experience of the parish will suggest topics, be that

circular process.

I: So is preaching an attempt to articulate "their" experience as much as any particular message or story?

Jane: Probably a bit of both. My experience and their experience and relate them to the text.

I: What, for you, shapes the messages you want to give, provides the language and structures for preaching?

Jane: I think simple language. Knowing my own limitations with how long you can concentrate for and how much you can take in, especially when it is just spoken and you are not making any kind of [visual reference]. So the standard sermon style itself I would expect to be short and simple and to the point.

I: What influences are you likely to encounter in your congregations?

Jane: I realize, of course, that I don't watch much telly or read many newspapers and that, therefore, I am out of touch with a lot of things that the rest of the world is in touch with. So it would be a case of finding things that were common.

I: Is the media a waste of time?

Jane: Aye. Reading newspapers is important and certainly keeping up with current affairs is important. But I think that watching television compared to engaging in meaningful human relationships is really a waste of time. I think that you can have too much of it. I think in general that there is too much entertainment involved in television and it distract people from things that might be more useful to them.

I: Is the problem the content of television programmes or the amount of time used in watching television?

Jane: It's both. It's too easy to be distracted from the world. That is what it feels like. It's too easy to just turn off and watch television.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Preaching is mainly encouraging, according to Jane. Therefore, it is about relationships and about connections. Like Amanda and Sarah, Jane sees preaching as a way of making links between the faith and the "real world" in which we all live. Jane is beginning to think about structures for preaching. "Simple language," "to the point," "ten-minute, very relevant...;" all of these phrases are being used to point toward certain structures rather than others.

The difficulty is determining just what constitutes the "real world" with which Jane wishes to connect. After admitting that she might be "out of touch" because of her lack of media use, Jane then complains that too much television is a distraction from the real world, rather than a part of it. Is the world with which we connect some sort of idealized creation or is it the experiences and activities of the people to whom we preach, even when that includes television?

Her negative attitude toward television has not meant that she avoids listening to some of the popular discussion about the effects of television on communication. Her desire to move to short, 10-minute addresses means that she is alert to some of the stresses on communication, but is avoiding some of the possibilities that television communication offers preaching.

Preaching Structures -- James

James is a married male in his early forties who began theological training after a number of years in another career. A conservative student, he has a long history of involvement in the Church. He is a moderate television viewer with a somewhat ambivalent approach to that medium. He considers the educational aspects of television to be the most important and generally prefers factual programmes and sport. James is one of the few students in the group who considers that television and the communication of the gospel are fundamentally incompatible. "The functions of the two are simply too different," he claims. As such, he does not see a great need to recommend programmes to his congregation, though he might wish to warn them away from certain excesses, such as violence and sexual content.

James is basically satisfied with the preaching he hears, though he considers it only *fair*, stating that it is as often boring as inspiring. He identifies part of the problem as a lack of images and stories to buttress the idea structure of the sermon.

He is quietly confident in his preaching ability, and has had some experience already. Oddly enough, given his complaints about the preaching he hears, James considers that logic and clear idea statements, though necessarily illustrated, are more important than rich images and stories.

- TRANSCRIPT -

I: Do you have preaching models?

James: No, I don't think that there is any one individual. I may pick up bits here and there, but no one individual.

I: What, for you, is the purpose of preaching?

James: To use the Bible to touch people's lives. What I would want to do would be based on the Bible, but coming from that I would want to encourage people, to challenge people, make people think about where they are going. There would be a variety of messages as there is a variety of persons in the congregation. But behind it all is the one salvation message.

I: How do you achieve this purpose?

James: Two main starting points: either I start with a passage of scripture and then let that mull over in my mind, and then I start to think what does that passage have to say to the people that I will be speaking to; sometimes I will be starting with a theme and then thinking through what passage of scripture will relate to that theme and then continuing on with the

process. It tends to be a long process, so I prefer to start as early as possible.

I: What are your sources?

James: I would use a commentary for the passage itself. Then I would look through the books that I have, just to see if anything sparks off. It's hard to say. It tends to just lie around in my mind for a while so that wherever I am things can just occur to me, on the train or in a museum. Part of the process would be trying to get it down into some sort of three points or whatever. I don't know whether it is a good technique or not, but I find that the introduction is very important. I can struggle with that for ages. But once I've got some sort of structure and I've got an introduction, then I find I can go forward from there. The introduction is important to capture people's attention. To give them something that they can start following. And also because I think that it's just, for me personally, it's good to get off the starting blocks.

I: Do you anticipate any blocks in this communication?

James: I think in general people don't have a good attention span. Sometimes older people just begin to doze off, which may be a physical reaction more than a spiritual one. I think I am conscious that it is a very different sort of situation than what people are in the rest of the week. It's more formal. They're just sitting there in rows, silently, unable to move, focusing on one particular thing. People listen to the radio and they're ironing, you know, they're not just listening. That is a more natural situation. As well as that, then you've got the problem of relevancy. If people don't think that what you're saying is of any relevance to them, then they'll switch off.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

James shows a great awareness of some of the principles of good presentation. He emphasizes a structure and a good introduction as a starting block for sermon preparation. James is analytical in his thinking, searching for various forms of input that will then find their proper place in his structure.

His awareness of the changing nature of communication is reflected in his final statements about relevance. The artificiality of the preaching event places certain demands on the preacher. It is interesting, however, that though he professes to ^{be} mostly concerned about making contact with the hearer, his starting points are both outside the hearer's context, a scripture passage or theme. While it is possible that the "theme" arises out of the congregation, this is not clearly indicated. He does not demonstrate a willingness to start where people are. Even though he tries to be sensitive to the communication context, the experiences of the hearers are brought in as a second level concern. This is a dangerous methodology in the television age, as television very much meets people where they are.

James' reluctance to talk about models signals an interesting trend among the students as a whole. Few students were able or willing to name a model for their preaching. Most of the students would prefer to claim to "do their own thing" than to be seen as copying another preacher. There is a positive and a negative in this. On the one hand, preachers must be

encouraged to "find their own voice."³ Preaching, as it is being defined by these students, is particular and experiential. This demands that the preacher relate a more immediate experience and not attempt to appropriate an experience that has not been made one's own.

On the other hand, there are not as many "giants of the pulpit" which stand out in the collective consciousness of this group of students. A few years ago, students were encouraged to listen to James Stewart, William Barclay, and others as prime examples of the preacher's art. The students seem to be left more to their own resources as rich or as meagre as these may be. Models, however, are at work in these students whether they acknowledge them or not. Each one has an image of a preacher in mind which they either react against or emulate to an extent. The question for preaching in a television age is who or what provides these models?

Preaching as Mobile - - Dave

Dave is a married male in his mid to late thirties who has been involved in mission work. He is now seeking to formalize his ministry and perhaps to move into another direction. A conservative student, Dave would not be adverse to calling himself a charismatic, though he is cautious about labels.

He is a moderate television viewer with a generally positive approach to that medium. He considers the educational aspects of television to be on a par with the entertainment aspects, and generally prefers factual programmes. Dave believes that not only is television an appropriate medium for the communication of the gospel but that it already is taking place in such programmes as *Songs of Praise*. Despite this, the only programmes he might recommend to his congregation would be of the documentary type, though he might assume that religious programmes would be watched already. He would also be keen to warn the congregation away from the darker side of the medium, such as violence, sexual content and the occult.

Dave is not satisfied with the preaching he hears, stating that it is usually too complex, boring, irrelevant and too short. Despite his years as a missionary, Dave is not at all confident in his preaching ability. He considers the more image oriented elements of preaching to be the most important.

- TRANSCRIPT -

Dave: I used to work with a missionary team. ... My main emphasis was on people who were outside the church. ... So many people are crying out for help with the questions of raising their kids, priorities at home or at work. And all of that is not being met, at least at present, in the church.

³This terminology was originated by Thomas Troeger and explained in his *The Parable of Ten Preachers* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

I: What role does worship and preaching play?

Dave: Keeps me going! I couldn't do what I've done without having a church context ... I think the tensions I feel in preaching and worship relates to people who are unchurched, that there is a need for contemporary worship and a preaching which is geared and specific to people's needs. ... Unchurched people hunger to hear the Bible preached and taught, the problem is when that isn't happening.

...
I see preaching as something mobile. Preaching is something that brings the message of the gospel to people where they are. I've always been a wee bit hesitant about preaching in a church which is full of people who've already heard the message.

I: Do you have models for this type of preaching?

Dave: Yes. [A Glasgow minister] ... Very forthright and evangelistic. ... I think I respond to a passionate minister even if he is wrong.

I: Would you say that there needs to be a difference in structure and style in preaching to church and unchurched?

Dave: Yes. In the church you are working from different presuppositions, you can assume that they might be familiar with the Bible, you can use Bible references. With the unchurched, you've got to go a wee bit further back. You've got to be able to address what they feel, questions they might have, issues that they might have. But it would be weighted more like that and you would probably use less scripture.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

"I see preaching as something mobile." What drives the communicative event of preaching, for Dave, is the listener. Old structures must give way to new attempts to reach people where they are. We start not with the text but with the context. This is not, for Dave, an abandonment of the core of the faith. On the contrary he is keen to communicate a particular message. What gives way is tradition in favour of gospel.

Yet behind this apparent willingness to change is a firm conviction that "unchurched people hunger to hear the Bible preached and taught." The key, for Dave, is to find a way to make that preaching and teaching relevant. His awareness of the hearer's context does seem to allow for the fact that television and other media have set the agenda for public discourse. Yet, that public discourse is not centred around the Bible. To claim that unchurch people want more exposition of the Bible is naive at best.

Preaching as Witness -- Robert

Robert is a married male in his late thirties who has relatively recently become a part of the Church. A liberal Christian, he is a moderate television viewer with a somewhat ambivalent approach to that medium, considering television an opportunity for the Church but also a great waste of time. He prefers factual programming, including religious television, more than any of the fictional programmes. He is not against entertainment, per se, but is

concerned at the amount of time he, and his family, spend in front of the set. Robert does believe that television and the communication of the gospel are compatible, but could not name any programmes where the gospel is clearly the focus. And he would not, on the whole, see it his task as a pastor to recommend television programmes to his congregation.

He is quite confident about his own preaching ability, though he confesses that he has a lot to learn. He was not willing to differentiate between the idea oriented elements of preaching and the more image related ones, considering them all of equal importance.

- TRANSCRIPT -

Robert: I remember reading in *Heralds of God* a quote that said something about preachers having the need to proclaim what they had discovered to others. ... I discovered something incredible, life changing, it was too good to keep to yourself.

I: How would you define preaching?

Robert: Preaching speaks to me first, and then I pass it on to others. ... I feel that if I can understand it then it is not beyond the comprehension of the people who are sitting with me.

I: So what IS the purpose of preaching?

Robert: ... Proclaiming the gospel as good news. The best example is witnessing to Christ. ... The sermon has spoken clearly about Christ and what Christ means in your life. ... More than anything else the sermon is proclamation of the good news and what that can mean to people.

I: So is it imparting knowledge or information?

Robert: ... I don't think that anyone is going to come to Christ by being given information, a piece knowledge that they didn't previously have. I'd love to know just what it was that does convict people. ... Suddenly something touches them, more than just intellectually, but touches them as a whole person. They suddenly realize that this message is speaking to their whole lives and it is something that they must come to terms with.

I: What sort of language do you use?

Robert: I like to use Parable, when I can. Parable in my mind works because you've got to come to grips with it. ... And even if you try and ignore it and say "it's got nothing to do with me," that is a response. I don't see that as imparting knowledge, I see that as presenting them with a life situation; presenting them with the gospel coming into interaction with their life situations. Where I feel my preaching often falls down is that I find it difficult to tie it into life. ... I can't come up with images or illustrations, things that make people say yes I've been there, I know that feeling. ... But I see that improving as I get to know people better, as a pastor. But I'm constantly afraid that the illustrative material that I am using from my own life is not striking a chord.

I: did anything strike you as you completed the TV section of the questionnaire?

Robert: Didn't relate section on television to preaching. Perhaps related as both were communication.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Robert is obviously struggling to find a language that completes the communication process that he has experienced in preaching, and wants to continue. But he has difficulty finding the proper language. It is interesting that, though he is aiming for images and stories from life, he sees no real connection between television's images and stories and the images and stories of the life of faith.

The personal experience type of preaching, has precedence in a television age, as we have seen in Chapter IV. But it seems to cause some discomfort to Robert, however, as he worries about whether he is "touching chords." It is not out of character for him to use this method of preaching. He understands preaching to be the process of sharing something that he himself has found. As he describes the preparation process, his personal investment is quite clear. It is logical, therefore, that, for Robert, preaching is at least in part a personal witness. In this he is very much participating in a style of communication compatible to the television age. Human interest and personal experience stories are dominant elements of that communication. Though it has come from a different place, personal experience and theological reflection rather than communication studies, it is still an effective means of adapting to the television age.

Preaching as Engaging the Imagination -- Carl

Carl is a single male in his early twenties who is a long term member of the Church. He considers himself a liberal Christian, and is heading toward a ministry in some form of Christian Education. He is a heavy television viewer with a generally positive view of that medium, though he is somewhat concerned about the effects of television on family life. He enjoys both factual and fictional programming, listing his favourite viewing as Comedy and News. This makes him somewhat rare among the students as many of the rest were quite suspicious of comedy as a genre. He is also unique in that he considers *Escape* to be an appropriate function served by television. Like Robert, Carl believes that television and the communication of the gospel are compatible, but could not name any programmes where the gospel is clearly the focus. And he is unsure as to whether it would be his task as a pastor to recommend television programmes to his congregation.

He is quite confident about his own preaching ability, and is willing to experiment with styles and structures. While not claiming that ideas were unimportant to preaching, he unquestionably prefers Images and Stories as more effective communicative elements. Carl clearly considers communication and dialogue high priorities in preaching.

- TRANSCRIPT -

Carl: All my life I wanted to be a preacher. ... I also knew that I could make a difference. I heard so much preaching that was not as effective. So, for the last ten years or so I have had this great desire to make a difference. It was, in part, a decision to change the language away

from stock phrases, to make it more real, more able to touch people's real lives.

I: Do you have images of good preachers in mind as you prepare?

Carl: Lots. I remember in particular reading Peter Marshall's sermons. I was excited by the way he used all the senses in preaching. He is probably the most prominent preacher I look to. But I also listen to politicians who can talk to people as if they are real. Some of the American civil rights campaigners, like Martin Luther King, who spoke with such passion about real things, and to ordinary people. The Kennedy and Nixon campaign, was a good example of plain talk. Even Thatcher in her change from an authoritarian to a more softer image. All of these can, I think, inform us, or me, as preachers. In fact they may be the preachers of today. But there are those in the churches who are doing good work. I hear a preacher with a very traditional structure, but he's a master executor. Though I wouldn't use his style at all, I am in awe of how well he does the job.

I: What is the "job" of preaching?

Carl: I think it's lots of things. It is partly teaching, partly relating the gospel to today. But it is about helping the congregation in making their own decisions, not always to give answers. In a way preaching is to help get people out of themselves.

I: How do you get people "out of themselves?"

Carl: I would use their experiences and experiences that I have had with them. I'd use story part of the time. I'd use their imagination, because for a lot of them television is an escape. They watch soaps to try and get out of themselves, it gives them a half an hour of release. I think you should use their imagination, use something they are familiar with, something they can relate to. I don't think that I would use what they see as a structured sermon. All sermons have structure. But I wouldn't say, "right, here is where we're going and this is how we'll get there." I try and involve the whole person.

I: So is preaching an escape?

Carl: I don't think it is providing an escape, I think it is using the tools of their escape to help to lead them out of that and ground them back down in reality. Using their situation to help lead them out.

I: So how do you feel about TV use in your congregation?

Carl: For a lot of them it is very necessary to have an escape. Because they are in difficult situations and for a lot of them it is the only release that they get. They don't get away for holidays, so it is necessary to help them deal with the life situations they face: alcoholism, poverty, and so on.

I: Is the kind of TV important?

Carl: I think that I could honestly say that I am really not that concerned, as such, as long as they don't look at that as the ideal, and try to escape into it as an artificial reality. Unfortunately, they are where they are and it is very difficult for people to escape from their situation. ... The problem comes when they see something and say, "right, I want that and I'll use any means to get it." Knowing from the start that there is no way to actually achieve what they set out to do. I think I would be more concerned about that aspect.

I: How do you avoid that?

Carl: I think it is very, very difficult. ... With the sermon you can help to ground them again. I think you are replacing their escapism with something real, and you're showing them that they are real, helping them down the road. It's not an escape, it is a different ideal from, say, escapism in television. But you are using the language that they understand, but using it in a different way. And you don't leave them in the clouds but you bring them down, not with a bump because you are using a familiar language, but you bring them back gently to the ground of reality.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Carl, more than any other student in the group, saw a clear connection between what is happening as people watch television and what might happen as they hear preaching. He is careful to point out that while there is a connection, watching television is not the same thing as hearing preaching, the aims and the end results are quite different. For Carl, preaching is a way of reconnecting people with reality. But it is not a jolting reconnection because you use a "familiar language."

That familiar language is, for Carl, the language of the imagination. Imagination provides, on one level, a release from what might be seen as the drudgery of everyday existence. But that release then, on another level, enables them to see that other forms of escape, such as that provided by television, are false, setting up impossible and misdirected goals.

Preaching is about education, in part, about giving options and opening doors. But it is not about solving problems, or about taking away responsibility. The tool that enables this process to take place is imagination.

Preaching as Interpretation of Reality -- Carrie

Carrie is a married female in her early forties who has been a long term member of the Church. She considers herself a liberal Christian. She is a moderate television viewer with a very positive approach to that medium, which perhaps is more a reflection of her general "take it or leave it" attitude than a real commitment to television advocacy. Her commitment to *Coronation Street* is quite strong but she has little desire for much else besides the News. Carrie is unique in that she considers the primary function of television is to stir the imagination. She also believes that television and the communication of the gospel are compatible, but could not name any programmes where the gospel is clearly the focus. And not only would she not, on the whole, see it her task as a pastor to recommend television programmes to her congregation, she was almost offended that anyone would suggest that it was.

She is a bit unsure about her own preaching ability, though she has some clear views on what makes for good preaching. She was not willing to differentiate between the idea oriented elements of preaching and the more image related ones, considering them all of equal

importance. She was keen to suggest that, whatever the structure and content of the sermon, it must be logical.

- TRANSCRIPT -

I: Do you have models for ministry?

Carrie: Oh, definitely...but perhaps more facets from here and facets from there. I can't see ministry in any terms other than an holistic approach, where pastoral work feeds into theology which is then changed by the existential work which is done in pastoral work, which then comes out in the preaching. I can't see preaching as the be all and end all. ... I think it is more a problem for the Church of Scotland.

I: Why a problem?

Carrie: We can't seem to get rid of this subject - object divide. It's not even an "I - Thou", it's a preaching that's delivered to passive recipients. In fact there is a twist in the logic somewhere because although it comes over as preaching to a passive congregation, but the congregation is mentioned again and again in terms that you should alter your theology to suit the congregation. So the negative aspect of what the congregation feeds in, apparently, is present. But not a positive dynamism. Because the vehicle used for preaching that is most desirable, apparently, and certainly the most commonly accounted, is the vehicle of propositional type, or lecture type preaching.

I: What other options might you suggest?

Carrie: When you talk of preaching as storytelling or poetry is mentioned the reaction might be that not everyone can be a poet. But not everyone has to be a poet, it is a question of models. ... I think it is very important to sort out what kind of models and metaphors are fixed out there in what we are trying to do, because then we will follow ... that is what is going to come over not just in our words but in our body language as well.

I: So what do you see as the purpose of preaching?

Carrie: I think that there is constant need for interpretation of reality. Trying to interpret present reality in terms of the Christ who is the revealer of the truth within that reality. So its an interpreting process, it's an offering of a new vision, a different vision, another way of looking at what's actually happened. ... You've got twin poles. Your preaching has got to be biblical and it also has to relate to the real world that you are preaching to and from and out of. It's a circular activity because the world is being challenged by Christ for you, and you've got to lay that challenge before the congregation who are also being challenged. And if you can open a window, make less opaque the reality of Christ in the world.

I: How does one do that? Where do you start?

Carrie: With people. The pastoral side of ministry is getting involved at the ground level where people are. The task of ministry is overcoming alienation. Preaching is of a piece with ministry, but is different because you are using words. It has to be answerable to scripture at all time, scripture has to be normative for preaching.

I: Do you see preaching as in any way competing with television, say?

Carrie: Preaching doesn't have to be in competition with the world. I love the world. I don't think it has to be in competition with the world. But what it has to be in competition with is our values which have arisen in the world and have become idols which get in the way of -

- So preaching ... shouldn't be anti-culture at all, it should transform culture, it should pick out from culture those aspects which have wonderfully high aspirations, how else can we reach God? ... You risk so much, because I do think in the end that words are probably quite pathetically inadequate. But we've got to use them. We've got to take that leap of faith.

- *END TRANSCRIPT* -

Carrie takes Carl's idea of imagination to a different level. The purpose of preaching is to reinterpret reality. Sometimes it can do this in harmony with the world and modern culture, including television, and sometimes it must challenge the prevalent values in that culture.

But it cannot do this in a vacuum, or in the preacher's own mind and imagination. Preaching must be "answerable to scripture at all times." The Christ revealed in the text is already at work redefining the reality we take for granted. The preacher's task is to share in that process of reinterpretation, to call it to the attention of the congregation for fresh hearing.

A check on this process is whether the words ring true in the experience of the hearers. This is Carrie's other pole. Preaching must "relate to what is generally regarded as reality." But, for Carrie, this is not a limitation, but an opening up of possibility. By changing the metaphor of the preacher from lecturer to poet, we find a new energy for preaching. A way of ringing bells and striking resonances in the hearts and minds of those who come to hear. And the congregation is a participant in the dialogue. A "positive dynamism" is created between preacher and community.

Carrie has begun to grasp most closely the images of preaching argued in the previous chapter. We now can ask whether our practising preachers have begun to intuitively seek after this model or have remained committed to what Carrie sees as an older model of preaching as propositional discourse.

EDINBURGH PREACHERS

As difficult as it was to get a number of New College students to make definitive statements about preaching, it was even more difficult to achieve any sort of consensus from the practising preachers. Though most of the preachers involved were willing to make some general statements about the nature of the preaching enterprise, they would often moderate these statements in a number of ways. The most common moderation these preachers would make was to say "this is how I feel today, ask me tomorrow and you may get different answers."

In light of this process of moderation the investigation into the opinions that this group of preachers have about the nature of preaching can be found in Appendix C. The remainder of this section will be an analysis of some representative sermons delivered and submitted by the preachers involved in this study. In this way the opinions are seen as a reflection of

practice.

The purpose of this exercise was to determine if the preachers were adapting, consciously or subconsciously, to the dominant communicative structures of the society within which preaching takes place. I expected these sermons to be full of imagistic and expressionistic language, to engage hearers in a form of dialogue. In addition I anticipated the use of inductive, narrative or imaginative structures. Surely the possibilities for a deeper communication, available in a television age, would be realized in this vital Christian arena.

PREACHING PRACTICE: SERMON ANALYSIS

Sermon Structures

Deductive

The dominant sermon structure present in the sermons submitted was the traditional or deductive outline that begins with some sort of proposition or theme and then extrapolates that theme through a number of points (usually three). Eleven of the sixteen sermons could be categorized as largely deductive. Seven of those eleven had a very clear structure that was presented to the congregation. Only one, however, presented that structure to the hearers at the beginning of the sermon, in true deductive style. The other six either called attention to the various sections by indicating the number of points to follow ("The day of Pentecost seems to have two words that describe it."), introduced each subsequent section with a number ("Firstly...Secondly..."), began a new section by reminding the hearers of what had gone before, or concluded the sermon by repeating the various points or headings.

Of the four that were largely propositional but with less clearly stated outlines there were a variety of structures employed. Two used a "faceting" approach where a variety of perspectives were taken on a particular theme. The other two sermons used a combination of the faceting structure with a developmental structure. Both of these sermons began by exploring a range of perspectives on an issue but before the end introduced an idea that grew out of the favoured perspective, thereby bringing in a new point but one that stood upon the ground of an earlier one.

Inductive

The five remaining sermons could be broadly categorized as inductive in the sense that they represent a journey of sorts from a starting point to a quite different and somewhat unsuspected ending. All of these sermons use a developmental structure that seems almost stream of consciousness. The connections are not always clear, but seem to spring up from a chance word or idea which may or may not be directly relevant to the implied sermon theme. Occasionally, these "digressions" were illustrations that emphasized a point that was interesting but not central to the thrust of the sermon. Other times the digressions functioned

almost like an aside in a stage play, or a "one-liner" that was slipped into the manuscript as light relief.

Though the connections were often vague in these sermons it does not necessarily imply that the preachers had no clear idea of direction. As these were all manuscripts prepared before the preaching event, the preachers were fully in control of the direction and end result. Some of them make quite profound or significant final points that were clearly intended from the very beginning. What is less clear is how the preachers moved from their introductions to those final points. And, I suspect, that it would have been quite difficult for many in the congregation to follow those lines of argument.

The problem of providing clear connectors was not only a problem for the preachers using an inductive structure. Some inductive sermons were quite clearly outlined. And a few of the sermons in a more deductive style managed to make confusing changes in subject. However, it is easier to move to a completely different concept in a deductive sermon simply by stating, in some fashion, "and the next point is...." A sermon in an inductive style needs to flow from point to point, or "move to move" in Buttrick's terminology.⁴ Connectors are much more crucial.

While these five sermons could be classified as inductive, they are more propositional than imagistic. Though they flow or unfold as though revealing new scenes in a novel, what is revealed is a sequence of points. That these ideas are discovered rather than presented is what classifies these sermons as inductive. Nor can they be considered narrative either in structure or content.

It is difficult, however, in the end to make definitive statements about the sermon structures. Though the majority are largely deductive and a few are largely inductive, in fact most of the sermons employ a mixture of structures. The terminology, which first rose to current use in Craddock,⁵ is considered by a few homileticians not to be completely accurate. There are inductive elements within most deductive structures and some quite clearly deductive elements within inductive sermons. These sixteen sermons reflect this blending of structures.

Illustrations

To state that these sermons are more propositional than imagistic is not to claim that

⁴See Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia:Fortress Press, 1987), esp. pp.23-24.

⁵See Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), esp. p.54 for his discussion on "direction" in preaching. Craddock does not claim to be the originator of the terminology, but is certainly the one who shaped the modern debate on structure.

they are completely conceptual. There are indeed a number of illustrations in all of the sermons. Ten of the sermons begin with illustrations. Two begin with questions attempting to make sense of a biblical text or to make contact with the hearers. Only four of the sixteen sermons begin with a more or less propositional statement.

There is an interesting variety of illustrations represented in these sermons. While a few words about each of these types will be useful here, the more complete analysis of illustrations in the sermons can be found in Appendix D.

Personal Experience Illustrations

Here the preacher uses a personal experience to introduce a subject, define an idea, or (when used in the introduction) to break the ice and remind the congregation that the preacher is only human. Introductions are not the only place where personal experience illustrations are used. Two preachers used personal experiences like punctuation. Each point or section of the sermon would either begin or end with a personal experience that attempted to make the concept more concrete.

Some of these illustrations were in fact propositional statements put into a "real life" context. The purpose of the illustration was to restate an idea. In the end, it could hardly be said that an illustration of this type actually "illustrated" anything.

Biblical Illustration

There are two kinds of biblical illustration represented in these sermons. The first is the use of a supporting or secondary text to illustrate the main text. The other, more common type of biblical illustration is "re-telling." Here a text is recast in modern language and retold as a part of the sermon, usually the introduction.

Another type of retelling is to not only change the language of the biblical story but to "up-date" it in various ways. Here the preacher uses biblical and modern day imagery interchangeably. This manipulation of the biblical event is a subtle way of claiming that their story is our story, that human nature has not changed in the hundreds or thousands of years since the text was created.

Literary or Historical Illustration

One type of "literary illustration" is to quote passages of other genres of literature, usually poetry, in the body of the sermon as a way of emphasizing a biblical or theological point. The other form of this "literary," or perhaps more accurately called historical illustration, is the anecdotal. A quote from or about a famous literary or historical figure is used to illustrate a more abstract statement. As a subset of the literary or historical anecdote,

many more preachers are likely to mention famous Christian figures as illustration.

Common Experience Illustration

Here the preacher attempts to tell the congregation their own story, the events of a general human experience. This type of illustration can be quite effective as it provides a common ground from which the preacher can move into interpretation or connection with other less common experiences or understandings.

A major argument of this thesis is that perhaps the greatest common experience of our modern age is that provided by television viewing. Here is a vast field of images and stories to which the majority of the population has easy access and enjoys with regularity. Yet, only one preacher made passing reference to a television programme, and even that was used to illustrate a quite obscure point that had no real bearing on the sermon itself, though it made an diverting entrée into the subject. Another talked about the feeling of anticipation when waiting for a favourite programme. Two others spoke briefly in general terms about media. One saying that it must be used, though he did not discuss how or even to what end.

It is not surprising that television was largely ignored in these sermons, given that few mention any sort of common experience at all. And, as we have seen, the preachers are ambivalent toward the medium and their own viewing time would be far below the national average. Yet it is disappointing that, given the predominance of television imagery, the preachers manage to avoid making much if any mention of the experience.

Community Experience Illustration

Even more under-used is the illustration that attempts to make the common experience one of community experience. It was, I believe, troubling that all but two of these sermons could have been preached to any Christian congregation. The sermons were, for the most part, devoid of any specific contextualization. Only one preacher used the experiences of the local congregation as illustration for his preaching.

It is a function of preaching to tell not just the story of the gospel, but the story of the Christian community, local as well as historical. One function of this type of illustration is to make the gospel relevant to the local situation. As the preacher draws attention to the events taking place amongst the people who have come to hear, the gospel is heard arising not just out of a text and not just out of a history, but out of daily life as lived. Describing how the congregation relates to one another, how they interact within the larger community or how the value systems and beliefs are already shaping their practice can be much more revelatory than relating anecdotes of literary and historical figures, though there is room for both.

As argued in the last chapter, the television context demands relevance. The gospel

itself demands relevance. Preaching is one place, hopefully one of many, where the relevance of the gospel is emphasized. Relevance can be understood, at least in part, to be that which relates to our common experience.

Language

Having examined the structure and illustrations, which might be called the "macro" issues of homiletics, it is time to look more closely at the detail of the sermons, to the "micro" issues of language. Do these sermons employ an imagistic and/or feeling oriented language at all, or is the conceptual the dominant mode? As we have seen the structures are directed toward concepts and the illustrations relate specifically to an idea. But this does not imply that the influence of an image oriented culture is absent. By looking at the language we can discover whether the sermons of the preachers in our sample relate to or diverge from the dominant modes of communication in society.

It is obvious from the first that a great advantage that all of these preachers have is that they are able to avoid, for the most part, theological jargon. Indeed, given the range of career and former careers represented by the preachers in the groups, they manage to avoid jargon of any kind. There are very few technical terms and when these are used they are quickly explained and expanded. Two of the preachers did tend toward a more formal use of language which might have sounded out of place in some congregations, but was probably quite acceptable in the settings represented. Over all, the language was "of the people."

This simple language is a great advantage in preaching. A common complaint, represented by at least one student in the previous section, is that sermons are often difficult to understand, they "go over the head" of the congregation. But the sample sermons submitted here do not have that problem with language. It is possible that when complaints about comprehension are raised language may not be the only problem. The section above on illustrations reflects that some methods for illustrating abstract or propositional points might leave the hearer none the wiser.

Simple or common language is important for preaching. Yet simple ought not mean bland. Television supplies rich pictures, sometimes familiar and homely, sometimes exotic and haunting. Through the television experience the viewer is touched by the scenes played out on the screen. A sermon need not, and indeed ought not, avoid descriptive language. Nor should the preacher be afraid of language that engages the emotions, that warms the heart or lifts the spirit. Are the preachers in the sample using languages that engages?

To explore this question, we shall examine two excerpts from the sermons for the use or non-use of descriptive language. Both of the sermons represented here are well constructed and offer interesting insights into the stated texts and the Christian life. They are not offered

as particularly bad or good examples, but as representative of the sermons submitted.

The first excerpt is from a Pentecost sermon. Delivered by a clergyman with a long term relationship with his congregation, it is also designed to welcome a group of new members to the Church. The sermon structure is basically deductive and consists of an introduction followed by two points and a conclusion. The following excerpt is the second point, which contains two parts.

- EXCERPT 1 -

And the other word is very similar, it's the word grow. It's the word GROW. Move along, but grow up. The Church is meant to grow. It is God's nature. The seed is naturally growing. Like all the weeds in my garden, it is their nature to grow. And it is the nature of the Christian community to grow. As the message is shared and interpreted, that's the gift of Pentecost, that the people not only hear us but they understand us and respond. Let the processes happen.

But also let the processes happen to us. Let them happen in us as well. Now you see, we have people, and we're terribly encouraged by having 18 people who want to join us. Just enjoy it. When all the other Churches seem to be going the other way, let's be happy about it. I want you to go home and feel happy about it.

But if any of us think "well, we now know it all. We've been through a class, you see, now we're a member, so it's all right." And if we stop letting God grow in us and let things happen in us and to us, then in a sense we've got it all wrong. It's a process, you notice that? God added to the Church those whom he was in the process of saving. I think I'll read that again. Those whom he was in the process of saving. God's work in us is a process. The trouble is that so often we think the process is over and we declare it quits. God is wanting to make you and me more like Jesus. And it is not something that stops the day that we make a profession of faith. It doesn't stop at any particular stage in our life. It's a growing thing.

There are folk here preparing to get married. One of the things that we all find in a marriage relationship is that we've got to grow with it. Often the break down of marriages is because one or other of the partners or both will not grow beyond the point of the wedding day. And growth, of course is uncomfortable, and we feel stretched and we feel challenged, and we feel, sometimes, threatened. But no relationship, including our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, is going to get any where unless it is one to develop. God wants the Church to grow, but more he wants the people in the Church to grow. Grow in grace and grow in faith and grow more like Jesus Christ. Let these things happen, the Holy Spirit has come.

- END EXCERPT 1 -

Pentecost suggests two words; move and grow, according to this preacher. In all, this sermon is a quite appropriate message to a specific congregation at a specific time in its life. This preacher, more than any other in the sample, uses the life of his congregation to illustrate the sermon. This gives a very clear context for the message.

Looking closely at the language we see many things to commend. First of all, the main point is very clear: Grow! The word grow or a form of that word is used seventeen times in this excerpt of 441 words. No one could claim to have missed the point. In addition, this word "grow" is further defined as a "process" that takes time. Again there is sufficient reinforcement of this idea. And, perhaps most importantly, the idea is illustrated a number

of times. First a sentence illustration talks about the Church's and God's nature is to grow "like all the weeds in my garden." Church growth is illustrated by the eighteen people who have come to join the Church that morning. And finally, the process of growth in faith is likened to growth in a marriage.

All of these illustrations of this idea of growth are commendable. But still the question remains, is the language significantly descriptive and/or emotive? There does not seem to be very much of the type of language that would enable hearers to create clear and lasting images from this sermon. What does this growing look like? What does it feel like?

It looks like weeds. The image is of rampant, uncontrolled and unwanted growth. This might be a true image of the Church, but it is not likely to be the most instructive one. The preacher counters this image with succeeding paragraphs emphasizing the on-going process of growth. And yet though this word is used frequently, it is never modified or described. What is this process like, how does it work, what is our part, what will happen to us and in us as we let God work, how do we know when we are growing?

The impression is that we all know what these experiences are like and, therefore, we do not need to describe them further. This is what contributes to an "insider language" in preaching. The most obvious form is technical jargon, which, as stated above, is not a problem for these preachers. Simple language, however, can become technical jargon when it is not sufficiently described. Even the marriage illustration, while an important and appropriate one, could stand further description. What exactly does "grow beyond the point of the wedding day" actually mean? What does that experience look like or feel like? These are the kind of things that are being provided for hearers in other, mediated communicative experiences. Because we can watch a marriage breakdown on *Eastenders* due to of irreconcilable differences, we can know more about the experience and emotions. But the preacher does not have the advantage of a video enactment with full soundtrack support. The tool of the preacher is a rich and full language.

But it is not only the illustrations that need to be supported by more descriptive language. Even the more propositional moments in the sermon can be made more descriptive. In the excerpt the preacher talks of the process with these words:

It's a process, you notice that? God added to the Church those whom he was in the process of saving. I think I'll read that again. Those whom he was in the process of saving. God's work in us is a process.

What does this really tell us about the process? For many in the Church this is no doubt familiar language and they would have been quite comfortable with it. But there were eighteen people there who were joining the Church for the first time. Did they understand what this process might entail? The preacher goes on to describe the process further: God wants to make us more like Jesus. As a start, that is pretty good. But as the sum total of the

description it is pretty weak.

The transition between growth in numbers and spiritual growth is not immediately clear. A few adjectives, numerical growth and spiritual growth or external growth and internal growth, might have made the distinction more clear. Even if the intent was to claim that it was all part of the same process, the results could have been differentiated.

There is a reference to emotion in this excerpt that must be noted. "Let's be happy about" growth, the preacher claims. This brief inclusion is worth a mention for two reasons. First it is the only clear indication of an attitude a hearer should take to an event mentioned in the sermon. It is one thing to tell people about the gospel, but it is also worth indicating that as human beings we respond emotionally to events. This mention is very direct: I want you to be happy about it. It is possible to be more subtle and have the same effect. Perhaps to describe the influx of new members as "a joyous event worth celebrating" would ^{have} invited the people to respond in certain ways.

The call to be happy is also worth mentioning because the overriding emotion in the sixteen sermons submitted is fear and/or despair. There are numerous accounts of "the way things are" in the world that cause us at least to wonder and at worst to grieve. But there are very few indications that the news we preach is good news in the end. Emotion in preaching ought not always be negative. This preacher calls for happiness. He is, however, quick to suggest that that happiness is not the end of the story, lest we get too pleased with ourselves.

The purpose of this analysis is not to criticise this sermon unfairly, but to indicate that language for preaching is often bereft of colour, beauty and emotion. Whereas the hearer's communicative world is full of these things.

The second excerpt comes from a sermon on "the complete life." It, too, is largely deductive, consisting of introduction and three points, the third of which also functions as conclusion.

- EXCERPT 2 -

Many of us have self-respect and give ourselves to the well-being of others. However, there are some who cannot make that final step towards the complete life.

The upward reach for God

There are those who have chosen agnosticism. They cannot believe: difficulty reconciling the troubles (pain & suffering) with a God that stands by; of the difficulty squaring scientific/rational view of the universe. These people have a living and moving difficulty.

Others have, by the way they live, unconsciously "erased God from the agenda of life" says Martin Luther King. They see the world and experience it within the 5 senses only.

But the nature of we human beings is that we often find ourselves looking at the world and appreciating it not through the senses, but in awe and wonder.

That nightly display of twinkling lights in the parapet of Heaven. That scene

that is here today and was there yesterday and will be here tomorrow. Draw a picture of the gravity that holds the stars there!

When I look at you I wonder if I can see you. I can only see the outward person you are. Inside, or somewhere invisible is the thing that truly makes you you. The invisible thing we call personality. The part of each of us that time, self, others and God has made.

Can we deny the existence of the God of the world? Do we understand all things? Are there not aspects of life that will never be adequately explained by man's quest for the key to the universe? The seed quietly bursts upon the scene as the full blossoming flower. The wind drifts across the plains, ruffling the grass and quietly disappears, only to reappear unannounced. The eyes of the baby open and follow the movement of the mother's caress. These daily miracles are the foundation of the reality of the hidden Lord.

Do you find yourself now and again getting that little flutter somewhere in the pit of the stomach? You have just sat down to lunch when you get that little flutter because you have just remembered that you have yet to read that long-awaited letter that arrived with the noon post.

On the way home you get that little lift that brings a smile of expectation to light up your face. You have remembered that your favourite programme is on the television that night.

These little oases of light and joy are also to be found when we remember that there was once a man called Jesus who completed our lives by dying on that cross and opened the way for a real loving and lasting friendship.

We can conclude therefore that you are commanded to love yourself and others, but first on that list is that you should "LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD, WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND"

THESE 3 - THAT IS YOUR LIFE'S WORK. AMEN.

- END EXCERPT 2 -

This third "point" of the sermon was very different from the first two. They were much more simple, rational and unadorned. Some might argue that it would be difficult to sustain such poetic imagery. The preacher reserved this language for the final point.

It is also clear that this excerpt represents something of a bridge between an outline and a full sermon text. A few parts, particularly early in this excerpt, don't read smoothly. The assumption is that the preacher filled in the gaps in the oral presentation.

The sense of awe and wonder is quite descriptively presented in this sermon. It is clear that that was the preacher's intent with this final point. We could argue that when turning from nature language to theological language the description is not as clearly made. And it might be wished that the same power of language used to describe the wind on the plains, be employed to present the Christ who completes our lives.

As an example, however, of language that creates images this excerpt is a powerful one. This power can be shown by comparing the weeds in the first excerpt ("Like all the weeds in my garden, it is their nature to grow.") and the flowers in the second ("The seed quietly bursts upon the scene as the full blossoming flower"). The use of the adverb (quietly), descriptive verb (bursts) and the adjectives (full and blossoming) add a dimension to the

second that is somewhat lacking in the first.

The emotional connection is also effectively drawn in this excerpt. "The little flutter" and the "little lift" described real events that most, if not all, of the hearers could recall in their own experience. It might be a bit contentious to compare the feeling of anticipation from a letter or for a television programme to the feeling of being saved by the crucified Christ. Surely there is a problem of degree here. Yet, for most Christian lives, it is the mundane experiences of day to day existence that need redeeming by the Son of God. The emotion of this excerpt is not overblown or overly excited. It is the calm and comfortable experience of oneness with the Creator.

Language is the preacher's instrument. In the sixteen sermons in the sample, the majority are more like the first excerpt than that second. It might be argued that they represent the "plain truth" which has its own appeal, and does not run the risk of seducing the hearers unaware. Yet, if the argument in the previous chapter is correct, then all lasting communication is designed to create images in the minds of the hearers. The question for the preacher is does the sermon enable hearers to create complete images in their consciousness. Or is our language too barren for such a purpose?

CONCLUSIONS

The result of this investigation is similar to that in Chapter II. The preachers in this sample have not yet begun to grasp either the threat or the potential of the television culture. They are still, to some degree or another, voices shouting in the wilderness. Many of them would be proud to be given such an assessment. And indeed, at times it might be better to stand against the prevailing trends than to blandly accept them. Yet, preachers must, I believe, learn how to tack into the wind and use it to go in a different direction. Knowing when to resist and when to accept gifts offered is a matter of some considerable discernment. Though there are few bright spots, the sermons for the most part were cerebral, idea oriented and somewhat bland. This is not to say, however, that these sermons are worthless and empty. On the contrary, many of these sermons were no doubt received appreciatively by the congregations concerned. In Chapter IV, reference is made to congregational expectations. No doubt these sermons met or exceeded those expectations. Yet, the television age suggests so much more. Despite my expectations, these preachers were not spontaneously adapting to enable better (deeper, more experiential, more imaginative and more engaging) communication.

The students reflect a similar resistance to communication patterns as presented in television. They resolutely prefer an emphasis on ideas and logic over image and story. There is evidence of a reluctance to embrace the emotional elements of communication and the issue of authority causes considerable concern. Over all, the students have a laudable commitment

to the content of preaching, but this often hinders effective communication.

A closer look, however, is much more hopeful. Individual students do embrace a wide range of models for preaching that are not antithetical to the television age. Emphasis on imagination, parable, poetry and dialogue can all be found in these students. Though there are many interpretations of these phenomena, one implication of this is that the television age is not as alien to the students' experience as some indications might suggest. The inevitable question that arises is how might these students be encouraged to explore preaching in a television age further? This is the guiding question for the next chapter.

VII THE TEACHING OF PREACHING IN A TELEVISION AGE

In Chapter I a profound paradigm shift was identified in the dominant patterns of human communication. The influence of television and other visual media has moved communication, on a variety of levels, away from a word dominated model to a more image/experiential based system. This does not mean, of course, that literacy has disappeared, that words are now empty or that preaching is futile. Instead, the emphasis on dialogue, experience and imagination offers new possibilities for preaching in a television age.

Chapter VI suggests that the responding shifts in communication for preaching are not spontaneous. Preachers, at least those in our sample, are not sensing a shift in communication patterns and attempting new structures or adopting a new language for preaching. The sample suggests that preaching has remained in a largely "Enlightenment model" of conceptually based communication. Most of the preachers are concerned with communication and with illustrating ideas so that hearers might come to fuller understanding. But there is very little sign that these preachers are aiming for more than understanding. Even the students seem reluctant, outside of a few exceptions, to recognize a need for new dimensions in preaching.

One of the reasons for this reluctance might be seen in Chapter II. There we examined the use of television by both groups. While there was considerable variety of opinion and use of that medium, it is clear that these students and preachers do not approach television in the same manner as the general public. The primary result of the explorations of Chapter II was that the media gap suspected in Chapter I does indeed exist. It is practically a universal recommendation in modern homiletics that the preacher must know and understand his/her congregation in as much depth as possible.¹ The statistics and considerations suggested in this thesis imply that the preacher cannot know the hearers in our modern society unless he/she is aware of the vast impact that television is having on their lives.

This impact is seen in two areas. The first is the content of television. Does the preacher understand the world view that is daily presented across the spectrum of broadcast and narrowcast television? Is the preacher aware of the issues of public debate? Does the preacher know of the solutions to problems and needs that are attended to in television terms? These and a myriad of other questions can really only be answered one way: by watching television. This is not to suggest that preachers, to be effective, must become "couch potatoes." On the contrary, the preacher must be discerning in his/her viewing. But this

¹See, for example, Buttrick's argument in "Preaching and Praxis," *Homiletic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), Chapter 24 or Craddock's "The Pastoral Context," *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), Chapter 2.

discerning choice must include popular programmes as well as news and documentary. In this way, the preacher is participating in the public discourse that television engenders.

All of this, the complaint will be, takes time. And time is a commodity in short supply for busy pastors and preachers. Yet, just as pastors must read to keep up with on-going developments in theology, biblical studies and ecclesiology, so the preacher must devote some time to "reading the texts" engaging the awareness of many people in the congregation. This calls, in part, for an attitudinal change in preachers. While there are, as represented in our sample, some preachers who refuse to watch or even own a television, most preachers do engage in television viewing to a greater or lesser extent. For many of these, however, this can be somewhat of a source of embarrassment. Statements such as "I don't usually watch TV, but I just happened to see ..." reveal this embarrassment. Yet preachers, like all human beings, have needs for relaxation, entertainment, engagement and escape. Television is one source for meeting such needs and preachers should be no more embarrassed than the average church attender that he/she has a television set in the home. Preachers can affirm the viewing that they already do as valuable and, indeed, integral to their preaching ministry. But just as preachers do not engage in pastoral conversation, in family and social gatherings or in reading newspapers or novels primarily to search for illustrations for preaching, so too he/she does not watch television to find material for a sermon. Occasionally, a programme will provide input that might directly be referenced in a sermon. But what will be more common is that as the preacher watches television, he/she hears the concerns and the attempts at meeting those concerns that are daily suggested to the community of which he/she is also a member. Sermons that communicate are sermons that are asking the questions that the hearers are asking, aware of the solutions that are already being sought and affirming those that are positive and countering those that are negative in the light of the gospel.

Of television's two areas of impact (structure and content), however, the content is actually the lesser of the two. It receives the most press and the most debate in Christian (and other) circles simply because it is the easiest to attack.² Yet it is the structural issues outlined throughout this thesis that actually cause the most problems for preaching in a television age. And it is to minimize those problems that the remainder of this chapter will be addressed.

As stated in the introduction to Chapter VI, I approached the preachers expecting to see changes already taking place. Preaching has adapted itself to a variety of historical shifts in rhetoric and public communication quite effectively.³ And yet, in the face of what might

²Or affirm. Most of the public debate from Christian critics, however, has been in the form of complaint rather than affirmation.

³See Chapter IV, "History of Preaching Change."

be the most dramatic change of all, preaching seems to have resisted the tide. Instead of sensing the shifts and rethinking preaching, the preachers sampled all seem to have resolutely opted for a more or less traditional model for preaching. These preachers, though some are highly respected by colleagues and all no doubt appreciated by their congregations, meet the challenge of the television age primarily by avoidance.

In order to more properly respond to the changes in communication, the teaching of homiletics in the colleges and seminaries must understand these changes and implement courses designed to enable preachers to take advantage of the new communication. In the students in our sample we can see signs of hope. Those who had been exposed to a new course in homiletics, as we have seen in Chapter VI and shall see more completely in the next chapter, seem to respond positively to attempts to meet the challenge more directly. A course introducing a variety of elements designed to approach more effective preaching in a television age provided students with options and opportunities for preaching of which they had been unaware. In addition, the course design itself must be consistent with the aims and objectives outlined for preaching and provide a model for communication in a television age. Turning now to an examination of the teaching of preaching in a television age, we look at both course structure and content.

MODELS OF APPROACH

A course in homiletics, like all courses in a university, must have a clear aim and defined goals. These goals will then determine the nature of the course structure and the actual practice of teaching. As a model I suggest the following statement of the aims and goals for the teaching of preaching.⁴

AIMS: This course is designed to examine the issues related to the nature and purpose of preaching, to investigate the preaching tradition, to explore implications for preaching in a media saturated society, and to construct models and structures for preaching particularly suited to a television age.

GOALS: To enable students to discover and incorporate in their own preaching ministry, the traditions and theology of preaching and to respond creatively to the media influence.

To stress the need for movement in sermon structure.

To emphasize the visual in preaching.

To provide models for preaching.

To relate content with delivery.

To raise awareness of the impact of television and other media on communication and preaching.

⁴Full course outline is provided in Appendix F.

Though very simple, these objectives reveal that a primary intention of the course is to blend theory and practice in a real way. It is possible to interpret these goals in a deductive way, without a substantial opportunity for practice being provided. The use of terminology such as "Discover and incorporate..." implies, however, that without the opportunity for integration and experience this course would be incomplete. Indeed, the course notes following the syllabus state that the course is designed to blend theory and practice.

An important element of this class will be the participation of the students in preparing sermons, outlines and class presentations. Though the emphasis for this term is textual, there will be elements of application. Each student will preach at least once during the course to be evaluated in the context of the class and privately by the tutor. Some students will continue into another term for a more direct workshop approach to preaching, presenting sermons for critique.⁵

There are, of course, a variety of methods for introducing an element of preaching practice into a course. The course discussed here is a working model. It has been developed over three years in situ. Further modification will, no doubt, be necessary.

Course Structure

The design of a course in basic homiletics must include a blend of theory and practice. As the model of communication represented in this thesis is experiential, the course must reflect experience in execution. There are many levels of interaction in the learning process. On the simplest level students must preach during the course. This is hardly an innovative concept for teaching. Most courses in homiletics include an element of practice in the design. Practice, however, tends to follow a course of input from the lecturer and/or texts. The usual pattern is, therefore, deductive. "Rules" or theories for preaching are given to students more or less deductively and then students are asked to apply these rules in a practical section. Such a course structure has the value of giving the students a broad look at the range of issues surrounding homiletics before allowing them to test them out in practice.

This deductive model might, however, be overwhelming to students approaching the preaching task with little or no experience. To be given precise details about how preaching should, ought, or might be done could handicap the students' ability to imaginatively respond to the media influence by forcing them into certain limited structures for preaching.

On the other hand, an inductive model for the teaching of preaching might throw the students into some confusion in the face of a variety of preaching structures and styles. In keeping with a modern understanding of communication, it is much more effective for students to engage in preaching practice alongside exposure to preaching theories. A model offered as example can be seen in detail in Appendix F. The thrust of the course structure

⁵Course notes, Appendix F.

is that for each of the ten two hour sessions, the first hour is spent listening to students preach followed by some evaluation and the second hour is spent in a more traditional seminar design arranged around certain themes. We shall look at these themes later.

The advantage to this model is that the students are involved in both preaching and leading of seminars from the very beginning. The very first session of the course included an hour of preaching and evaluation followed by an hour of input and discussion to set the pattern firmly in the minds of the students. Given the difficulty in arranging student preachers and seminar leaders before the start of term, the instructor preached a sermon for the students and then led the seminar discussion that followed. This had two advantages. The first was that the procedure for the rest of the course was presented to the students. The second advantage was to suggest that this course, different in subject, was also different in nature from the other courses in the faculty. This difference will be explored more fully in the next section.

The key to the effectiveness of this structure is allowing the sermon(s) preached in the first hour to help illuminate the theme discussion in the second hour. This will involve a certain amount of insight on the part of the tutor. Due to the emotion and the time involved in both preparing sermons for class and preparing to lead a seminar discussion, it is more realistic to assign different students to preach and to lead in any one session. It is, therefore, unreasonable to expect the students to prepare sermons that directly and obviously relate to a certain theme every time, though on occasion this can be done. It is much more effective, however, for the independently prepared sermons to be tied, through the group discussion, to the theme for the second hour. For example, in one class session the theme was "The Preaching Context." The student preaching in the first hour did not purposely set out to illuminate the theme in her sermon. In the second hour discussion, however, attention was drawn to the implied context in the sermon. In this way the sermon reinforces the seminar discussion. This can be revelatory for the students as they see the relationship of the theology of preaching, for example, to an actual sermon preached. This discovery, or "a-ha" experience, is a much more effective learning practice than hearing or reading about the connection from a more abstract text or lecture.

Group Dynamic

The students in such a course are also enabled to engage in "self-teaching" to a degree. While not completely abdicating the role of the tutor, the course manager or member of teaching staff can allow the students to discover for themselves the connection between theory and practice. It is the students who explore the issues, who present the sermons and who engage in evaluation in the class setting.

It is here, in examining the role of the students in the course input, that we discover the different nature of a course of homiletics. The students are used to being evaluated by staff members, both in terms of marks awarded and of tutorials for essays and exam preparation. What is different and might be more difficult for many students is assessment by fellow students. This calls for a very different type of group dynamic than is the norm. In the book *Learning Preaching*,⁶ prepared by the members of the Academy of Homiletics in the US, a great deal of attention is given to creating an atmosphere conducive to such high levels of student involvement. Their suggestions apply fully to the British context.

Vulnerability and Trust

There are a few elements of that dynamic that must be emphasized. Such a model for teaching preaching calls for sensitivity to the students' vulnerability. It is somewhat of a risk for students to preach in front of fellow students and staff. Unlike an academic setting where one is dealing primarily with ideas and texts, in preaching there is more of the "self" in the presentation. Preaching involves, to a greater degree than other class settings, a personal investment of belief and experience. It is also more difficult to determine what is "right" and "wrong" in preaching than in other academic discourse. It is not unexpected, therefore, that students approach preaching in the class with considerable hesitancy. Yet, that very sense of vulnerability is of great value for preaching.⁷ This is one of the important lessons of preaching that students need to learn. Unfortunately it cannot be learned without a certain amount of risk.

The course must, therefore, work to minimize that risk. The only way to reduce the risk a student faces when preaching to his/her peers is to emphasize trust. *Learning Preaching* refers to a number of exercises that can lead to an awareness and building of trust. While these exercises might be desirable, in a busy term they are difficult to schedule. Trust must be established quickly and students need to feel that the class is as non-threatening an atmosphere as possible.

One attempt at introducing these elements is for the staff member to take the same risks that the students are called upon to take. As mentioned above, when the tutor began the session by preaching a sermon to the class, a clear signal was sent that something different was

⁶Donald Wardlaw, ed., *Learning Preaching* (Illinois: Academy of Homiletics, 1989). This book arose out of discussion in the Academy as to the variety of teaching methods in use in the USA. Wardlaw's remit was to gather some of the diverse material available and to find points of contact and divergence. The result is an important text exploring the fundamentals of teaching preaching.

⁷See Chapter IV, "Authority for Preaching."

taking place. Care must be taken to ensure that the tutor's sermon is not presented as the prime example and that evaluation, positive and negative, is fully sought.

Peer Assessment

The evaluation is the most critical element of the course structure. Some might consider it unrealistic for the students to hear a sermon from a course tutor as anything but a prime example of how it should be done (or at least how the instructor wants it to be done). And yet if a model for evaluation is followed for the tutor's sermon as well as for the students' sermons, then the framework for evaluation works on a level ground. The evaluative tool, not the tutor's sermon, becomes the check on each sermon presented, for affirmation as well as improvement. *Learning Preaching* suggests a variety of evaluative tools. The one used in this exercise, and presented in Appendix I, was adapted from one or more examples in that text.

Evaluation itself can become oppressive. The tool used in evaluation need not be seen as the definitive word on the subject of sermon design and delivery, but rather as a way of opening up the issues of preaching for students. The tool cannot establish a model for preaching that the students all attempt to emulate, but rather can ask questions about any sermon structure as to effectiveness and relevance. The real evaluation is what takes place in conversation in the class. The practice of evaluation enables students to be more perceptive about their own preaching. If the instructor is the only evaluator, then the students might learn about various areas in their preaching which need work, but not necessarily how to identify further areas in their continuing preaching ministry.

It can be helpful, as well as work to reduce the personal risk of each student, if the evaluative attention is shifted slightly. Instead of asking the usual questions of what is right with this sermon and what is wrong with it, the evaluation could begin by asking what can be learned from the sermon. This way the discussion is not on how well or poorly the student performed, but about impact of preaching on the listener. This is a more accurate representation of what takes place in the Church. It takes into account a congregation which has come to hear the Word, which is very different from a group of evaluators who have come to assess. This introduces the very important factor of congregational expectation into the exchange. A large part of how hearers respond to preaching is tied up in what their expectations are. The difficulty is enabling the students to see the preaching class as a "real" setting for preaching. The more we move from detached observers to fellow worshippers, the more effective our evaluation can become.

In addition to the in-class evaluation, each student should be given a private evaluation with the tutor. Here, the use of video replay enables the tutor and student preacher to view the presentation in a more or less objective way. The tutor is then able to make more direct

comments away from the class setting with a little less discomfort to the student. Here detachment is expected and necessary, but not to the degree that the context of preaching is ignored.

An excellent example of the dynamic discussed in this section in action is Troeger's innovative text *The Parable of Ten Preachers*.⁸ In this work Troeger employs a narrative style which explores the issues involved in the teaching of preaching as well as the issues of preaching itself. In almost novel like form, Troeger tells of a teacher of homiletics reminiscing about his first preaching class which adopted a new style of teaching. With fully developed characters and a variety of classroom experiences, Troeger relates quite forcefully a number of important elements of course structure for homiletics. Troeger's parabolic course, however, was for students who had already been exposed to the basics of preaching and he was able to leave out of his structure some of the foundational elements. This does not negate the effectiveness of his model, however. By ensuring that some of the more traditional basic preaching elements are included in the course design, an experiential course structure is certainly still valuable. It is to an examination of these foundation elements that we now turn.

COURSE CONTENT

A look at the course outlined in Appendix F reveals that a basic course in homiletics is concerned with more than just "mechanics." In addition to asking the "how to" questions of preaching, such a course must help students to answer the "what" and "why" questions of preaching as well. It is also good that these, somewhat, larger questions are asked at the very beginning of the course so that students have a foundation upon which to build a complete understanding of the preaching task. Yet, in a blend of theory and practice, these issues are examined in a specific context with specific examples.

Definition of Preaching

A proper starting point for the course is an exploration of images and understandings of preaching already prevalent in the students' minds and experience. Asking questions such as "what is a sermon," for example, or "what is preaching," invite the students to open an ongoing debate with themselves and the other students in the class as to how they see preaching in general as well as their own preaching.

There are a number of texts that explore the nature of preaching. It may be useful, however, to suggest a reading that will challenge the perspective many of the students may hold on preaching. Wangerin's essay "Preaching" is a useful text as it explores the still

⁸Thomas Troeger, *The Parable of Ten Preachers* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

somewhat unconventional concept of preaching to the whole person.⁹ Students then react against or with Wangerin and enter into debate about the nature of preaching. If this is teamed with a sermon with an unusual structure then the effect is intensified.

In addition to the students' experiences and perceptions, it is important to keep in touch with the traditions of preaching in the history of the Christian Church. Holland's text gives a useful exposition of some of the highlights of preaching history.¹⁰ By providing such a framework, the students are not locked into one image of preaching, but are given a spectrum of belief and practice within which their own preaching ministry might take various positions as they grow and change.

Theology of Preaching

As a course of this nature is usually undertaken as a part of an overall degree or programme of training in ministry and theology, the theological underpinnings of preaching must also be examined. As evident from the course outline, it is difficult to select one text that will give a definitive theology for preaching. Theology is an important element in many texts on preaching. The reading list selected on the course outline is only a sample of that variety. Lischer¹¹ provides an overview of the relationship between theology and preaching which is an effective starting point. It is difficult to see, however, how any modern course on preaching can avoid serious consideration of Buttrick's theology for preaching.¹²

In addition to some of the more traditional theologies of preaching, it would be useful to examine in some detail some works on the theology of communication.¹³ Here the course can relate more directly to models of communication prevalent in society and how some of these are appropriate for the communication of the gospel and some are not. But such explorations invite students to be aware of, not just the traditions and process of preaching, but Christian communication in general. This encourages students to consider how theology might guide communication from the simplest interpersonal level to the Church's mass media

⁹Walter Wangerin, "Preaching," *Ragman and Other Cries of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), pp.71-82.

¹⁰Holland, D.T., *The Preaching Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), pp.13-49. Wilson's *Concise History of Preaching* is also a very good text for the historical context of preaching.

¹¹Robert Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), pp.13-29.

¹²See Buttrick, *Homiletic*, op cit, pp.449-459.

¹³See, for example, Dillistone, *Christianity and Communication* (London: Collins, 1956) and Rowe, *The Communication Process* (London: Epworth Press, 1978).

campaigns being planned and already in place. In this way the subject of the media is introduced indirectly. The Church's attempts at communication are compared with both the "traditional" avenues of religious communication and with the secular media. Comparing a denominational documentary to a BBC or ITV programme is often a salutary experience.

It is important to stress that the task for such a course is not to determine for the students what a theology of preaching and communication should be. Rather, the texts and the class discussion ought to raise elements and considerations that the students must encounter in formulating their own theology of preaching. While it is necessary that students begin to formulate a theology of preaching or at least understand the theological issues involved in the preaching task for the purposes of examination, the real work of providing sound theological foundations to an on-going preaching ministry will only happen over time. And, indeed, the experience of many preachers is that their theology changes as their experience grows. We shall return later to the question of examination and assessment.

Authority

As indicated in Chapter IV, in a television age one of the most significant theological elements for preaching is the change in the understanding of authority for preaching. In the previous chapter we saw an indication of how difficult such a concept is for students. Authority has connotations of manipulation as well as hierarchical and monological communication systems. It is imperative that authority be reinterpreted for preaching today. Buttrick's analysis, while not directly referring to the influence of television, makes an appropriate response to these concerns. Authority, he claims, must be re-understood, not in terms of power or expertise, but in terms of "folly" and "weakness," as represented by the image of the crucified Christ.¹⁴ This means, without repeating the earlier argument, that authority is no longer seen as an intrinsic value, but a relational one. Authority in the television age is given not owed.

Though this sounds like a significant departure from the historical understanding of authoritative preaching, it is actually less difficult for students to grasp than some of the other elements of preaching. The influences of a television culture are already felt here. Others might identify this movement away from traditional expressions of authority as a loss of confidence in the gospel, or an effect of an increasingly secularized society that values tolerance over exclusivity. While these factors no doubt have their influence, it is possible to see the new situation in a more positive light than has been suggested recently. A movement away from preaching "six feet above contradiction" leads to a more equal sharing of the

¹⁴Buttrick, *Homiletic*, op cit, pp.245-248.

preaching task. It allows for a more dialogical understanding of preaching.

There are, of course, a number of other issues that ought be considered as crucial in a homiletics course. Issues such as Ethics, the Use of the Bible, Preaching and Children, Preaching in the Context of Worship, and Purpose in Preaching (as represented in the course outline in Appendix F) all have a central place in a holistic approach to the teaching of preaching. Indeed, some of these topics are directly affected by the influence of the television age. Certainly a session on "Children and Preaching" must take the new, more visual language into account, and "Preaching in the Context of Worship" needs to reflect the place of preaching in a worship setting that, too, is responding to (or avoiding) the television age. But the theoretical issues outlined above are, in some ways, the most crucial ones in a course of this type.

Structures for Preaching

It is also crucial that the "how to" elements of a homiletics course are addressing the new communication environment. As outlined in Chapter IV, the television age enables certain structures even as it blocks certain others. The difficulty is to avoid presenting one structure as the *only* structure for preaching. In making a decision to present one structure as the main input for the seminar session students may interpret this as the preferred structure for preaching (at least to get a good mark from the tutor!). It is doubly important, therefore, that a variety of structures be presented throughout the discussion. The chosen text is a "base line" from which the students are encouraged to diverge. In selecting this base line, however, it is important to introduce a certain amount of innovation. If the base line is the traditional three-point or deductive structure, then the students, who will have heard this style of preaching for the most part, will see this as the norm and other structures a deviation. If, however, the main text introduces a radically new structure for preaching, as does Eugene Lowry's text,¹⁵ then the students are more likely to be challenged by the text to explore a variety of options.

Imagination

Included in the exploration of structures must be an examination of the use of imagination in preaching. There are a number of new preaching texts that explore imagination, most of them are referenced in Chapter V and in the Course outline in Appendix

¹⁵Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), pp.5-25.

F. Some of these texts, particularly Wilson,¹⁶ have some quite practical exercises for utilizing and improving one's imaginative capacities. Though in short supply, time spent exploring issues of imagination, both in sermon evaluation and in seminar session, is a valuable indication of the importance of this human faculty for communicating the gospel. It is also worth drawing the students' attention to the growing list of theological texts with an emphasis on imagination. This might help to move some of the more reluctant students away from the position held by some that imagination is child's play and, therefore, not serious enough to carry the gospel.

Story

One structural model and a useful tool for exercising the imagination is storytelling. A common practice in many of the courses I teach is to invite the students on the first day to tell their own stories. Depending on the time and the number of students, this may be done in pairs, in small groups or before the whole class. In this way the students get used to speaking in front of others. It is also a useful tool for beginning to build up the level of trust required for such a course.

Students should also be encouraged to tell other stories. One way of breaking into this model for preaching is to ask each student to tell the biblical story surrounding the text that he or she will be preaching. Though I would hesitate to demand all students attempt a specific structure, if I were to choose any it would be the narrative structure. By getting students to think in terms of plot and character, movement and development, creating a story can be good training for all types of preaching, even the most traditional.

Voice and Presentation

Homiletics teaching has traditionally been concerned with the voice. The shifts in communication do nothing to reduce the importance of such concern. A clear and interesting speaking voice is vitally important for preaching in a television age. For people exposed to messages surrounded by image and colour and light and music, preaching can seem thin and dull. The voice is the preacher's instrument and must be used to the best of its ability. The outline in the last section of Appendix G, reflects the variety of elements attention to voice should consider. It is also clear that the evaluative tool used in the class setting should include sufficient reference to the vocal quality of the preaching event. In addition to affirmation and restating some of the in class critique, the main purpose of the private evaluation of the student is to give direct input as to the vocal strengths and weaknesses, and ways of

¹⁶Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988).

maximizing the former while minimizing the latter.

The emphasis on image, however, does bring other considerations to the evaluation of preaching. In examining the "performance" of the preacher, a critical look must be taken at the non-verbal dimension of the communication. What do the hearers see? The visual dimension of the preaching event plays an increasingly important role in preaching. Little attention is paid to the subject in most homiletic texts. Yet, the students need to be self-aware in their presentation without being self-conscious. Again, the outline in Appendix G, suggests a variety of elements to be explored in assessment.

Other Considerations

The sheer number of the items under the heading of course content should give one pause. It is difficult to see how all of these could be comprehensively covered in a one term or even a one year course. It should be remembered that this outline is designed as a basic course in homiletics. For some it may be the only course in preaching. It is useful, therefore, to introduce a wide range of subjects briefly than to simplify the syllabus and explore only one or two of the subjects mentioned. The purpose in such a design is to whet the student's appetite for more, and deeper, study in the subject. The "more" could be provided by individual reading and practice, work with speech training, practice in placement or probationary years, and even an advanced course on homiletics could easily be introduced given space in the term.

It is also possible that even this (somewhat overloaded) course would not find room except as an optional course for the few most interested. In that case other provision could be made. In Appendix G we see the outline of a series of lectures and seminars which function as a slot in a general ministry course. The outline of the course as a whole appears in Appendix H.

In this shortened version we see the rudiments of the more complete course. It too attempts to address the "What" and "Why" questions alongside the "How to" elements of the course. What is represented in Appendix G is the bare outline of the input. The methodology, like that in the earlier course, is more conversation than lecture. Though time is taken for a significant amount of input, the students are not simply recording machines mutely taking notes. A series of exercises are built into the "lecture" series to keep the students active in the process of exploring the subject of preaching.

Three other ingredients to this shorter course design work to complete the picture. First of all the students attend a variety of worship services over the course of the module. Using the evaluative tool shown in Appendix I, they are asked to reflect on the style and effectiveness of the preaching as well as the worship service as a whole. This puts a sense of

real world context into the discussion. Secondly, there are three weekly student-led seminars, designed to allow the students to reflect on the input sessions and one or more texts exploring similar themes. For this module on preaching, an element of practice was introduced into the seminar to give at least a few students the experience of preparing for and/or preaching in the class setting. The aim of the practice is different than that of a full homiletics course. The students were asked to reflect on the process of preparing a sermon rather than on the final delivery of that sermon. It was, admittedly, difficult for many of the students to make such a fine distinction. The third added ingredient was that these sessions on preaching were immediately preceded by two sessions on media and communication. In this way a number of the relevant themes were introduced into the discussion prior to turning specifically to preaching. Issues such as visual communication, dialogue and experiential communication were presented before the preaching module and, therefore, served somewhat as a base line for further, and more specific talk about the nature of preaching.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

These courses, Appendix F and G, have been running in the Department of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology at New College for two and three years respectively. As the course designer and the lecturer, I have been committed to a programme of development in the area of homiletics for four years. These courses, while still in need of fine tuning have been enthusiastically received by the students. We shall examine their response more fully in the next chapter.

My own assessment is first that both of these courses need more class time. ^{There is} no doubt that all lecturers feel the same way about their subjects. But there is an overwhelming sense of racing through an~~o~~ver full menu without adequate time to digest each item. Much is left to the students to assimilate and to test out on their own. I would much prefer giving the students more opportunity to fine tune their preaching. If each student had an opportunity to preach three or even four times during the course, then there would be scope for asking for specific styles or structures (e.g. narrative, conceptual, or imaginative) to be attempted, for different techniques (e.g. manuscript or extemporaneous) to be explored, and for that little bit more confidence in one's own ability to be fostered.

Yet, time is a premium that cannot be assumed. The discussions on a variety of themes are often lively and exciting. As the term progresses the students find themselves able to argue and disagree without antagonizing one another. And by leaving certain debates unresolved by the end of class time, more students are motivated to reflect and perhaps even read more on a specific topic. I have often loaned and recommended preaching texts to students after each class. As a way of stimulating interest, this "scattershot" approach is quite

effective.

As with most student led seminars, some are more successful than others. It has been, on occasion, hard work to find the points of intersection between the sermons preached and the seminar discussion. At times the consequence grabs the students' interest and makes the discussion lively and inclined to go on long past the end of class time. Other times, the students struggle to see what a text or a theme has to do with "real preaching." There is also a suspicion that much of what is presented in class is somewhat idealistic and that the grind of preaching week after week makes most systematic thinking about preaching difficult, if not impossible.

It is precisely on this point that the issue of exams is relevant. There are those who argue that preaching is not an examinable subject. Assessment for the course should be the assessment of sermons. In fact, I held this position myself for a time. I now see, however, that the ability to think clearly about the nature of preaching, to use analytically and purposefully the language of preaching, and the ability to explore the dynamics of preaching, all of which are examinable subjects, is as important at this stage as confidence and experience in the practice of preaching. We cannot do away with practice completely. To lecture about preaching and never give the opportunity to preach or at least prepare sermons is to do an injustice to the students. But, on the other hand, because someone is good at public speaking or witnessing or even biblical exposition does not necessarily mean that he/she understands preaching. There is scope for more than just practice.

There is also scope for more teaching in homiletics. A further course in homiletics that focuses more on practice within a smaller framework of issues would begin to fill in some gaps. Preaching on social issues or prophetic preaching, for example, would enable an in-depth look at one function of preaching within the larger sphere of preaching in the Church. Other courses are waiting to be designed.

The question of media input is also an important one. To truly reflect on the nature of communication in a television age, some time ought to be spent in exploring the influence and content of television. There is a variety of communication models presented on the television fare, some of which are directly related to the preaching event. New College offers a companion course, on the theology and ethics of communication and media, ^{which} is offered at the same level as the homiletics course. Taken together these two courses begin to raise awareness of the complexities of communicating in a television age. It is difficult to ensure that students would be able to take both classes, however. Some space should be made in the preaching course, then, for the television input. But how this might be done, given the constraints on time, is not yet clear. One option is to ensure that each topic covered in the syllabus includes a media component. Though some subjects, such as authority, structure and context, lend

themselves easily to such a discussion, others may prove more difficult.

In some senses, the media element is implied in the discussion. The need to stress imagination and story, dialogue and experience, is due in part to the influence of television on society. And yet, it is legitimate to include such topics in the course without direct reference to the media. Most of the theological investigations into imagination do not explicitly include discussion of television influence. But it cannot be denied that the growing confidence in the subject is a response to the changing nature of communication in Western society. Whether the source of the change is identified might be moot.

What this more subtle approach misses, however, is the ability to reference the content of television. Any course on preaching ought to enable students to read the public texts in order to address their preaching more effectively. Here the discourse of television must be directly on the agenda.

All of this, however, must be supported by the institution of the Church. Those responsible for the oversight of ministers in training need to recognize the importance of a course in homiletics, and to require or at least strongly suggest that each candidate for ministry take at least one class. Of course each discipline believes that theirs is the one vital ingredient that ministers cannot do without. And yet preaching is one of the areas of public witness, regularly seen by a significant part of the membership, and in some ways the integration point of a range of other disciplines. The Church needs good preachers.

VIII

CASE STUDY OF NEW COLLEGE STUDENTS ASSESSMENT OF HOMILETICS COURSE

As stated in Chapter II, out of the seventeen students involved in the case study, ten of them were students in the honours Homiletics course. The remaining seven were students in the Practical Theology 1 (PT1) course, of which preaching was a three week module. The purpose of this chapter is to record some of the responses that the students made to the various courses.

Before attempting that, however, a context for these responses might be provided by looking at the homiletical training experience of the Edinburgh preachers. From there we can have an indication of the change, if any, in the styles and effectiveness of the teaching.

EDINBURGH PREACHERS ASSESSMENT OF INSTRUCTION

Each of the eleven preachers was given the opportunity to relate in some detail the instruction for preaching that he/she received in preparation for ministry. In addition they were each asked to indicate whether this instruction was helpful in their ministry or not.

Lay Preachers

The five lay preachers had all undergone a correspondence training programme that entailed some considerable work at home in reading, writing essays and sample sermons. Three of them then attended a short course that covered a range of ministry subjects at a theological college. This course was designed especially for lay preachers and emphasized the practical dimension of preaching. At the end of the correspondence course, each preacher sat an exam that was assessed by denominational leaders. One of the lay preachers also attended a ministry course at a Bible Institute.

This more formal education was then followed by some time as a preacher "on trial." In this scheme the preachers are observed and evaluated by other lay preachers. For some this process lasted for only nine months, others were "on trial" for up to three years. The difference, apparently, had more to do with availability for preaching dates than with preaching ability.

All of the lay preachers were complimentary of the training that they received. Three considered it "Very Helpful" and two "Helpful."

Clergy

The experience of the clergy is much more varied. There were two, however, who

came through the Methodist tradition and received their initial training in the same manner as the lay preachers. All Methodist ministers in Britain receive lay preacher training before candidating for the ministry. Of these two clergymen who received this lay training, one is still in the Methodist Church, the other serves in the Church of Scotland.

Other clergy comments indicate that the training was actually less formal than that of the lay preachers. One preacher indicated that he was brought up in a church with a strong preaching tradition and it is from that experience that he received his education. Another indicates that he attended "a few lectures, made one taped sermon and had two elocution lessons." Reference to an "internship" period of practical training was made by one. In fact, the most common remark made by the preachers is that the best training they received, and continue to receive, is the weekly practice of preaching. It is through the experience of preaching that they learned what they know about the discipline.

Few of them are terribly enthusiastic about the training that they received. The one exception is a clergyman who spent a semester at Union Theological Seminary under George Buttrick, which he considers "an eye-opening experience unequalled elsewhere." The rest indicate that their preparation for the preaching ministry was either somewhat "helpful" or "neither helpful or unhelpful." Though none of them claim that the training that they received did them any damage, neither do they claim that it gave them a powerful start. In fact, a few of them confessed to having difficulty in remembering exactly what sort of training they did receive.

There is no doubt that for most of these preachers, primarily those who have a number of years of service behind them, it is the practice of preaching that gives them the most help. Though a few have had occasion to read a preaching text since beginning their ministry, for most the practice of reflection on the preaching task is a solitary one that often must give way to the more "pressing matters of the parish." Just as their television viewing is hampered by the pressures of time, so too is their reflection on the practice of preaching. Given the difficulty in getting appropriate feedback or evaluation from the hearers, most of these preachers have not given serious consideration to the practice of preaching for a number of years. This is not to say that they are not concerned about the quality or effectiveness of their preaching. Rather that they are struggling on their own, for the most part, to improve or develop their preaching style. None of the preachers confessed to being overwhelmed by the communication taking place all around them, or to adapting to fit certain models. As was reflected in Chapter II, these preachers do not see much connection between their preaching and what happens on television. Television and preaching are, for most of them at least, two disparate worlds.

STUDENTS' CLASS EXPERIENCE

The courses that the students undertook have been described in the previous chapter. The seven PT1 students were exposed to preaching in a manner like that shown in Appendix G. The main difference is that the "Children and Preaching" lecture was added in a later year. The ten higher level students took a course very much like that seen in Appendix F. Again, a few changes were made in the contents, but the format was the same.

The teaching techniques in the two courses were very different. In the first level course, it was primarily "teaching from the front," though care was taken to involve students in dialogue as much as possible. In the third level course, after the first two sessions, the students took over responsibility for the direction of each seminar, as well as the preaching. Each student was instructed to read the designated text and at least one other book from the reading list. This way there would be a common starting ground, the assigned text, but with a variety of supportive material depending on the choices that the students made.

The students then chose which seminar they would lead based on personal interest and experience. The remit for the seminar leader was to present the fundamentals of the subject as briefly, but as interestingly as possible and then to engage the rest of the class in discussion in some way. Some quite imaginative students used role play or problem-solving as a way of introducing discussion. Others brought a series of questions, and some simply opened up the issue for general debate. Some of these latter ones were actually quite exciting, as there were a few students who could carry such a class. For the most part, given the restrictions on time, the more structured talks were more beneficial, though they tended to end somewhat unfinished. As is always the case for seminar discussions, there was more that could have been said. Some attempts were made by the seminar leaders or the course tutor to "round things off" by articulating some of the cogent points or raising some questions for further review. But many of the students expressed frustration with the limitations of discussion time.

Throughout it all care was taken to link the sermons for the class with the subject of the seminar. The student leaders were encouraged to do so when they could, and, as tutor, I made an effort to unite the two halves. The format for the preaching was different in that, though the sermons were delivered by students, the evaluation was directed by the tutor. As I had the opportunity to meet with the student later, I spent most of the time allotted in soliciting comments from the other students. It was more useful for the students to struggle both with presenting the sermons and with the evaluation. The evaluations were, for the most part, friendly and supportive. It was almost too friendly at first as no one was willing to point out negatives or weaknesses. Though this made for a comforting atmosphere, it took some time before the students were willing to be a bit more directive. Even a sermon that was unsatisfactory in both content and delivery elicited primarily encouraging comments as the

students worked hard to minimize the embarrassment. Given the opportunity to come back later and discuss the sermon in detail with the student, it was probably a more helpful exercise for the students to struggle with affirmation. The student preacher, from comments made both before and after delivering the sermon, was aware of the limitations. Hearing fellow students offer encouragement probably did more good than a direct critique would have.

As stated in the previous chapter, the intent of the evaluative session was to focus on the preaching event more than on the particular performance. This did not mean, however, that students were not allowed, or even willing in later sessions, to make suggestions as to delivery and pace, et cetera. On the contrary, it was fully intended that a student was given the chance to hear how others received the sermon he/she presented. In the end it seemed to work best that the students were largely supportive, with the occasional question or suggestion. This allowed me, as the tutor, to explore weaknesses and possibilities more directly with the student on an individual basis.

STUDENT RESPONSE AND ASSESSMENT

Practical Theology I

The responses from the students in the PT1 course came with that class as a whole. There were some 30 students that year who were asked to comment on the various modules of the course. The comments for the preaching section were generally favourable. The module was given the highest rating in most of the designated categories by three-quarters of the class. The students were generally appreciative of the attempt to introduce more consistent dialogue into the teaching time. A few students specifically mentioned the blending of theory and practice built into the module.

Perhaps the most significant complaint was that there was no opportunity for the students themselves to engage in preaching practice. "A great opportunity was missed," wrote one student, "by not making this a real workshop on preaching." A few students were also concerned about the speed with which some topics were addressed. They would have preferred a more leisurely approach to some of the subject, specifically the use of the Bible and sermon structure. Here again it appears to be the practical concerns that are uppermost on the minds of the students.

In a lecture format, like PT1, it is difficult to see any other way of approaching such a practical subject as preaching. Effort was made to bridge the gap between workshop and lecture. But a few students were disappointed. Though the numbers complaining were small, it is an important issue nonetheless. Particularly as this will be the only exposure to homiletics that many students will receive in their college course. The bulk of preparation for preaching is left to the placement and probationary years.

Honours Homiletics

The students taking the optional course in homiletics were also generally pleased with the input. All of the students agreed that the course was stimulating and refreshing in that it took an innovative approach to a discipline. They felt that they were stretched to think of preaching in new ways almost from the very first. "My expectations were exceeded with every subject," claimed one student. "The new approaches to preaching were exciting. I don't know if I'll be able to preach with such diversity, but it is good to know of the possibilities."

It is useful to remember that at present this is an optional course, therefore, it would be expected that the students are already interested in the subject. Yet there is a strong feeling that what was so appealing was the "newness of an old subject." One student wrote that the course was "stimulating -- fresh approaches regarding preaching, what it is and why and how we do it."

On the issue of the group dynamics more than one student claimed that the design and working of the course "helped me feel more affirmed in what preaching is about and my ability to preach." The group became a cohesive unit in ways that other seminars may not. First names were used throughout and outside of class a general affability pervaded among the students. Also appreciated was the leadership from within. "Perceptive summing up from the tutor, and helpful interventions, acute and pertinent to help steer us, when necessary, back to the topic." Since the course a few of the students have returned for further discussions. And one student, encountered outside of college, claimed that now that he is in a church he would like to come back and go through the course again. The importance was newly relevant.

The main complaints had to do with the amount of work needed to prepare for both preaching and seminars. It seemed to some students to be quite heavy compared to other courses. By blending theory and practice a few of the students felt they were actually doing two courses in one. There was also concern about the time factor. Some of the students wanted more time in discussion about the student sermons, others would have preferred more discussion time in the seminar. A few were worried that the course tried to cover too much in too short a time. And yet, when pressed, none of them were able to suggest what might have been left out.

Preaching in a Television Age

Though none of the students in either course came forward with statements indicating that they now saw new life for preaching in the television age, a few of the students did refer to some of the themes stressed in both courses. Perhaps the most resonant theme was dialogue. The students were ready with examples of preaching that spoke to no one and answered

questions no one was asking. They were keen to point out agreement with the idea of dialogue though still unclear as to how it might be implemented. The most common suggestion was that "the preacher must be a pastor who listens before preaching."

There were a few of the students who enthusiastically grasped the idea of imagination in preaching. They attempted a variety of preaching styles in an effort to awaken the imaginations of the people in the pew. Narrative, parable and poetry were the most cited means. The remainder of the students were willing to admit that imagination had a place in preaching, primarily that of providing illustration or interesting introductions. But some of these students could not claim to be totally convinced that imagination should be given free reign to communicate the gospel.

As an exercise of teaching in a media age, the new structures of inductive, experiential learning were quite effective. The students explored the issue of preaching from the "inside," from the pulpit as well as the textbook. The video gave another perspective on preaching practice from the hearer's point of view. In terms of performance, there is nothing so eye-opening as watching yourself preach. As these students came to the class with a variety of life experiences, to avoid taking those into account in the class sessions would have aborted the dialogue before it began. In moving from the classroom into the pulpit this inclination to involvement, to imagination and dialogue might take some time to take root.

CONCLUSIONS

These students are part of the cadre that will be entering the pulpits of the Church in the near future. The experience of asking questions about the nature of preaching cannot help but be beneficial to them as they attempt to carry on a preaching ministry. One student claimed that participating in the case study exercise, as well as attending the class on homiletics, opened his eyes to the possibilities for preaching. While before he saw it as a somewhat onerous duty to be performed, he now saw that it was an exciting ministry in service of his calling.

CONCLUSION

PREACHING

Preaching is a distinctive act of Christian communication. It is distinctive due to its history, tradition, and biblical precedent. The true distinctiveness of preaching, however, originates from its content and its intent. Preaching is a human act of communication that participates in a divine act of communication. This act of communication, preaching, intertwines with the notion of the Word of God.

As discussed in Chapter III, God's Word is seen as both the creating and the redeeming power of God. For the Christian the Word of God is fully revealed and incarnated in Christ. Christ, then, is the content of preaching; Christ, whose birth, life, suffering, death and resurrection incarnate God's Word to the world.

The content of preaching is that Word of God, which is also the Love of God revealed in the Incarnate Word of God which has become the gospel of Jesus Christ. The ideas fuse together into one. The content of Christian preaching is a person, Jesus called the Christ.

Incarnation, then, as the model for divine communication, discloses that God's nature is to reveal God's presence and will to creation. Preaching, as one act of Christian communication, participates in this drive and shares in the impetus to make God known. The content of preaching directs the intent of preaching. The preachers preach because theirs' is a message of love. They love the people to whom they preach, and the context in which they preach is that of love. It is this impulse to communicate God, which is an impulse of love, that shapes our communicative acts. In as much as preaching participates in this divine communication of God's love, it participates in the Word of God. God, who communicated God's love to God's people in the Incarnation, calls preachers to incarnate that love in their preaching and, beyond preaching, in their lives. But when all this is said, the fact remains that preachers must be heard.

TO BE HEARD

The understanding of communication presented in Chapter III is that communication takes place in a relationship and within a community. As argued in Chapter IV, Christian preaching takes place within a context. This contextual dimension is, on the one hand, necessitated by the content of preaching. Christ coming into the world as Jesus of Nazareth brought a contextual dimension. The Incarnation is a contextualization of the universal message of God's love for creation.

On the other hand, our theological reflection upon the nature of the communicative act itself calls for contextualization. Christian models or principles of communication

emphasise the dialogical nature of communication. The impetus to communicate in love demands that the persons engaged in the act of communication be regarded as full participants in dialogue. A Christian understanding of communication will not allow concern for the other to be swallowed up in the concern for the message. Christian preaching is speaking the truth in love to the people who come to hear. It challenges and directs, it affirms and supports, it invites and unites. But, through it all, preaching communicates with people where they are, people in a particular context.

IN A TELEVISION AGE

As argued in Chapter I, the context within which preaching takes place today is one in which certain modes of communication dominate. The community of faith is located within a culture supported and defined, to a degree, by the media of mass communication. These media present a shift in the dominant patterns of communication within a society. Often termed a "paradigm shift," this influence alters how human beings understand, derive meaning and communicate. These media, with television at the forefront, provide information and experience by which the members of a society come to understand themselves.

The case study experience, as reflected in Chapter II, reveals that there is a significant gap between the community's use and experience of the media and that of the preachers and preachers to be. In terms of viewing time and programme selection, the preachers and students are partaking in "minority" television viewing. In terms of the significance given to the television viewing experience, the preachers and students for the most part do not consider television an important element in either their preaching or pastoral ministry. The implication of this is that preachers are not aware of the significance of the medium for either providing meaningful content or restructuring the patterns of communication.

A significant element of this shift in the patterns of communication is the move from an emphasis on word to one of image that television brought to the public in such a dramatic way. Television language is a language of image, providing experience and identification often structured along the lines of narrative. This is the standard, then, by which public and private communication is judged. It is the model with which we approach the preaching task.

This thesis has been an attempt to discover ways of preaching in a television age. Those who come to hear preaching do not come as blank slates upon which a preacher's oral communication might write. The hearers live in a world of communication. We explore the characteristics of a television age in order to understand the hearers and their environment.

PREACHING TO BE HEARD IN A TELEVISION AGE

The preacher listens to the hearers, discerns the patterns of communication prevalent in the social context and adapts to these changes with fresh approaches to the preaching task. Such sensitivity and willingness to learn is not, however, a surrender of the gospel. On the contrary, the foundation upon which a change in preaching purpose and technique takes place is as rooted in our theological understanding of communication and preaching as it is a response to the external changes brought about by the media. But, as the nature of the act of communicating faith is explored, unexpected lines of congruence between television communication and preaching might be found. In addition, an awareness of the need to adapt communication techniques represents a recognition of the way in which the gospel is inevitably enculturated.

There are a variety of models that might be employed in preaching. Some of these models resonate with the heart of both the nature of the gospel and the television age. The history of preaching and homiletics is rife with examples of preachers and thinkers who have experienced the need to adapt communication styles. Some of this change grew out of a theological reflection on the nature of preaching, rather than direct influence of public communication shifts. Despite this, the need for change, and perhaps even the theological reflection, grew out of an awareness of blockages in the communication from the pulpit. Preaching must be in tune with those patterns of communication.

In examining language for preaching, certain key characteristics gain significance for preaching in a television age. The language for preaching is, in the first instance, visual. It needs "words that evoke." Images are described, and thus recreated in the minds of the hearers. Describing invites hearers to participate in the sermon experientially. The hearer is enabled to "see" what is being said.

Further, these images, and this language for preaching is concrete. It is the concrete that communicates to a wider audience than the general providing clear points of contact and resonance in the minds and experience of the hearer.

To maintain this connection with the particularities of human experience, the language of the preacher is also the language of the people. The words themselves must be accessible, within the experiences and understandings of those invited to hear and see.

Visual, concrete and accessible begin to describe the language of television and so the language for preaching. Images in preaching language have similar characteristics as images in television language. The images created in the imaginations of the hearers serve to provide an emotional context functioning primarily through identification.

This imaged understanding and experience of the world around them is what people are experiencing today through the medium of television. Preaching needs to respond with

a language of life as it is experienced and understood through images. It is through the ordering of these images, or the form of the sermon, that the gospel encounters and transforms the hearers.

Part of the emotional context created by television images includes entertainment and humour. It is the nature of television to be an entertainment medium, and humour is a popular means of entertainment, though not the only one. Though it serves the ends of entertainment, humour ought not be dismissed as only able to deal with trivialities. Humour has a way of slipping past a defence and communicating larger truths. It can also create a common space where social differentiations are no longer as important. The preacher is not merely a stand up comedian, and sermons need not always be humorous. But neither should humour be avoided as unable to communicate the gospel.

The dominant element of this language for preaching in the television age is image. The images provide a focus, a point of contact, an emotional context and allow preaching to provide an experiential encounter of the gospel. Preaching, then, demands the utilization of the imagination. Both the preacher and the hearer engage the imagination as they participate in the preaching event.

The encounter, or experience is central to the preaching event. The thrust of the language for preaching as described above is to engage the hearer in a dialogue. Dialogue is the key understanding of the process of preaching.

It is, then, in the attention to these two, imagination and dialogue, that preaching can be heard in the television age.

THE HOMILETICAL RESPONSE

The case study experience, as reflected in Chapter VI indicates that this resolution to the dilemma of preaching in a television age will not spontaneously be employed. Preachers, at least those in our sample, do not seem to be sensing the shift in communication patterns and attempting new structures or adopting a new language for preaching. Preachers are concerned with communication, ensuring that hearers might come to fuller understanding. But there is very little sign that these preachers are aiming for more than understanding. Even the students seem reluctant, outside of a few exceptions, to recognize a need for new dimensions in preaching.

Therefore, a programme of homiletical instruction seems to be necessary. As outlined in Chapter VII, this course not only should teach *about* the changes in communication structures in a television age, but should embrace these communication patterns in the very design of the course itself. This means that in addition to teaching about dialogue and experience and imagination, the students in the course should be given scope to engage in

these activities. In this way the model for preaching becomes the model for Christian communication on a variety of levels.

The course work experience of the students in the case study was generally positive, as reflected in Chapter VIII. A number of the students allowed the experience of learning preaching to provide them with an opportunity to explore the nature of communication in a television age, to embrace dialogue and to recognize the importance of imagination in preaching. Though the time constraints were great, there was room for student engagement with the subject of preaching in a television age.

Further work needs to be done in discerning models both for the practice and teaching of preaching in a television age. One area overlooked in the recommendations for course work is continuing education for practising preachers. Teaching models, interactive techniques as well as books need to be developed for this crucial area.

The problem, stated in the introduction, still before us is how to communicate the gospel authentically from the Christian pulpit in a society where television dominates the patterns of communication. This thesis has argued that preaching, in order to be heard today, must adopt the new language and forms used by television. The medium of television can inform preaching, even though television's message is seen by many to be antithetical to the message of the gospel. This thesis has explored a faith in the efficacy of preaching. Television has not made the preaching of the gospel redundant. The Christian message can still be communicated through preaching, but most effectively through preaching that is heard in a television age. The person of Christ can encounter human beings through image; and a living faith may be seen through experiential preaching.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CASE STUDY
NEW COLLEGE STUDENTS

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. In which age group are you? *circle one*

10-19 20-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41-45 46-50 51 or over

2. Are you **Male / Female** ? *circle one*

3. What is your marital status? *circle one*

Single Married Separated/Divorced Widowed Other

6. What is your denominational affiliation?

7. How would you characterize your own theological persuasion? *circle one*

'Conservative' 'Liberal' 'Moderate' 'Socialist' 'Fundamentalist'

8. How long have you been regularly attending worship services? *circle one*

Less than 2 years 2 - 5 years 5 - 10 years More than 10 years

9. How much would these 'opinions of television' reflect your own attitude toward television.

'Opinions' Don't Know Don't Agree Agree Somewhat Totally Agree

'Innocent Toy' 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

'Opportunity
for Church' 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

'Destroyer of
Family life' 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

'Waste of
Time' 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

'Window on
World' 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Other 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

please specify: _____

10. How much television do you watch in an average week? *circle one*

None 0-2 hours 3-5 hours 5-9 hours More than 10 hours

11. What is your favourite television programme? _____

12. What programme(s) would you recommend your family watch? _____

13. What programme(s) would you recommend your congregation watch? _____

14. What programme(s) would you recommend your family not watch? _____

15. What programme(s) would you recommend your congregation not watch? _____

16. How important would you say these "functions of television" are for your own viewing?
circle appropriate number

"Functions"	Don't Know	Not Important					Average					Very Important
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Educate	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Entertain	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Pass the time	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Escape	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
For Company	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Stir Imagination	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Other	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

please specify: _____

17. In your opinion is it possible to communicate the gospel on television? *circle one*

Yes No

18. If Yes, is it being done at present?

Yes No (*If yes, name programme: _____*)

PART II: PREACHING

19. How would you rate the preaching you hear on these aspects of communication?
circle appropriate number

	Don't Know			Poor			Adequate			Good		Excellent
'Aliveness'	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Convey mood	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Convey meaning	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Presence	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Sincerity	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

20. Read each of the following phrases about some weaknesses of preaching. How well do they agree with your own complaints of the preaching you hear?
circle appropriate number

"Phrases"	Don't Know			Don't agree			Average			Agree completely		
I can't follow	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Too Long	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Too Short	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Boring	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not relevant	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I can't see it	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I don't understand	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Doesn't excite me	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Doesn't relate to me	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Other	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

please specify: _____

21. Which of these do you agree might be said in favour of the preaching you hear?
circle appropriate number

	Don't Know			Don't Agree					Average		Agree completely		
Good stories	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Good thoughts	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Make sense	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Humorous	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Good images	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Other	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		

please specify: _____

22. What do you remember from a sermon? *circle appropriate number*

	Don't Know			Don't remember					Average		Remember completely		
Main points	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
General Idea	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Story or illustration	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Feeling	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Other	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		

please specify: _____

23. If you can, think of a specific sermon that you believe was the best example of what preaching should be. How would you describe it? *circle one*

A well thought out lecture A story of faith An instruction on moral ideas

An image of faith in action Other (please specify): _____

24. How important are the following elements in preaching?
circle appropriate number

"Elements"	Don't Know	Not Important					Helpful					Essential
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Logic	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Illustrations	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Ideas	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Stories	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Images	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Colourful Language	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Humour	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Other	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

please specify: _____

25. What is the purpose of preaching? *circle one*

- Teaching Biblical Truths**
 Relating Faith to life
 Experiencing of the living Christ
 Retelling the story of Jesus
 Other (please specify):

26. How would you rate the following items in order of importance for preaching?

- _____ **Theology**
- _____ **Biblical exegesis**
- _____ **Witness to Christ**
- _____ **Communication**
- _____ **Congregational engagement**
- _____ **Response**
- _____ **Christian Discipleship**
- _____ **Affirmation**

EDINBURGH PREACHERS

TELEVISION & PREACHING QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Number of years in preaching ministry:_____.
2. Did you enter ministerial training from school or university? *circle one*

Yes No

3. If **No**, what was your previous occupation?
4. Briefly describe the training in preaching you received?
5. How helpful was it for your own preaching? *circle one*

Very Helpful Helpful Neither helpful nor unhelpful Unhelpful Very Unhelpful

6. How would you characterize your own theological persuasion? *circle one*

'Conservative' 'Liberal' 'Moderate' 'Socialist' 'Fundamentalist'

7. Which of these leisure activities do you enjoy and how often? *circle appropriate number*

	Never	Rarely			Monthly			Weekly			Daily
Outdoor Activities	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Cinema	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Television	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Sports	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Hobbies	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Other	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

please specify: _____

8. How much would these 'opinions of television' reflect your own attitude toward television.

'Opinions'	Don't Know					Don't Agree					Agree Somewhat					Totally Agree					
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
'Innocent Toy'	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
'Opportunity for Church'	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
'Destroyer of Family life'	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
'Waste of Time'	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
'Window on World'	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
Other	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										

please specify: _____

9. How much television do you watch in an average week? *circle one*

None 0-2 hours 3-5 hours 5-9 hours More than 10 hours

10. What type of television do you enjoy viewing the most? *circle appropriate number*

	Never Watch	Do not enjoy					Average					Enjoy a lot
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Drama	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Comedy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Documentary	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Game Shows	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Religious	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Nature	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
News	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Films	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Other	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

please specify: _____

11. What is your favourite television programme? _____

12. What programme(s) would you recommend your family watch? _____

13. What programme(s) would you recommend your congregation watch? _____

14. What programme(s) would you recommend your family not watch? _____

15. What programme(s) would you recommend your congregation not watch? _____

16. How important would you say these "functions of television" are for your own viewing?
circle appropriate number

"Functions"	Don't Know	Not Important					Average					Very Important
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Educate	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Entertain	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Pass the time	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Escape	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
For Company	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Stir Imagination	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Other	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

please specify: _____

17. In your opinion is it possible to communicate the gospel on television? *circle one*

Yes No

18. If Yes, is it being done at present?

Yes No (If yes, name programme: _____)

19. How important are the following elements in preaching?
circle appropriate number

"Elements"	Don't Know	Not Important					Helpful					Essential
Logic	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Illustrations	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Ideas	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Stories	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Images	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Colourful Language	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Humour	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Other please specify:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

20. What is the purpose of preaching? *circle one*

- Teaching Biblical Truths**
 Relating Faith to life
 Experiencing of the living Christ
 Retelling the story of Jesus
 Other (please specify):

21. How would you rate the following items in order of importance for preaching?

- Theology**
- Biblical exegesis**
- Witness to Christ**
- Communication**
- Congregational engagement**
- Response**
- Christian Discipleship**
- Affirmation**

APPENDIX B

CASE STUDY: OPINIONS AND USE OF TELEVISION FURTHER ANALYSIS

NEW COLLEGE STUDENTS

TELEVISION VIEWING CHOICES

These narrative sections are generally accompanied by a relevant graph to show in a visual way the details of the student responses. These will occasionally be somewhat misplaced as the relevant sections might be too short for the graph. But they should provide additional information as to how these students, and the preachers in the latter half of this Appendix, responded to the leading questions.

The heavy viewers tended to choose the fictional programmes as favourite. Though they gave a high rating to the news and documentary programmes, they would choose drama and comedy more often than would the light or moderate viewers.

The heavy viewers were the least likely to watch religious or nature programmes but more likely to say they enjoyed films. So, while the heavy viewers were more likely than the average to say that they watched television for educational purposes, their practice seems to suggest that entertainment is at least as important, if not more so. The heavy viewers' practice does reflect their willingness to say that television functions as an escape.

Aside from game shows, the lighter viewers were most dismissive of comedy programmes. In fact comedy programmes caused a number of students quite a bit of problems. The more conservative students listed comedy programmes as their least favourite (after game shows). They were more favourable toward drama, films and religious programmes than were those from the more liberal side. The "moderate" students

favoured nature and documentary programmes and were less enthusiastic about films than the

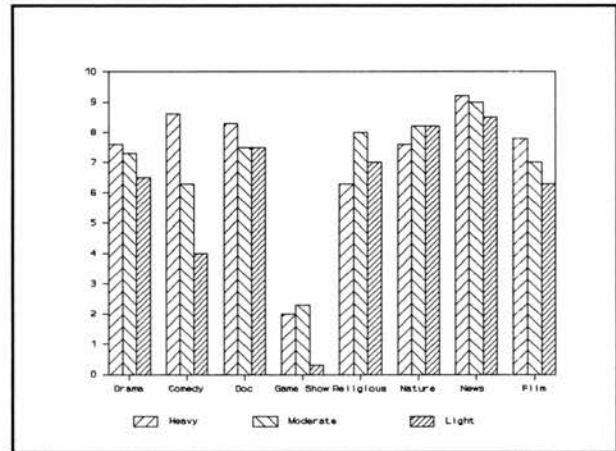


Figure 1 Viewing Categories

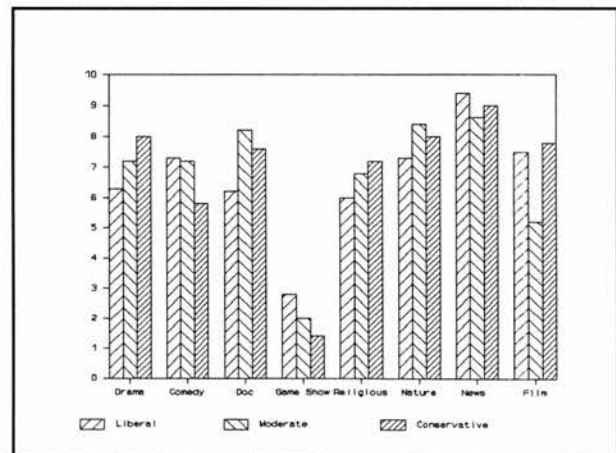


Figure 2 Theological Categories

other groups.

The only programmes to which the male students gave a higher favourable rating than the female students were news, films and game shows. In fact the women in the group seemed to have the least problem with comedy programmes. They selected it as their favourite fictional type of programme and higher than religious programmes.

Age differences gave little distinctions for favourites. Except that in general the older the student the more favourable they were to the factual types of programme (except documentary) and the younger the student the more the fictional programmes were preferred (except drama).

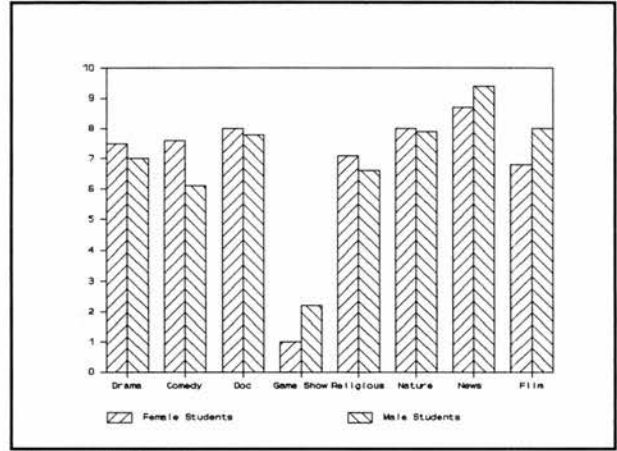


Figure 3 Gender

FUNCTIONS OF TELEVISION

To educate or inform was the number one choice by almost all the students. Males and females were equally confident that this was the case. Heavy, moderate and light viewers all agreed that this was vitally important. All age groups and theological categories also were convinced that television is an important educational medium.

What is interesting is how the students correlated television as an educator and television as an entertainer. The second most cited function of television was as entertainment. In general, the students put entertainment below education. But not in all cases. For example, in the age group division, the oldest group believed that entertainment and education were roughly equal in importance. "Yes it is good to learn something, but I like it to be a good story too," said one. In addition, one of the younger groups (30's - 40's) actually considered entertainment more important than education. "I read

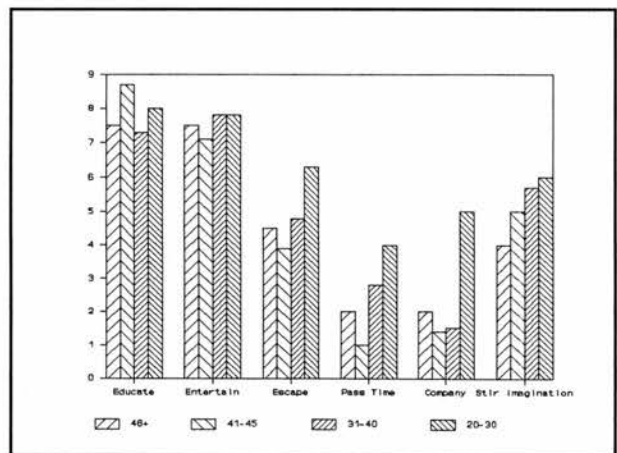


Figure 4 Age Groups

something, but I like it to be a good story too," said one. In addition, one of the younger groups (30's - 40's) actually considered entertainment more important than education. "I read

books and go to college to learn, I want to watch television for fun."

Another interesting correlation was among the conservative students. They too put entertainment slightly above education when assessing the important functions of television. The more liberal and moderate students, on the other hand, gave education a much higher rating than entertainment. We are not able to make any generalizations about various theological positions on the function of television, but for these conservative

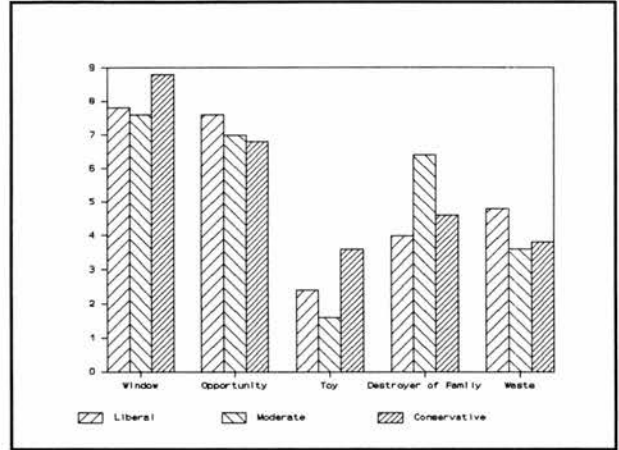


Figure 5 Theological Categories

students their position seems consistent. While they are not anti-television, they are reluctant to give it too much importance. They were less likely than the others to use television for evangelism and more likely to consider it a triviality of modern society. Therefore, it follows that they would consider television to be mainly a medium of entertainment, not of education.

There were those who wanted to argue the opposite. For the light viewers, if television was not an instrument of education than it was not much good at all. Entertainment received a lower mark from these students. "I find doing things more entertaining than sitting there watching a small screen." "To enjoy something, it has to be shared. Television is a solitary experience. I'm less likely to laugh at a joke on the telly than one told

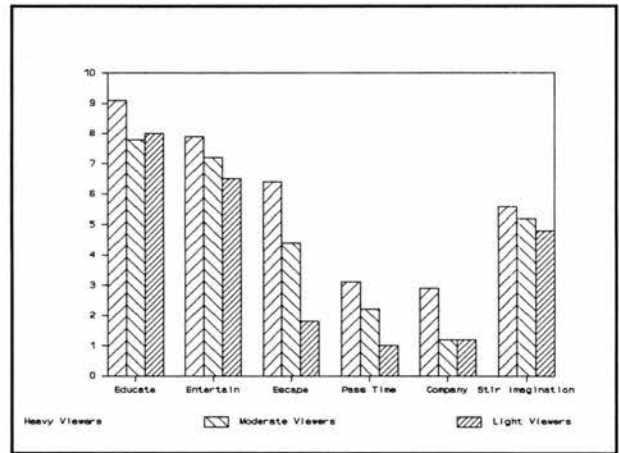


Figure 6 Viewing Categories

by a friend." Though these sentiments were expressed by members of the group who were considered by others to be primarily negative toward television, even some of the most avid television supporters did agree to an extent.

The most vocal in their complaints about the idea of television as an escape were those who were the lightest users of the medium. The older members of the group tended to be reluctant to talk about needing or wanting an escape. For those who were opposed to this function of television, escape was about giving up control or about a denial of reality. Some, however, were in favour of the idea. As a group, it was the youngest students who were more inclined to talk about television as an escape.

The females seemed to see more of a need for escape than the males. The women were more likely to talk about television viewing as a relaxation pursuit, so perhaps an escape is quite consistent. They would often complain about trying to juggle university work with family life and found a need to make some space for themselves. "While watching television I don't have to think about studies or housework, and if the family is there I don't have to worry about what they are getting up to without having to go and chase them down or even talk to them!"

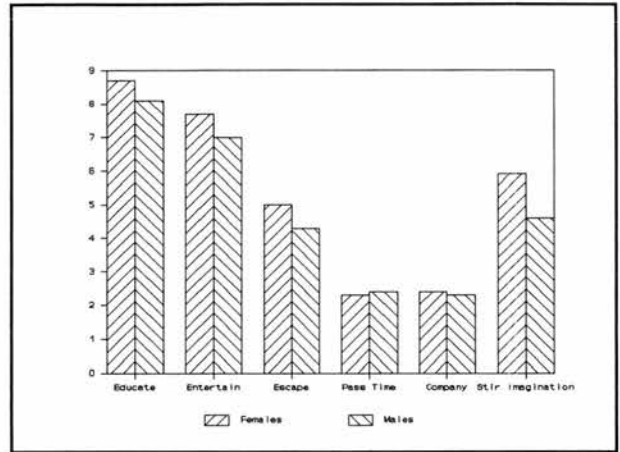


Figure 7 Gender

Once again, the conservative students are more willing to talk about escape than the more liberal ones. It must be remembered that, as stated in Chapter II, there was a general antipathy against the idea of television as escape. So when the conservatives show more willingness to accept the concept, it does not imply unqualified support.

Those who watch the most television were more willing to talk about imagination. Many of them could relate in minute detail a particular programme that had "captured" them. Some of the others wanted to call this "a memory exercise, not real imagination." But others were just as adamant that "the ability to feel what a character is feeling and to think his thoughts requires more than just memory."

The females were again more enthusiastic about television as a stir to the imagination than the males. One expressed this empathetic imagination as "the feminine way of relating."

One distinction that we have avoided making in this stage of analysis is the level of New College experience mentioned in the introduction. The discussion about imagination and television is the one area where it seems appropriate to mention that difference. The advanced homiletics course had, on a number of occasions, begun to explore the importance of imagination for preaching and for communication in general. This is reflected in the responses of the two groups to television as a stimulus to imagination. The first year group tended to downplay this function, seeing television as more an entertainment or educational medium than a way to engage the imagination. The advanced course members however, would often equate entertainment and imagination. Occasionally, one or more would even venture to equate education and imagination. But as a whole this latter group was more enthusiastic about television and imagination than the first year students.

Theologically, it was the more liberal students who want to emphasize imagination as

an important function of television. "Especially if we want to talk about the gospel on television, we must consider using our imaginations and engaging the imaginations of the viewers. The gospel is about opening up, not about nailing down." Other, more conservative, students were uncomfortable with this idea. "Imagination might lead people off on all sorts of paths, not necessarily the right one." Some of the conservative students were quite concerned that television does too much imagining. "It can be so seductive that we begin to believe what we know is not true." This position is reinforced by how the conservative students rate two other functions of television, which might be considered negative or at least more passive: television as a way to "pass the time" and television as providing "company."

OPINIONS OF TELEVISION

No matter what criteria you use to divide up the students' responses (such as age, gender, theological persuasion, or amount of television watched) that television is a window on the world is still the predominant opinion.

It is interesting to note that the male students were likely to be more enthusiastic about the "window on the world" properties than were the females. Though the females were willing to acknowledge that this window does afford a long range view, they were more inclined to point out that the view is not necessarily a clear one. "What we see on our televisions is so limited and biased," said one female student, "we are tantalized by glimpses but are never given the full picture."

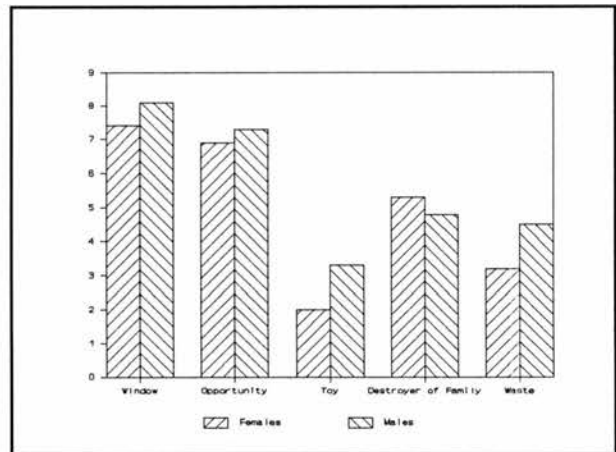


Figure 8 Gender

In fact, the students who shared this last opinion were likely to be the ones who watched more television. If the group were divided into light, moderate and heavy viewers, their willingness to agree that television was a "window on the world" was an inverse proportion. Perhaps this is an encouraging sign, that the more a student watches television the more suspicious he/she becomes about that medium.

With regard to television providing an "opportunity for the Church," again it was the males who were a bit more willing to dive into the medium. While the females were willing to admit to the potential of the Church's use they were less likely to see it as essential.

Here again, the heavier viewers tended to be more sceptical about the possibilities. While they did want to affirm that television represented an "opportunity for the Church" they

were less willing to emphasize this than those who were light or moderate viewers. When questioned about this it became clear that the heavier viewers were more aware of the variety of television programmes that were already on view and therefore less sure that the Church could make a significant impact. It is also clear, as seen in the discussion of genres, that the uses to which the heavier viewers put television make it a less appropriate medium for communicating the gospel.

One might expect, given the popular or lampooned image of religious television, that the conservative students in the group would be the most willing to exploit the medium for the Church. In fact, just the opposite was the case. As a group the conservative students were more likely to claim and applaud television's "window on the world" quality, but were the least likely to see that television has a significant role to play in the work of the Church. There was one conservative student who saw great potential if the Church "would only grasp the nettle and spend some money on it." But in general the conservatives in the group, while not anti-television *per se*, would rather "let the Church be the Church and television be television." Though surprised by this, in conversation I discovered that the conservative students were more concerned about face-to-face encounter and that anything other than this was somehow defective or at least deficient. The more liberal students were quite willing to engage with television, putting forward the marketplace argument as the main reason for their eagerness for the Church to engage in television production.

Referring to age, it is the youngest members of the group who were the most sceptical about these perhaps more positive qualities of television. While all age groups agreed that television is a "window on the world" and an "opportunity for the Church," it was the youngest members of the student group (between the ages of 20 and 30) who were the least enthusiastic. These students are of the television generation and yet they are the ones most reluctant to be positive.

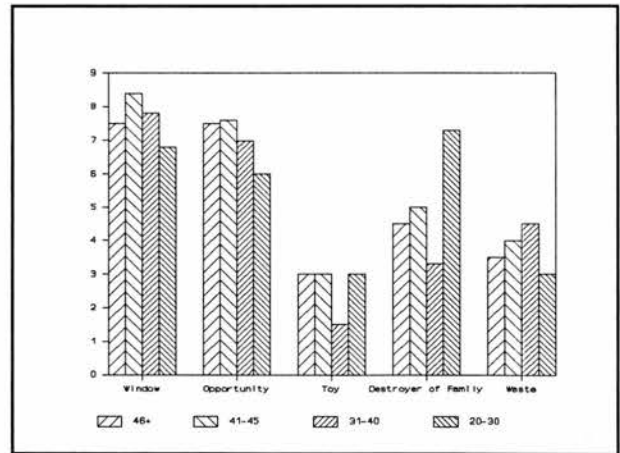


Figure 9 Age Groups

Again, one interpretation of this might be good news, in that those who watch a lot of television as well as those who have grown up in a television culture have developed what might be termed a healthy suspicion towards the medium.

Interestingly, it was the males who were more concerned about television wasting their time. Perhaps because their image of themselves was as more active than they actually were

and therefore saw in television a way of directing some blame. For the females, television was often listed along with another activity as their number one leisure pursuit. Most claimed that a hobby of some sort occupied their time as much as television. One female in particular listed her number one leisure time activity as "relaxing with my husband." Perhaps as these activities are a bit more sedate, for the women in this group television was seen as one more activity in which to engage and the wasting of time was not a major concern. But lest the wrong image of the women in this student group be given, let it also be said that many of them also listed sports or other outdoor pursuits as important leisure activities.

What is in no way surprising is that the more television viewed the less likely a student is to claim that television is a waste of time. It was the light viewers (some who claimed to be non-viewers) who were most adamant that television wasted their time. The heavy and moderate viewers have decided "that in general it [television viewing] is worth the time." The students claim to be in control of their television use. If it were the

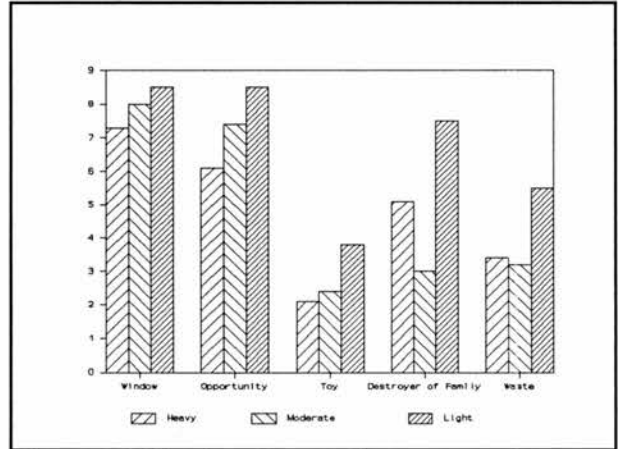


Figure 10 Viewing Categories

heavy viewers who were complaining that television was a waste of time, the implication would be that they were somehow seduced or coerced into watching and were upset about it. As this did not prove to be the case, the student's claim seems to be a legitimate one.

While there was very little differentiation along theological lines, the liberal students were a bit more likely to claim that television was a waste of time than the rest. However, it seems unlikely that there is anything significant in this. Nor did there seem to be much difference in the various age groups. Some of the older students saw television as a great way of relaxing, while others were impatient with the apparently passive nature of the medium. The younger age groups were similarly divided.

Not surprisingly it was the female members of the group, both married and unmarried, who were most vehement that television could destroy family life. But they were not alone, many of the males joined in this complaint and in fact it was a male who said that the number one effect of television was to destroy family life. What seems surprising is that it was the youngest ones who were the age group most upset. Some had young families and could see the effect that television was having on their families. "I have to confess," reported one, "that it is too easy to use the telly as a babysitter when I have work to do." "I know what you mean," echoed another young family man, "just last night I said to my youngest 'go watch telly

now, Daddy's busy.'" Yet it was not just those with a family who were concerned. Some of the single members of the group were just as anxious that television could interfere with family discourse. Whether this reaction reflected an imagined, possible future situation or whether it grew out of their own experience of growing up in a television owning family was not clear. A more moderating tone was sometimes sounded by those with older, teen aged children. Having lived through the early years wrestling with television, they now found that many of their children "could take it or leave it. The problem is getting them to come home enough to spend time together. I would enjoy sitting down to watch television with my children once in a while!" And perhaps it was the "once in a while" comment that is revealing. Both the heavy and the light viewers were more inclined to complain that television is destructive of family life (though, understandably the light viewers were the most vocal). The moderate viewers for the most part did not see it as a threat. These were the ones who claimed to only "watch what we want and then turn it off." They seemed more willing to let television be one of the many inputs into their lives but not to dominate it. The moderate viewers who did suggest that television viewing is their number one leisure activity were often quick to point out that it shared its number one spot with something else.

The students were generally agreed that television could not be considered an "innocent toy." It had great power of influence. Though there was general agreement with this "power of television" idea, there were some interesting variations. The women were more suspicious than the men. This is reflected across the spectrum of opinion. They were less enthusiastic about the positive statements about television, more willing to agree with the negative ones, and the least likely to believe that television was a neutral medium to be used for good or for ill.

Theologically, it was the conservatives as a group who were more inclined to say that television is neutral. "Sure there is a lot of garbage on telly, but that is hardly the telly's fault," maintained one conservative student. At least one other conservative student held a complete opposite view and was generally positive about television and its potential use. But overall, it was the more liberal or moderate students who wanted to say that the medium "is not just a tool, like a hammer, to be used to construct or damage. It is more like a filter which subtly, or not so subtly, changes the picture on view."

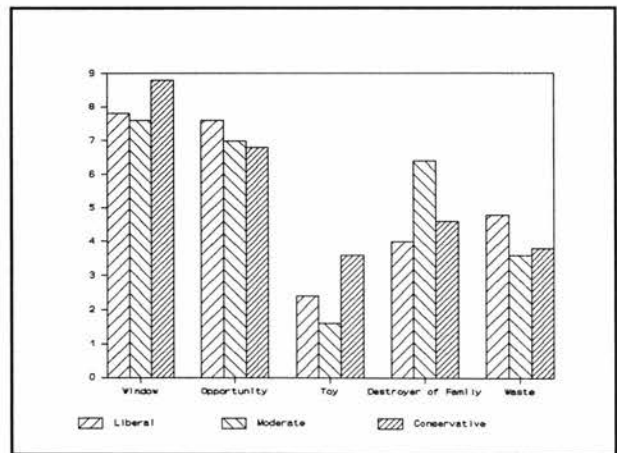


Figure 11 Theological Categories

Another area of differentiation had to do with television use. The heavy viewers were the least willing to see television as a neutral medium. Again, it must be considered that this group of students, though willing to engage with television to a relatively high degree, has developed an educated suspicion that enabled them to keep a degree of distance from the medium. It also is curious that for these students the decision not to watch seems to have more to do with the fact that television is a trivial, time wasting "toy" than an instrument of control or destruction. Those who watched very little, or who did not put television as their number one leisure activity, were the ones most inclined to agree that television is an "innocent toy."

RECOMMENDING TELEVISION

To Family

The most common sort of recommendations were general types of programmes. Seven out of the seventeen students chose to do this. Suggestions included News, Nature, Sport, Education, Children's Programmes, Drama, Documentary, History and some Films. The student offering the latter suggestions was keen to point out that he was not against films and found that some could be quite useful, but that it was important to emphasize the "some" part of the recommendation.

From this list it is clear that students wanted to recommend primarily factual types of programming. Just one mention of Drama to support the "some" films de-emphasizes the entertainment element of television in favour of the educational role. This is not to say that factual programmes cannot be entertaining. But for many of these students entertainment is good only when it is secondary to a "higher" purpose such as education.

That, of course, is not the whole story. We have already mentioned one student whose only criterium for choosing programmes to recommend was that they were enjoyable. That seems to suggest that for some, at least, entertainment is an important part of the television experience. The remaining three students who chose actual programmes to recommend do include a bit more variety. Dominating the list are Children's Programmes: *Blue Peter*, *Newsround*, etc. Two Documentaries also appear: *Panorama* and *World in Action*. But there were two fictional programmes named as well: *The Cosby Show* and *The Waltons*. It is worth noting that those few who are able to name programmes are from the heavier viewer categories, which may simply mean that they have had some experience of selecting programmes to watch.

There were six students who said that there were no programmes that they would dissuade their family from watching. Three of the six were from the first "none" response. But three who were able to make positive recommendations were unwilling or unable to make negative recommendations. It is perhaps worth pointing out that of the six, four were single

and therefore might be said to not have the relevant personal experience needed to understand the situation. In fact, as we have seen, that was the other students' own comment. But it still seems curious that so many of the students would be so open about television use.

When we look at those who do have programmes they wish their families to avoid there is a similar lack of definition. None of the remaining students could name specific programmes. A few mentioned genres of programmes to which they would give a blanket restriction (Soaps and Game Shows primarily). One student would include comedy programmes in this ban, though he did not specify whether it was all comedy or only the more "objectional" ones.

The rest of the students chose instead to ban certain types of content rather than a specific programme or genre. And as might be expected *Sex* and *Violence* head the list of content to be avoided. One student perhaps straddled the lines between specific content and genre by suggesting that the programmes he would ban would be "Violent and Sex Films." Bad Language was mentioned by two of the students. *Horror* and *Occult* each had a reference. From there it becomes even more general as the students want to avoid "anything that devalues the family," "whatever sets bad examples for children," and "too much of anything." The student who wanted to recommend anything useful now wants to prohibit "any that are a waste."

It is useful to point out that for both the positive and negative question here, those who want to refrain from making any suggestions are primarily the heavy viewers. It is the light viewers who have the more definite opinions about what makes a good programme and what makes a bad programme. Or at least they have an image of television against which they are reacting, because none of the light viewers are able to name a programme that they would encourage their family to watch or that they would prohibit them watching. This is especially important when we see that one of the moderate viewers suggests that he would prohibit and "unnecessary violence and sex." When asked how they would know which programmes included the elements they didn't want to be exposed to their family the responses were vague at best. "Reading the TV guides" or "looking out for the parental guidance notices" was one way of approaching the problem. Many of the students declared that they were already engaged in that. But how to determine if the offending elements were "unnecessary" or not proved a more difficult exercise. One response was to claim that "all sex and violence on telly is unnecessary," though that didn't seem realistic to the majority. To further emphasize the point many examples of sex and violence from classical literature and even the Bible were cited as reason against a blanket ban.

To Church

Ten students tried to come up with something to recommend and seven of those tried to suggest things to avoid. Out of both of those lists only one specific programme is named: *Panorama*. Many students, again, tried to suggest types of programmes to recommend: Documentary, Educational, News, Nature, and Religious. And one mentioned content to recommend: Environment. The rest of the positive suggestions included "Useful ones," "Relevant items," "Anything decent," and "A mixture." Clearly they were trying to indicate that they might conceive of making a few suggestions, but only as they deal with "hard facts" or "important ideas."

On the negative side the seven students who wished to make some suggestions merely repeated their prohibitions from the family category. (Although the student who wanted to forbid his family Comedy, Soap and Game programmes decided that he would only ban Soaps for Church members.)

As with the family recommendations, it is primarily the light viewers who are most willing to make suggestions. Though they are not able or willing to be specific, they do have particular stands on the subject of television that they seem willing to air. Whether these recommendations (being of the "embrace the good and turn away from the bad" variety) are that helpful in the end is very doubtful.

THE GOSPEL ON TELEVISION

One of the negative responses came from a student who was highly suspicious of television across the board. He was in the light viewing category, and held the opinion that television was a waste of time as much as television was a window on the world, and more than it was an opportunity for the Church. It was interesting, however, that though stating unequivocally that the gospel could not be communicated on television, he also held the opinion that television was somewhat of an opportunity for the Church. Obviously, that was not his main view on the medium. He was also sceptical of television's ability to educate.

On the other hand the other negative response came from a student with a completely opposite view of the medium. This student was generally positive about television, considered it both a window on the world and an opportunity for the Church to a much greater degree than it was a waste of time or destroyer of the family. He was also in the heavy viewing category, was quite definite about his viewing choices and was one of the few to select a favourite programme (*M*A*S*H*). His recommendations for family viewing included "Nature, Sport and Some Films" and for the Church: "News and Religious programmes." Though he was willing for the Church to view programmes, he did not believe that these programmes were actually communicating the gospel. This response seems a bit schizophrenic, until we discover

that as a conservative, he has quite definite ideas about what "communicating the gospel" entails. "The current restrictions against religious programmes to aim toward conviction and decision mean that even the religious programmes cannot communicate the gospel. They can be good sources of information, and can talk about the gospel. But in the end they cannot preach the gospel." When asked if it were possible that some "secular" programmes, such as *M*A*S*H* for example, could actually be communicating the gospel, he responded that "if it is disguised in some way then it isn't the gospel."

The remaining 15 students all answered in the affirmative, though one wanted to give "a qualified yes." This means that from all age groups, all theological persuasions, all levels of television use, both males and females agreed (with the two exceptions above) that "television is an appropriate means for communicating the gospel." But, even though appropriate, there was argument about its effectiveness. The students who held an opinion similar to the second of the two dissenters claimed that "television may be useful for supplementing a programme of gospel teaching, but it cannot replace face to face encounter." While agreeing with this assessment, the more liberal students of the group, went on to say that "television can raise issues central to the message of the gospel in a much more effective way that the Church is doing. What we should do is work together with the television producers to have a more concerted effort." What exactly this working together might entail was not explicit. But it was clear that the majority of the students who were favourable to the idea of communicating the gospel on television did not see it happening yet.

When asked what sorts of programme might be more effective in communicating the gospel, most of the students were hard pressed to come up with anything. "A good drama that challenges the status quo, or offers a vision of the Kingdom, perhaps," was one suggestion. "Real preaching, not something that was scripted and vetted by the production crew," was another. As a whole the group was dissatisfied with these responses but could not offer any better solutions. In the end they were left with some vague hopes about the possibility, but as yet could not describe how they might be realized.

EDINBURGH PREACHERS

With the students quite a bit of time was spent in discussion, both individually and in groups, to get a clearer picture of their opinions and behaviours. With the preachers the case study involved receiving some written responses to a few leading questions, followed up with a brief individual interview, in some cases, and a smaller group session with some of the Methodists.

Because of the size of the group and the process whereby some of this information was obtained, it is difficult to make as many of the divisions among the ministers as with the

students. In addition, the preachers were less willing to categorize themselves than were the students. Many of them considered themselves both liberal and conservative, for example, saying that these labels don't really communicate anything. What this means is that the only sub-groupings I am able to make are contrasting the clergy responses from the lay responses and looking at the responses of the light, moderate and heavy viewers. As the large majority of this group were males of a similar age, the gender and age categories will not be helpful.

TELEVISION VIEWING CHOICES

When we compare the choices of the clergy to that of the lay preachers, we find some interesting variation. The clergy put Drama at the top of the list, equal to News. Documentary is a somewhat distant third, but is closely followed by Comedy and then Films. Nature manages to top Religious programmes by a slim margin, and Game Shows hardly register at all.

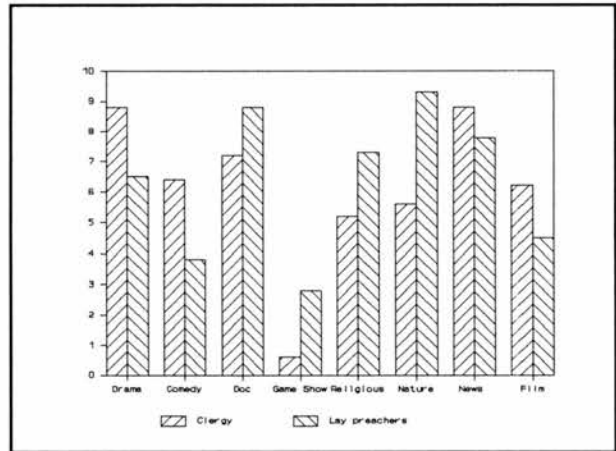


Figure 12 Clergy/Lay Preacher

The lay preachers, on the other hand, put Nature right at the top of the list. Following behind are Documentary, News and then Religious programmes. Some way down the list are Drama and then Film. Comedy only rates a little above Game Shows for the lay preachers, in contrast to the clergy.

The comparison is quite striking. The lay preachers show a clear preference for the factual programmes, while the clergy combine the two, factual and fictional, completely. Comedy programmes in particular rate quite highly for the clergy but are an anathema to the lay preachers. The clergy have little time for Religious programmes, while the lay preachers put it right toward the top of their list. And, though Game Shows are the least preferred of all, the lay preachers are much more disposed toward them than are the clergy.

If we divide the group by the amount of television viewing, the favourite for the heavy viewers is Drama. News and Nature share second place, followed by Documentary. Films are slightly preferred over Religious programmes. And, oddly enough, Comedy and Game Shows come out about equal at the bottom of the pile. The moderate viewers lean toward the factual programmes more directly. News and Documentary are the most favoured, followed by Nature. Drama manages to just edge out Religious programmes. Films and Comedy are roughly equal and Game Shows fall far below.

Like the students, where a "none" under the question of a favourite programme might be a positive rather than a negative, the preachers also reflected a variety of no response. At least one of the preachers who claimed to have no favourite was a heavy viewer who was favourably disposed toward television in general. However, the majority of the "none"s represented a negative response.

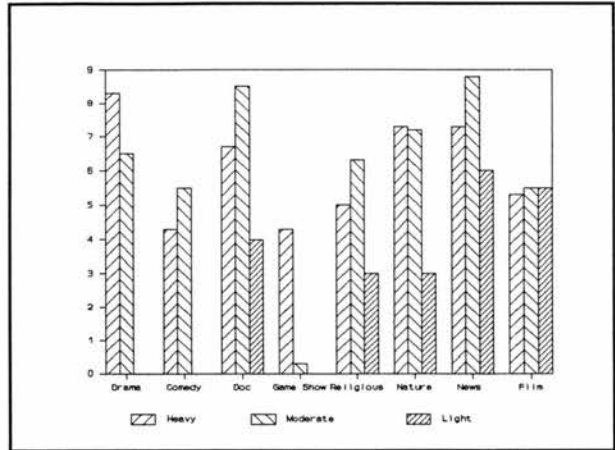


Figure 13 Viewing Categories

Even more surprising is that the favourites of the clergy are factual (News and *Highway*) or general ("a good play or opera") or none, when it was the clergy who were most favourable toward fictional types of programming. The lay preachers, on the other hand, claimed to favour factual programmes over any type of fictional programmes, and yet those who chose favourites included a soap and an adventure series with a travel programme. This, of course, begs the question as to whether in responding to questions about television preference the preachers are inclined to give what they think sounds more appropriate than what is actually the case.

FUNCTIONS OF TELEVISION

Though the general picture seems clear, underneath there are some curious diversions. It is true that both the clergy and the lay preachers name "to educate" as the number one function. However, the lay preachers rated this much more highly than did the clergy. For the lay preachers there is a large separation between their affirmation of television as an educator and television as an entertainer. The clergy are not so definite in their response.

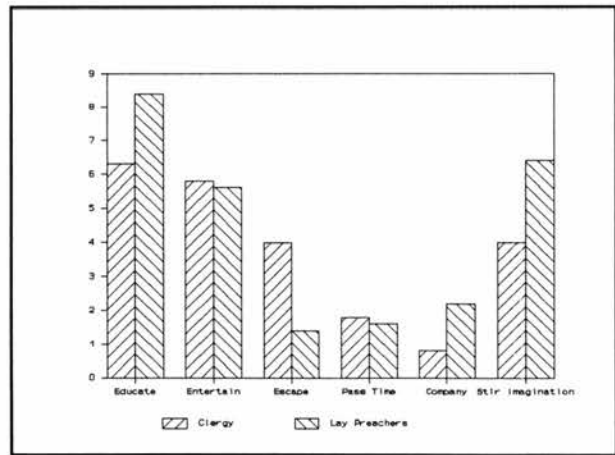


Figure 14 Clergy/Lay Preachers

In fact the majority of the clergy assigned educate and entertain with equal value, only one of the clergy rated educate more highly than entertain. The only respondent to rate entertainment above education was clergy.

Though over all entertainment was also highly valued, the clergy make very little distinction between education and entertainment. Most of the clergy report that they are

moderate viewers, which explains why it is the moderate viewer category that has the least difference between educate and entertain. The heavy viewers (predominated by lay preachers) make a larger distinction, though generally favourable to both, the emphasis is on education. The light viewers dismiss entertainment as of almost no importance, and only grudgingly admit that television does provide some educational value.

Comparing the clergy to the lay preachers we find a significant disagreement as regards the television function of escape. The clergy, while certainly not positive about escape, are much less negative than the lay preachers. For the lay preachers, escape is the function receiving the lowest rating, below "to pass the time" and "for company." The clergy seem to admit to some recognition of escape as a useful exercise.

The heavy viewers, as might be expected, see escape as more important than do the moderate viewers. In fact the heavy viewers in the group give equal weighting to all three of what are often deemed "negative" functions of television. The light viewers, as stated before, only see education as in any way beneficial. All these other functions are to be derided to say the least.

The clergy as a group were almost unanimous in saying that in no way should television be seen as a way of providing company. They were against the idea that this medium should take the place of human contact. The lay preachers, on the other hand, were more inclined to say that television could on occasion provide company. In fact they were less negative toward this function than they were to either "pass the time" or "escape." We might be able to explain this distinction in two ways. On the one hand, if we remember that the group of lay preachers includes a few retired members, then it might be understood that they might have little outside contact, or certainly less than when they were fully employed. In this situation, "the friendly voice" of television can be a way of keeping in contact with other real (and not so real?) human beings. On the other hand, the clergy are constantly in contact with other people. Television, when viewed, might be a way of avoiding or at least of forgetting for the moment those people. The idea, therefore, of seeking out more company through television seems quite strange to most of the clergy.

The heavy viewers in the group were very positive about the function of imagination in television viewing. In fact were just as likely to talk about imagination as they were entertainment. The moderate viewers were a bit more reserved in their judgement, though somewhat positive. The light viewers were not just negative, but outright belligerent. "Watching television," claimed one of them, "is like performing a lobotomy on a child's imagination!" Far from being a stimulus to imagination, some of those in this category wanted to claim that television was antithetical to imagination.

It is this extreme position, held by at least two in the group, that colours the total

responses of the preachers quite significantly. In looking at the types of television actually watched, for example, the only category not effected by the extreme responses is that of Film. Why that should be a more acceptable genre of television, is not completely clear. If we were to speculate, there are a few hints that might be telling. For example, one of the "extremists" is a professional storyteller. This might explain some of

her antipathy toward television, which she sees as usurping her role as the storehouse of common stories. It might also explain why film, which is seen as a genre that is more imaginative and less formulaic, is a more acceptable genre of television than any other.

The other of the extremists, however, comes from a different point of reference to the same conclusions. He is a conservative who would not be adverse to being known as a fundamentalist. For this preacher, television is full of subject matter to which he objects most strongly. In fact, he claims that he "does not own a television and would not want to use one, except as a teaching tool." What he means is that as a video monitor, when he can select the videos being shown, a television is a "useful" tool. But television, as presenting the "vast wasteland of broadcast programmes" is less than useless, it is a negative force in our society. However, he is willing to admit that films, "and not just religious ones, can, on occasion, be a potent communicator and force for good."

OPINIONS OF TELEVISION

Out of the eleven preachers responding, three did not consider television their number one leisure activity. Two of these three held such overwhelmingly negative views, that others who might have actually been ambivalent toward television appear to be television supporters in comparison. Some of these extreme positions led them to make a few odd or conflicting statements.

The clergy and the lay preachers were equally affirming of a global village quality of television. As heavy and moderate viewers, the preachers were also assured that if nothing else television did provide a "window on the world."

Unlike the student group, the heavy viewers were the most positive about television as an opportunity for the Church. The light and moderate viewers were a bit more reserved in their judgement.

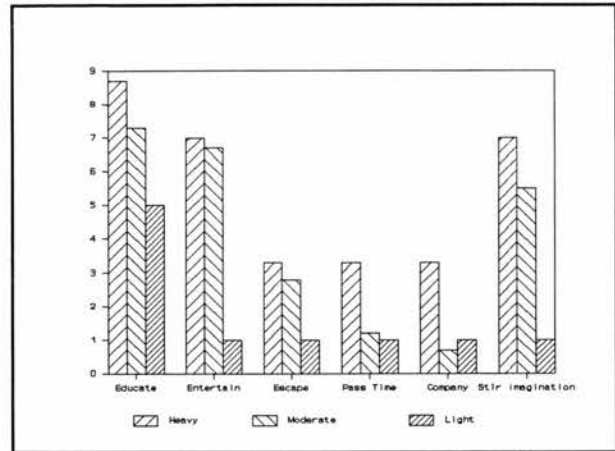


Figure 15 Viewing Categories

The clergy were the most concerned about the tendency of television to be a waste of time. The lay preachers, it must be noted, included a few who though still preaching regularly had retired from their work and therefore were less concerned about the amount of time available to them day by day. Consequently their concern about the amount of time television took up was quite a bit less.

Not at all surprising was the fact that the heavy viewers held the opinion that television was not primarily a waste of time. Having made the decision to watch, they were not likely to complain. The moderate viewers were slightly concerned, which is perhaps what led them to choose to watch only a little bit of television, far below the national average. The light viewers saw this as one of the most damning qualities of television. In fact, they held that these negative opinions far outweighed any positive aspects of watching television. And to further define these "light" viewers, it must be noted that all in this category claimed not to own a television.

The clergy were a little more concerned than were the lay preachers that television could "destroy family life," but not extremely so. The heavy viewers were in near agreement with the moderate viewers as to the importance of this opinion, though a little less worried.

THE GOSPEL ON TELEVISION

It was the "anti-television" lay preacher who claimed that when "believing worship" was broadcast then the gospel was communicated. In exploring further, he claimed that not all of the worship services broadcast qualified as believing worship, but many did. While he would have liked "a much more direct appeal to biblical authority and to calls for conversion," he was "certain that some of the worship broadcasts had the power to convict."

The other positive but general response came from a male clergy with a more liberal

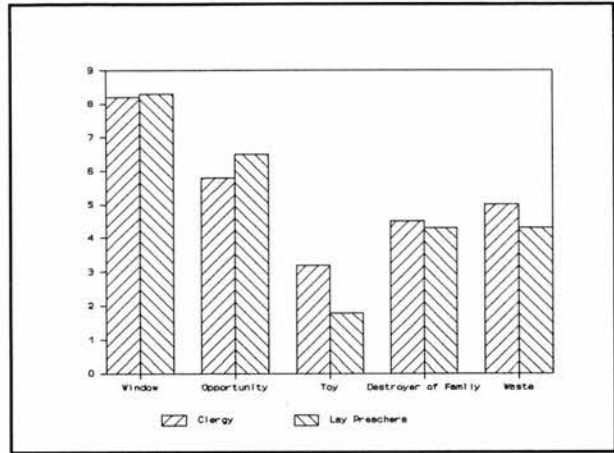


Figure 16 Clergy/Lay Preachers

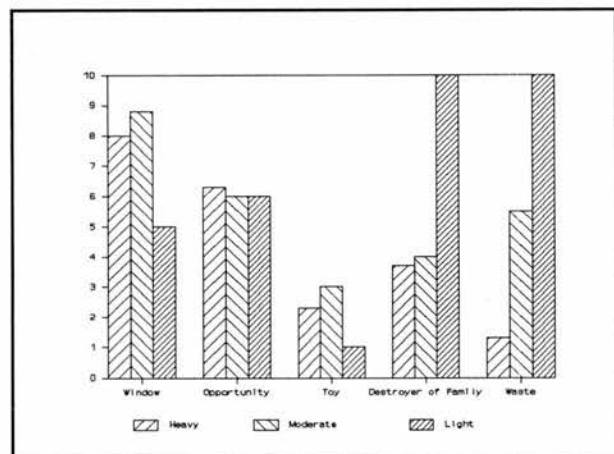


Figure 17 Viewing Categories

approach to both theology and television. While he claimed that television was not his number one leisure activity, he was in favour of the medium in moderation. His only negative comment related to the amount of time the medium could consume. His own use of television was primarily for education, though he also mentions the giving of "ideas and inspiration" as one of the benefits of watching television. By asserting that some films and documentaries are capable of communicating the gospel, he was asserting the Muggeridgean belief that the best religious (or Christian) television was television that showed Christians being Christian. The preacher is not looking for something overt to communicate the gospel, but rather something that shows the gospel in action. It is the real life witness that, he believes, will be more effective in communicating than any direct appeal.

APPENDIX C

CASE STUDY: OPINIONS AND PRACTICE OF PREACHING FURTHER ANALYSIS

NEW COLLEGE STUDENTS

Of the seventeen students in total, six rated the preacher they hear as *good*, five as *fair* and two as *poor*. Four students declined to rate the preaching at all. Some of those who declined claimed that it was because they were unsure what qualified as *good* or *poor* preaching. Others stated that preaching varied too much to be definitively rated. Only one from Group B declined to rate the preaching, but there were three (out of the seven) in Group A who declined.

About half of the students (eight out of seventeen) claimed to be satisfied with the preaching they heard. Seven students were not satisfied and two declined to respond. These last two also refused to rate the preaching they heard as *good* or *poor*. When questioned about this the Group B student claimed that though the preaching she heard was generally good, it did not "seem fair to objectify such a nebulous activity." This seems a curious response from a woman undertaking a homiletics course. It would seem to follow that, if such a course were possible, then there must be some objective criteria to the subject. The other non-respondent was a Group A student who somewhat sheepishly confessed that she did not attend church at present and therefore could not respond.

ASSESSING PREACHING

Complaints of Preaching

All of the students were asked to judge the appropriateness of a number of standard "complaints" about preaching. The students were asked to be more critical of preaching whether they were initially positive or negative concerning the preaching that they heard. As expected, the former were less inclined to find fault than the latter. However, there is surprisingly little difference in a few areas.

The number one complaint was *Not Exciting*. Perhaps because they were alerted to the word "boring" in both interviews and discussions, it no longer seemed to adequately describe their complaint. *Not Exciting* seemed to come closer to their assessment. "It's not that I fall asleep, but that there doesn't seem to be anything there, you know?"

This idea of there not being "anything there" in the preaching was reflected in a number of ways. The second most cited complaint was that the sermons were *Too Short*. This seems to go against the common wisdom of the media age. With all the concentration on the decline in the attention span, it is generally accepted that sermons must be short to keep people with you. Yet, here is a group of students who are saying that the sermons they hear

are too short. If we look at those who are most disgruntled with the preaching they hear we discover that *Too Short* was cited after *Not Exciting* and *Not Relevant to Me* as the most appropriate complaint. And in fact, looking to those who were satisfied with the preaching they heard, though they were reluctant to make any complaints at all, the one that just rates a mention is *Too Short*. But perhaps most surprisingly, the heavy television viewers were also more likely to complain that a sermon was too short than they were to say it was too long. It is the light viewers who would complain more about the preaching they heard being too long than too short.

This is, of course, not the whole story. If we look at an age breakdown, we discover that those who are most concerned about sermons being too short are those between 31 and 45. Both those younger and those older were more likely to say that the sermons were *Too Long*. It is also possible that, as in Chapter III, this is evidence that the students are somewhat out of touch with or at least significantly different from the average member of society. This is just a first look at the type of preaching these students might be likely to offer in their own preaching ministry. If the sermons they hear seem to them to be too short, are they not likely to consider longer sermons more appropriate, despite any evidence from communication studies?

A quick look at the separate student groups reveals a discrepancy. The students in Group B fairly consistently agreed that the preaching that they heard was too short. The students in Group A, however, seemed to be mixed. In fact, the complaint that sermons were too long was given slightly more approval than that they were too short. This is because the younger ones in Group A were more negative than the younger ones in Group B.

The third area of complaint for the students was the area of relevance. Particularly in the case of the students who were not satisfied with the preaching that they heard, the terms *Not Relevant* or *Not Relevant to Me* were given general agreement. "After most of the sermons I hear I have this overwhelming urge to jump up and shout 'So what?'"

Boring in this context seems to be more associated with relevance than with excitement or entertainment. In general the students gave *Boring* the same or similar rating as they did *Not Relevant*. So, even though *Not Exciting* was the universal highest negative comment, *Boring* was consistently rated much lower.

There were three negative comments that related to the intelligibility of the sermons. They were: *Can't Follow*, *Can't See It*, and *Don't Understand*. These always rated at the bottom of the list. Even the students who claimed to be unsatisfied, could not claim that the sermons were not understood. The purpose of *Can't See It* was to determine if the students were receptive to the image structure of the sermon. The students, however, seemed to equate the term with a more colloquial way of saying the same thing as *Don't Understand*. There is

some evidence that a few of the students from Group B, the group where the subject of image in preaching was much more a part of the discussion, were aware of some of the possibilities of such a complaint and as such were more willing to treat it as a different idea. But of all the complaints, comprehension concerns seemed to be the least troubling. "It's not that I can't understand what's being said, it's that there isn't anything worth saying being said!" The students were much more likely to hold a position similar to the one quoted than to say that the sermons were too dense or complex to be understood.

Of the three statements, the one that did get the highest agreement was *Can't Follow*. This would indicate that the connectors in much of the preaching to which the students were exposed were somewhat lacking. It was difficult to move from one point or idea or moment in the sermon to the next.

Before addressing the issues being raised in this section it might be worth a look at some of the other divisions within the student group. A gender divide reveals that once again it is the males who are most negative about the preaching heard. Only a third of the females claimed to be unsatisfied with the preaching that they heard and their responses to these complaints reflect that. Half of the males were unsatisfied and their complaints were much more forcefully put. The main difference in the complaints favoured, however, centred around the length. The males were definitely concerned that the sermons were *Too Short* while the females were split, half leaning toward too short and half toward too long. The males were also more likely to put *Boring* before *Not Relevant* and to state that *Can't Follow* was the comprehension complaint most favoured. The females were more concerned about relevance than the sermons being *Boring* and were more likely to state that *Can't See It* was the comprehension issue most troubling. This perhaps points toward the belief that females tend to be more image oriented than males, and therefore more sensitive at the lack of images in a sermon. It must also be said that the females rated this, and all the complaints (except *Too Long*) below the males.

The age breakdown has been mentioned before in terms of the length question. The younger ones were the ones most likely to say that the sermons were *Too Long* and, in fact, that was their number one complaint as a group. They were also the least likely to complain that the sermons were *Not Relevant to Me*. Except for the length of the sermons, the youngest age group and the oldest age group were the least negative of all the students. The "thirty-somethings" were the most negative in general and were by far the ones most likely to complain about comprehension. The students in their early 40's complained the most about sermons being *Not Exciting*, *Not Relevant to Me* and *Boring*.

Theologically, both the liberal and the moderate students were evenly divided on the length question, giving the slight edge to *Too Long*. The conservative students, on the other

hand, were all agreed that the sermons they heard were *Too Short*. All three groups agreed that the most serious complaint was that the preaching they heard was *Not Exciting*. The conservatives rated *Boring* as the second most accurate complaint. A lack of relevance was next for the conservatives, followed by *Too Short* and then finally the issue of comprehension, of which *Can't Follow* was ranked considerably more highly than the other two. The liberal students agreed that *Not Exciting* was the most serious complaint, but were more concerned with the length over the relevance. *Boring* actually rated at the end of the list, behind even the comprehension complaints. None of them rated very highly. The moderates were the least negative overall, but they too agreed that *Not Exciting* was the biggest complaint by quite a large margin. For the moderates, the length question and *Not Relevant to Me* received minimal agreement, but the rest hardly registered at all.

Because there is no way of listening to all of the preachers to whom the students were listening, we cannot use this assessment to rate specific preachers. It is also important that we do not put too much emphasis on any of the individual numbers that might be derived from this analysis. The purpose of this exercise, as stated, is to get a general impression of the students involved in this case study. In this section, in particular, we are interested in discovering the type of preaching that they prefer, by assessing what aspects cause the most complaints.

Positive Aspects of Preaching

In addition to being asked about the negative aspects of the preaching they heard, the students were asked to make some positive assessment as well. This was done in two areas, first the students were asked about some general, positive qualities of the preaching that they heard, and then they were asked to make some assessment of the communicative event itself.

In assessing the responses to these positive statements, we find, first of all that the students were much more willing to rate all of these items more highly than any of the negative ones. The students, as a whole, were much more positive about the logic or idea oriented elements of the preaching than they were about the story or image elements. Overall, the positive statement that received the most agreement was that the preaching provided sound or *Good Thoughts* and that the sermons *Made Sense*. This may seem somewhat against some of the more negative comments recorded above, particularly that the sermons were hard to follow. Again, the students were more likely to be positive and to state that the majority of the time the preaching *Made Sense*, while a minority of the time sermons were hard to follow. Even the students who were unsatisfied were willing to admit that there was still a certain amount of good content in the sermons they heard.

Though still positive, the students were less likely to state that the sermons they hear

provided *Good Images* or *Good Stories*. At the bottom of the list came *Humour*. The ordering of these elements into a hierarchy with ideas at the top and images somewhat lower down is reflected across all the groupings. What the students are hearing is an emphasis on ideas and logic, with some reference to images and stories, but little humour. What is important for our purposes is to determine if this is how the students themselves order these elements, or if this is the status quo against which these students will "rebel" to some degree. In a later section we will examine these responses in light of the students' "ideal" image of preaching.

Now we turn to an assessment of the communicative event of preaching. The students were asked how well the sermon was communicated. Presentation is an important element for this assessment.

The students gave the preaching they heard the highest marks for *Sincerity*. Apparently, they saw great congruence between what was being said and the belief system of the preacher, and they saw this as a great asset. "Even if the sermon isn't well written, if I sense the preacher believes it then I'm more inclined to believe it too." "Sincerity can overcome a lot of deficiencies in presentation." Statements such as these reflect the high esteem that these students gave to the idea of *Sincerity*. So much so that even strong disagreement with content can be mitigated in the preaching event. "It wasn't until afterwards that I realized that I disagreed with everything he said. He made me listen, for a moment at least." Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing became part of an extended debate that would reappear in discussion throughout the term. But there was no disagreement that it was a powerful attribute.

Secondly, the students were positive about the preacher's ability to *Convey Meaning* in the preaching event. This result echoes the earlier result that the sermons these students heard were most likely to produce *Good Thoughts* and to *Make Sense*.

The students were less sure, though still generally positive, that the preaching event communicated a sense of *Aliveness*. This was taken to mean that the preacher communicated a sense of enthusiasm and conviction. Some of the students said that *Aliveness* must be a function of *Sincerity*, but others were convinced that it was possible to be very sincere and yet not very lively.

At the bottom of the list were *Presence* and *Conveys Mood*. Here the students were not convinced that the preachers they heard were able or even willing to engage the emotions. As mentioned in Chapter VI, the students themselves were not at ease with the whole idea of emotions in preaching. This perhaps is reflected in their reluctance to appreciate it in the preachers they heard. Or it is more likely that the preachers shared this reluctance and tended to avoid emotion in preaching. This would naturally have an effect on a sermon's ability to convey a mood. So it is not surprising that these students would rate it as the lowest attribute.

The idea of *Presence* caused other difficulties. Though as a group the students were somewhat positive about *Presence* in preaching, some were greatly concerned about the implications of such a concept. "The idea of pulpit presence raises images in my mind of a certain type of authoritarian preaching. I don't want to 'tower over' a congregation, and don't want the preachers I hear to impose an authority on me." The issue of authority was a troubling one for most of the students. The very word seemed to imply a certain authoritarianism that was essentially a battle of wills. The idea that *Presence* meant necessarily some sort of imposition was prevalent among both groups of students.

The students in Group B spent quite a bit of time discussing authority for preaching. We examined various models and understandings. But it still seemed to many of them that authority (and by implication *Presence*) meant influencing people against their wills. Some students went so far as to say that "I don't want to be seen as an authority at all. I would rather be seen as one of them, with the same doubts and questions and inadequacies. The congregation might be the authority, but not me." This, I believe, is a key difficulty facing preaching in the television age: the place and understanding of authority.

Across the various groupings of the students, the general pattern outlined above is consistent, with only minor variations. *Sincerity* consistently rates at the top, and *Presence* and *Conveys Mood* come at the bottom of the list. It is interesting that the conservatives, as a group, are the most negative on rating *Presence*. It appears that their image of what authority for preaching should be might be more traditional and, therefore, are most negative when they sense it lacking in the preachers they hear.

DESCRIBING PREACHING

"Elements of Preaching"

The students were asked to determine the importance of a variety of "elements" of preaching. These elements included ways of conceptualizing as well as methods of structuring sermons. There was, however, general consensus that the content was more important than the structures. Elements such as *Images*, *Logic* and *Ideas* were given more weight than the more structural *Narrative* and *Colourful Language*. This is true except for the one structural element which came out at the top of the list: *Illustration*.

One element which was seen as almost non-essential by a few of the students was *Humour*. It seems quite logical that *Image* and *Illustration* top the list. However, this reflects a certain ambiguity as to how images might function within a sermon. For the students, even those in Group B, the main function of the image is to illustrate an abstract idea or main point. And, though images and illustrations come out on the top of the list, they are closely followed by *Logic* and *Ideas*. In fact there is very little to separate them. It is as if in the

minds of the students these words are almost interchangeable.

The relatively low status afforded *Narrative* is somewhat surprising, given that the students are generally open to innovation in preaching. Yet here again, it could be argued that *Narrative* is seen by the students as one technique for communicating an idea, rather than *Narrative* being its own communication. Therefore, like *Image*, *Narrative* serves to enable an *Idea* to be better understood, which brings us back to "points." What is the "point" of the story and/or illustration (and indeed parable) is a question these students are still likely to ask.

Not as surprising is the low status of an idea like literary or *Colourful Language*. The students were keen to point out on a number of occasions that sermons were often too literary, "too interested in sounding clever or poetic than in talking to people as they are." This was an almost universal complaint about preaching in general: that it was often over the heads of those who came to hear. However, the students would put this down to language (i.e. the use of theological jargon) or style (i.e. too poetic or "Shakespearean"), rather than indicating that the content of the sermon might be too abstract and not image laden enough.

In comparing the responses of the students in Group A with the students in Group B we find some interesting variations. The Group A students put *Logic* and *Ideas* just ahead of *Images* and *Illustrations*. All of these were important, they would argue, but "what is behind the images and the illustrations, must be well argued." The Group B students would make a much greater distinction between *Images* and *Ideas*, and the former were the much more vital. The Group B students, as indicated before, had spent some considerable class time investigating the power of images and the process of communication. It is not surprising, then, that they would be more inclined to stress the importance of images in preaching. Of the two, however, they chose *Illustration* over *Image*. This indicates that they were still convinced that the function of the image is representational rather than evocative. It is the idea behind the image that is the key. This interpretation is valid despite the relatively low status of *Ideas* in the students' assessment. What they were reacting against, I believe, is the strictly abstract idea. The preference was for an idea wrapped in an image.

We see here that these students, even though exposed to the debate about images and ideas, still cling to the enlightenment view of the supremacy of the idea. Imagination, while important, is somehow a lower order mental process. There might be a glimmer of awareness of the distinction among the students. If, for example, we examine the responses of the students who were dissatisfied with the preaching they heard in comparison with the those of the students who were satisfied, we discover an interesting shift in emphasis. As stated above, even the students dissatisfied were inclined to state that the sermons they heard did communicate content and were basically intelligible. Yet, still they are unsatisfied. There might be clues to their unease as we look at their responses on the image and idea debate. The

number one element of preaching for the students who were dissatisfied was *Image*. *Ideas* and *Logic* were much less important, about equal for these students to *Narrative*. *Illustration* was also quite high, but somewhat lower in importance than *Image*. By placing *Narrative* so high in their list, these students were claiming that certain structural techniques began to outweigh, or at least share importance with, the more abstract ways of conceptualization.

The students who claimed satisfaction with the preaching they heard, on the other hand, placed *Logic* and *Ideas* at the top of their list. *Illustration* (that which relates more directly to an idea) followed somewhat behind, and *Image* was even further behind. The implication is that those who come to the sermon event looking for ideas or arguments are able to find them and are thus satisfied. Whereas those who come looking for images, for ways of seeing their experience related to the gospel experience, are more likely to be frustrated in that desire.

Definitions of Preaching

Each student was asked to describe a sermon that they had heard which was for them the best example of what preaching should be. A series of phrases were given as options or the students were invited to write their own. The four choices provided included two that might be seen as more abstract and deductive (*A well thought out lecture* and *An instruction on moral ideas*) and two that might be seen as more concrete and inductive (*A story of faith* and *An image of faith in action*).

It is not surprising that none of these students chose *An instruction....* Given the earlier discussion on authority, most of these students would not want to take on the role of the instructor. In a similar way it is not surprising that only one chose *A well thought out lecture* as a description of what preaching was about. The majority of the students in both Groups chose *An image of faith in action* as the phrase that best described preaching. A minority chose *A story of faith*, and few (three out of the seventeen) chose to write their own description. Those latter three were unique in that their descriptions were more deductive and authoritarian. One wrote that preaching is "A biblical exegesis followed by a call to action." She was unique in that she was the only student who mentioned the place of the Bible in preaching. We shall return to this in a later section.

The other two "write-ins" were "A challenge to Discipleship" and "A passionate declaration of Divine truth." Both of these came from conservative students in Group A. The conservatives in Group B, while holding definite views of preaching, were willing to accept a more abstract definition such as *An image of faith in action*.

Purpose of Preaching

In addition to providing a description, the students were asked to define the purpose of preaching. In the Group B sessions, a distinction was made between the aim of preaching and the purpose a particular sermon. The former was understood to be the same across the whole of a preaching ministry and the latter was determined by the context each time. In answering the question about purpose, it was understood that they were attempting to address the aim of preaching in general.

As with the description, a series of options were given to the students, as well as the freedom to come up with a different purpose statement. The statements provided were: *Teaching Biblical Truths*, *Relating Faith to life*, *Experiencing the Living Christ* and *Retelling the story of Jesus*.

None of the students chose the last option: *Retelling the story of Jesus*. Some claimed that it was too vague, others that it did not indicate enough of a purpose statement. It was possible that it might be used as a technique, but the story of Jesus had to be illuminating something more contemporary. Few of the students were keen on the idea of worship as re-enacting a salvation history. Those who were open to such a concept saw other parts of the worship celebration (e.g. Communion and Responsive Psalms) more central to such an act than the preaching. Preaching, it was almost unanimously suggested, had to be about today. Consequently, "retelling" any story did not hold much appeal for these students.

Only one student was interested in *Teaching* as a purpose of preaching. But even she wanted to hedge a bit by suggesting that the purpose of preaching was a combination of *Teaching Biblical Truths* and *Relating Faith to life*. She was interested in stating that "there must be knowledge imparted in preaching. That isn't all that it is, I know, but at least a part of it is about learning what the Bible is saying." This desire to cover more than one purpose is echoed in at least one other who simply wrote that "Preaching has many purposes!" In a similar way, another student declared that the purpose of preaching was "a declaration and/or proclamation of God's revealed truth in relation to the needs and situation of the hearers." Such a description allows for the teaching or proclamation element to be strongly stated while allowing for the more communicative or context related elements of the preaching process to be fully declared.

The remaining fourteen students were more or less evenly divided between *Experiencing the living Christ* and *Relating Faith to life*, with the latter receiving a slight preference. Both of these statements avoid the impression of too much authoritarianism, preferring "relating" and "experiencing" to "teaching" or "proclaiming." Yet, there is also clear indication of content in that it is Faith that is related and the "living Christ" that is experienced. It is possible to be too negative toward these responses. They do seem to be

aware of the importance of communication as equal to content. They do seem to be more concerned with experiential learning than with more traditional deductive approaches. But there is a firm grasp that content is important. But how do these two elements, communication and content or medium and message, balance in the minds of these students?

Communication and Content

As a final exercise, the students were given a list of eight items and asked to prioritize them in the order of importance for preaching. Of the eight items, four related more specifically to content (*Theology, Biblical Exegesis, Witness to Christ* and *Christian Discipleship*) and four more specifically to communication (*Communication, Congregational Engagement, Response and Affirmation*). It is clear from this listing that some of the items are a bit ambiguous and could relate both to communication and content. *Affirmation* for example, could be seen as a way of communicating and also specific statements that would sound affirming. Similarly, *Witness to Christ* could be both specific content and a way of communicating. And, of course, *Communication* could be both method and message. Despite these blurry edges, however, some interesting responses were made to this exercise.

Perhaps because of the confusion mentioned above, it is not surprising that over all *Communication* was listed as the most important item on the list. Comments made by the students indicate that it was both the methodology and the message implied by the term that made it favourite. "Communication must be first. If you've got the greatest message in the world and it's not getting across, then you might as well not bother." "I put *Communication* first, because if you don't have anything to communicate then there's no point in preaching." In general, the first comment more clearly articulated the position held by most of the students.

The students placed *Witness to Christ* as the second most important item on the list. This was followed by *Congregational Engagement* and *Christian Discipleship*. It is important to notice that communicative elements are ranked highly, but they do not dominate the list. Just as in the previous section, the students are clear that preaching is not merely a matter of good technique, there must be solid content as well. This top four is followed by *Biblical Exegesis* and *Theology*. *Response and Affirmation* complete the list. The latter end of the list is, perhaps, a bit more troubling. It is not surprising that these students have relegated the more "doctrinal" elements toward the bottom of the list. For many of the students, *Biblical Exegesis* and *Theology* have an air of insider language about them. It was not uncommon to hear them talk about "leaving such things behind when we get out into the real world." There tended at times to be a certain amount of confusion between theology and theological language. Similarly, many of the students were unwilling or unable to see that the exercises

in which they engage in their biblical courses would be of direct use in their preaching.

It is also a matter of concern that the bottom of the list included the items *Response* and *Affirmation*. *Affirmation* was considered by a number of students to be a task of pastoral care rather than preaching. "In preaching we have to deal with hard truths, with the gospel. We can't spend too much time hand holding." This was admittedly an extreme position that most of the other students reacted against. And yet, *Affirmation* consistently found its way to the bottom of the list.

Response is the only one (save perhaps *Congregation Engagement*) that pointed directly to any concept of dialogue in preaching. It is somewhat disquieting that these students were largely dismissive of *Response* as an important item in preaching.

We must not draw too many dire conclusions from such an exercise, however. It is the nature of such an exercise that some come out on top and others are relegated to the bottom. It does not necessarily mean that these students did not think that *Response* was important, simply that it was not as important as, say, *Congregational Engagement*.

Yet, it is curious that for all the students such an important idea as dialogue consistently appeared at the bottom of the list. The students in Group B did give *Response* a bit more weight than the Group A students. The females, as a group put *Response* as fourth on the list, clearly indicating a different attitude toward dialogue than the males who placed it next to last. Also the oldest students put *Communication* and *Response* as joint number one, whereas the youngest ones put it in last place.

Theology and *Biblical Exegesis* are more important for some students (e.g. the conservative students place *Theology* at number four and *Biblical Exegesis* at number five in their list and the youngest students put them at 3 and 4 respectively) but for the most part they remain toward the bottom of the list. *Biblical Exegesis* appears as the last item by the females, the moderate students and the oldest age group.

EDINBURGH PREACHERS

DESCRIBING PREACHING

"Elements of Preaching"

Where the students, in general, took a somewhat ambivalent stance equating *Ideas* and *Images* as important for preaching, the preachers were of the strong opinion that *Ideas* must be the main focus of a sermon. *Images* were considered important, but clearly, for the group as a whole, *Ideas* reign supreme.

Logic and *Illustrations* were considered equal in importance. But *Narrative* and *Colourful Language* were rated considerably lower. Here, again, we see that the content elements are valued more highly than the structural elements.

It is interesting that for the preachers *Humour* rated much more highly than for the students. In fact it was roughly equal to *Logic* and *Illustration*. The students, as noted above, were wary of the use of humour in preaching. The practitioners are saying something quite different, as we shall see.

Ideas and Illustrations

The picture is even more dramatic when we separate the clergy from the lay preachers. It is the lay preachers who are most adamant that sermons should be driven by *Ideas* more than anything else. There is a considerable gap between *Ideas* and the next highest element, *Images*. This is closely followed by *Illustration*, which raises the issue discussed above as to whether there is any real distinction being made between the concept of image and illustration. The evidence seems to suggest that there is no clear distinction being made. As *Ideas* so clearly dominate the list and *Images* and *Illustrations* receive such similar weighting, the implication is that for the lay preachers the function of an image is virtually the same as that of an illustration, namely to depict an idea.

It must be repeated that this is not meant to imply that there is a serious deficiency in the sermons of these lay preachers. The objective of illustrating abstract ideas in preaching with well spoken images is a proper one, with a long historical precedent and a great deal of emphasis in modern homiletics. The argument of this thesis is that in modern communication, it is the image that carries the meaning more predominantly and, I believe, more effectively than the idea. To demand that images be distilled down to concepts is to mute the power of the image to evoke more than the idea itself can relate. There are those who argue that, for preaching, images must be tamed so as not to evoke more than intended, therefore the idea serves as a control on the image. It is my contention, however, that preaching is about opening up possibilities rather than narrowing down.

These lay preachers are of the opinion that a sermon is to "nail down" a message and, therefore, put ultimate importance on ideas and concepts. Those factors which assist the process of defining or comprehending, such as illustrations and logic are to be utilized. Whereas, those factors which might be seen to "muddy the waters," such as humour, story and colourful language, are to be used much more sparingly.

Images and Humour

The clergy members of the group, however, approach the subject somewhat differently. They, like the students, give equal weighting to both images and ideas. *Ideas* do not dominate and *Illustrations*, which are generally understood to serve ideas, receive a much

lower weighting as the clergy mark these elements. While somewhat ambiguous, this does suggest that the clergy are more open to a range of possibilities for preaching. From their weekly experience, they understand that more effective communication calls for a range of techniques. And they are willing to explore a variety of tactics. In fact the clergy have a lower total range of marks across all these elements than the lay preachers, implying that they are accustomed to regularly employing a number of elements in the preaching task.

But perhaps the most distinctive trait of the clergy in this group is the affirmation of the appropriateness of humour in preaching. After *Ideas* and *Images*, which receive equal marks, the clergy consider that *Humour* is the most important element in the list. More important than illustration and logic, humour, for these clergymen and women, has a vital place in the communication of the gospel. It is significant, given the reluctance of both the student groups and the lay preachers, that those who might be seen as the "professional preachers" consider humour to be so important in preaching.

I believe that this valuing of humour in communication is, in part, a reflection of the television age. Humour is at the very heart of an entertainment culture. It is the clergy who, in their weekly exercise of communicating the gospel from the pulpit, are more aware of a variety of influences in human communication. On one level at least the clergy would be more aware of what "works" in preaching as they engage in the informal dialogue that preaching creates. And humour, it can be argued, works in the sense that it is well received by the congregation and creates visual and verbal responses. But humour is not just at the heart of an entertainment culture. It is also, I believe, at the heart of the gospel.¹ Which implies that this is an element of secular communication that is not out of place in preaching and, therefore, can be employed. It is, however, a continuing debate as to whether this influence of entertainment culture into the pulpit is an advantage to or an affliction on the Church. As with most things, there are no doubt both positives and negatives here. What is important for this study is to acknowledge that, at least for this small group of preachers in Edinburgh in the early 1990's, humour is seen as an important or even vital element of preaching.

Narrative and Language

What is somewhat surprising is the relatively low weighting given to *Narrative*. Given the general acceptance of narrative in both theology and society, it might be expected that more preachers would consider this a valuable technique for preaching. Yet for these preachers, both clergy and lay, narrative is considered only of slightly more value than

¹See, for example, Buechner's *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977).

Colourful Language as a preaching element.

Logic

Logic rests somewhere in the middle of the list for both clergy and lay preachers. It is, they argue, of some value to have coherent structures that make sense. The clergy value logic a little more highly than illustrations. The lay preachers, on the other hand, prefer a well chosen illustration to a reasoned argument, though see value in both.

Others

The preachers were more likely than the students to add elements to the list provided. Some of the items that were added include: "A clear speaking voice," "Believing Preaching," "Challenge," "Structure" and "Reference to current behaviour." All but one of these were added by lay preachers. Only "Structure" came from a clergyperson.

The lay preachers were also more inclined to argue, both verbally and in written notes, that personality and personal commitment of the preacher was of prime importance in the preaching task. This agrees with the students' emphasis on *Sincerity* as one of the key factors in assessing the preaching that they heard.

Purpose of Preaching

After weighing various elements for preaching, the preachers were asked what they saw as the purpose of preaching. As with the students, the preachers were given a list of phrases from which to choose or the option of writing their own.

The overwhelming majority of preachers chose *Relating Faith to Life* as the purpose of preaching. A small minority opted for *Experiencing the Living Christ*, and one chose to write in "Challenging today's norms (not overly critically, but with an invitation to examine and evaluate)." Another chose to further define his choice by stating that a part of *Relating Faith to Life* involved "declaring what God is doing."

It is interesting that none of the preachers chose teaching as the purpose of preaching, though it was one of the options. It is generally assumed by many in the Church that most adult education takes place from the pulpit. Yet, here is a group of preachers who suggest that that is not their aim. This raises the question of expectation in preaching. Does the Church, or do congregations, expect certain things from the preacher and is the preacher aware of and attempting to meet those expectations or to change them? In other words, is there any conversation in the Church regarding the nature of the preaching task?

Communication and Content

Just as in the case of the student groups, the preachers were asked to prioritize a list of eight items in the order of importance for preaching. These items were grouped into "communication concerns" and "content."

The preachers as a whole listed *Communication* as the number one item on the list. However, except for this one item, the communication concerns came out towards the bottom of the heap. The only content item that received such low marks was *Christian Discipleship*.

It is possible to give too much significance to this exercise. Yet, it is curious that both clergy and lay preachers consistently give low priority to such items as *Response* and *Affirmation*. The clergy even consider *Congregational Engagement* to be of less importance than any of the content items. This was in spite of the fact that the clear priority for the clergy was *Communication*, which received a much higher rating than any other item on the list by a considerable margin. It is difficult to see how a concept like dialogue in preaching would have much credence when the communicative concerns like response and affirmation consistently receive such low priority.

This is surprising considering the responses in the last section. If the preachers did see that teaching was a primary purpose of preaching, then matters of content would clearly be of utmost importance. If, on the other hand, the preachers chose purpose statements with the words "relating" and "experiencing" as definitive, then it would follow that they would value the communication concerns more highly than they did.

It is also curious that the content item receiving the lowest priority for the preachers as a whole was *Christian Discipleship*. Making disciples would seem to be an appropriate way of relating faith to life, the stated purpose of most of the preachers. To be fair, the clergy do give a relatively high rating to this item in contrast to the lay preachers who consider it only slightly more important than response and affirmation.

The content item that was on top of both the lay preachers and the clergy list was *Witness to Christ*. As with the students, this is seen to be the most important distinguishing mark of Christian preaching. The preachers give much more importance to both *Theology* and *Biblical Exegesis* than do the students. Although it is curious that the lay preachers consider *Theology* to be more important and the clergy give the nod to *Biblical Exegesis*.

APPENDIX D

CASE STUDY: OPINIONS AND PRACTICE OF PREACHING INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS AND SERMON ANALYSIS

NEW COLLEGE STUDENTS

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Call to Preach -- Amanda

Amanda is a single female in her early forties who has started theological training after a number of years in another career. She considers herself a conservative Christian who, though having a long term commitment to the Faith, came to it later in life. She is a heavy television viewer with a generally positive approach to that medium. She enjoys the entertainment aspects of television as much as, if not more than, the educational functions, listing fictional programmes as her clear favourites. She does believe that television and the communication of the gospel are compatible and indeed this communication already takes place on programmes such as *This Is The Day*. Amanda would not, however, see it as her task as a pastor to recommend television programmes to her congregation.

Amanda is not satisfied with the preaching she hears, stating that most of the time it is "Confused and without a clear point." This makes her somewhat unique amongst the students, as for the most part the rest of the students saw that understanding was not a problem in the preaching they heard.

She is somewhat ambivalent about her own preaching ability, somewhat frightened of the responsibility and yet eager to make the attempt. And on the one hand she claims that *Images* and *Story* are vital to the preaching task. On the other, she prizes content matters much more highly than communication elements. But what is clear is that Amanda has a very high opinion of preaching and very much wants to engage in the enterprise.

- TRANSCRIPT -

Interviewer: Tell me about the process that led to the decision to train for ministry

Amanda: For me it's a very, very long process. Um. It probably started as long ago as 12 maybe 15 years ago. Almost from my conversion experience, which was for me, coming from a completely non-church background, for me becoming a Christian was that kind of key experience. Then, of course you have to have the process that comes after. From that point, I'd trained as a nurse, and from the last year I have felt this sense of what I can only call adventure.

In the beginning my life had always been an adventure, but I had never seen it in that way. Now I saw it as an adventure with my Lord. And that He had something ahead that He wanted to lead me to. I had a sense very much of a purpose He had for me, but I wasn't quite there. From the very, very beginning I had it fixed that women couldn't be ministers. It was utterly ... I don't quite know exactly why, I think it may have been to do with the church I was in which really didn't overtly state that, but that was the underlying thing: ministers were

men that was it.

I just felt this pressure inside, of being pushed onwards. And I felt as if I wanted to study theology and yet there seemed to be no way that I could do that. And all sorts of things went through my mind.

...

I had come from a fairly firm evangelical background, it never really entered my mind that sin was much more than an individual thing. I mean, I began to think politically and all this kind of thing. But this pressure inside me would not stop. And at this stage I had come back up to Scotland. ... And round about this time, perhaps a year or two later, I began to find that, I can only put it like this, words, words became very precious to me. And I wanted to write. I wanted to -- to spout poetry and all sorts of stuff. Gradually this sense of a pressure with words began to increase. And I found that over the last three years that what had been happening was that a pressure was coming that I wanted to express Christ in words. I wanted to make things vivid and real and alive. And I began to realize but it's not enough, this writing out. I'm needing to -- I'm needing to say this to people, I need to help people. I'm wanting to try and make the Christian faith live and make theology instead of something that people think of as dull and boring and nothing to do with them, doctrine, I want make it live for people.

And I found as I looked around me, I would see things happen, just ordinary little things, pictures, images and they all related to the Christian Faith and to theology. And it began to dawn on me -- this seems to be a like a pressure to preach. I wonder if it is. It really feels like it. I really feel, feeling that this sense - And also at the same time as this, increasingly, I had found that -- you know - that - that the words of Jesus -- um -- That by this shall they know ye are my disciples, that you have love one for another.

It began to really occur to me that, you know, I have been a part of the Church. I got really angry with the institution sometimes. But I'd felt so strongly that His Church was deeply important as His way. But it began to come to me in a new way, that His Church was His special community. Was a community whereby, if it was true, if it was real, if Christianity really did mean anything and Christ was risen, um, then His presence had to be revealed, it must be being revealed. And I realized more and more and more that within a church setting often people are unreal. They -- they are afraid to let their own real selves be shown to one another. And this is within the church setting. I realized how deeply I cared. Some of the anger that I used to feel about the institution went. I don't quite know why, but it went. And I suddenly felt a real -- compassion, I suppose, a sense that I wanted to just be alongside His people, and I wanted to help them be -- stop being afraid and relate to one another, be real with one another. I wanted to serve them. And I saw that I could. Even if I was never given the opportunity to preach, which to me would be the most enormous privilege. And I was scared rigid of it. But even if I was given that privilege, you could preach to 'til the cows come home, and if nothing was seen in the lives of the Christian Church, not simply for the sake of the Church, but for the sake of the world, it was all a kind of hypocrisy, if you like, it was all pointless.

And I realized that there were two things with me: there was this pressure to express Christ and it would appear to be a pressure of words to do so and it was also a desire to serve his people. And I still couldn't accept that He could possibly be calling me to Christian ministry. For years I was saying "Well Lord if I was a man, it would be the ministry. But as I'm not, it can't possibly be. So why do I feel the way I do?" But eventually, though various people that just spoke to me, I finally went through selection. ...

Still had doubts, but selection was a positive experience and I felt I couldn't run from it. I still have some questions. I see ministry as a service, and sometimes it looks like a sort of top down thing and I can see that. But, I'm going on.

I: What experience have you had in doing the things you spoke of?

Amanda: I've preached a few times, just two, three times at most that's all. Within my own

little local church and then another local church. So, I've had very little experience. That, of course is something that worries me. But there is nothing I can really do about that. But I feel that if it is a mistake then it will be tested out, the gifts won't be there. But my own feelings within it when I was preaching -- I think was a sense that, you know, this is right, and the reactions of people. But I still feel for me that there is a very long way to go, because I'm scripting and I feel that I would like to just let that go a bit. I'm a wee bit afraid to do that. And of course I've had experience, not in preaching as such, but I believe in the small group thing. Where people can let go of things.

(Amanda spends some considerable time talking about the beginnings of her Christian life, which culminates in the experience recounted below)

I told a friend, I had kidded about his going to church, and said I had never heard a decent sermon. He said "come with me next Sunday." And that for me was the beginning because the thing that really got me was, I think, that the man who was preaching meant what he said. I could feel the sense of conviction and passion. And I've never, ever, ever, ever heard anybody speak with passion about the Christian faith before. It suddenly occurred to me they believe this and then the wee question came what if it might be true after all and from that wee tiny question "what if it might be true after all for me" came the whole searching that I mentioned earlier.

I: How do you define a decent sermon?

Amanda: Well, it would have had to have made sense. Often I'd heard, not a lot, but it seemed divorced from life. It seemed what I would call "churchy" or even the ministerial voice. You know what I mean by ministerial voice. And it made it all seem quite unreal sometimes not very coherent. So to me all these things apart from passion, which is not very easy to describe or explain, at that particular time I would have said would have been a part of good preaching. Or as I put it a decent sermon. Just something that made a great deal of sense to me. Nothing I had heard made sense to me.

I: What would you say the purpose of preaching is then?

Amanda: I don't know what I would have said then. Now, I think the purpose of preaching (pause) it's to (pause) help make real, help make relevant things of the faith, to (pause) help people encounter the living reality that is in the Bible, that the Christian faith is about, that Christ is about, to make that link, as it were, to link it with real life, with real people. That to me is preaching. Or coming close to preaching.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Preaching as Teaching -- Sarah

Sarah is a married female, over 50, who also has come to theological training after a number of years in another career. She considers herself neither liberal nor conservative theologically and has been involved in the Church since her teen years. Sarah watches little television, yet still has a generally positive approach to that medium. She enjoys the entertainment aspects of television as much as the educational functions, yet tends to prefer factual programmes in her limited viewing. She does believe that television and the communication of the gospel are compatible, but cannot name a programme that meets her criteria for the task. Sarah might have occasion to talk about television as a pastor, but would

be more likely to talk about genre or subject matter rather than any particular programmes.

Sarah refused to rate the preaching she hears, stating that such a process "seems unfair to the preacher." She is, however, generally positive in her assessment, only complaining that the sermons are often too long and occasionally unexciting or not relevant to her.

Though claiming to little or no experience in preaching, Sarah is still somewhat confident about her ability to preach. She quite consistently considers Image and Illustration as the most important elements for preaching and the communicative aspects of preaching of prime importance in the preaching task.

The interview began with a long discourse on her so far unsuccessful struggles to be accepted as a candidate for ministry. She is quite distressed about this, but manages to maintain a sense of equilibrium. Her concern is that all the effort put into her studies will bear fruit.

- TRANSCRIPT -

Sarah: I hope that I'm not doing it [theological education] just for my own intellectual edification. I want to do it because I've been called to serve.

I: What role does preaching and worship play for you?

Sarah: Worship has always been very important to me. But I do see that preaching is very important, but I haven't had very much experience in that. I've done a bit of teaching and bible study, but not preaching as such.

I: But you see it as something you want to be involved in doing?

Sarah: Yes.

I: Do you have any preaching models?

Sarah: Yes, um -- [A well known Anglican evangelical]. ... It was good to hear his sort of teaching after being in a church where the preaching was small and not up to much. Let's say I didn't get much out of, I get more out of the Bible than the preaching as such. So this was good.

I: How would you characterize his style of preaching? You mentioned teaching.

Sarah: Yes, it was a type of teaching preaching. He always had a sort of light touch, there was humour there. It wasn't something forced upon you. It sort of came from life experience. Yet it gave a high priority to scriptures.

I: Do you see yourself as trying to fit into that kind of mould?

Sarah: I wouldn't dare to copy anybody.

I: But we have to have structures in mind as we prepare, do we not?

Sarah: Yes, I would like to work to -- I would like to have the scriptures being prominent. To do it without the scriptures at all I would have to be -- to feel very sure that the Lord was

giving me a message. And I don't think that I would attempt that. To attempt to preach without a scripture base. For myself, although I think it can be valid the other way. Unless they come at it wrong. And also I realize that life experience is important, and that people are very good to share of themselves. Something they find difficult, their own weakness, I think, that comes over quite genuinely.

I: You mean the preachers sharing things themselves?

Sarah: Yes. Not totally, but within a structured talk.

I: What would you say the task of the preacher is?

Sarah: To say to a particular congregation what God wants to say to them. And I don't think you have to choose your own script, I think it could be part of a series, or part of a lection. but if you listen to God and if you are working with people that there will always be something to say that will be relevant to a lot, or a good proportion. Because God wants to communicate with people.

I: And what kinds of things would you use in that communication, what would you feel is worth speaking about?

Sarah: (long pause) Well, presumably, in church you are preaching to Christians, so it needn't be an evangelical message all the time. But it will be to do with life generally. And the Christian life particularly. Realizing that I myself may not be more Christianly advanced, spiritually advanced than some of the people in the congregation. You know, having the humility to say "we" rather than "you."

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Preaching as Encouragement -- Jane

Jane is a married female in her early forties. Her return to theological training comes after years of volunteer work in the Church as well as her years of raising a family. She considers herself a theologically moderate Christian who grew up in the Church. Jane is a light television viewer with a more mixed view of the medium. She does, for example, see much potential for good in television, but also a tendency to destroy family life. Television, for Jane, must be an educational medium first and foremost, and does not claim to have a favourite programme. She is willing to admit that television and the communication of the gospel may be compatible but is not aware of any programmes that do so currently being shown. She might find herself recommending television as a pastor, but only rarely being positive and more often pointing out that television is an enormous waste of time.

Jane considers the preaching she hears to be very good and finds it very difficult to make any sort of criticism. Her enthusiasm for the preaching she hears is quite unique among the students, as even the most positive of the others did have some complaints.

She is somewhat confident about her own preaching ability. She does not, however, differentiate between image laden and idea oriented language, seeing both as equally

important for preaching. Jane does lean toward an emphasis on communication over content, prioritizing congregational response much more highly than most of the students.

- TRANSCRIPT -

I: Do you see the leading of worship as a privilege or a burden?

Jane: Both! I see worship as extremely important, meaningful, helpful to people. I've been involved in lots of meaningful worship experiences, and I want to be involved in passing them on to others.

I: And the burden?

Jane: It is hard work. And I'm not sure I have the skill to do it.

I: Do you have any preaching models?

Jane: I haven't had much experience in that because once you get attached to a church you tend to go every Sunday. -- My parish minister is a ten-minute, very relevant sort of sermon man. And I sympathize with that way of preaching. I like that. So, I found that 30 minute expository sermon was not my cup of tea and not really the kind of preaching I intend to indulge in.

I: What would you say the purpose of preaching is?

Jane: It's trying to encourage people. Mainly, I think it is encouraging people in their faith. Encouraging them to get on, to hold on. It's got a teaching function as well. But I think that's secondary.

I: How important is preaching for you and your ministry?

Jane: I think really important. It's going to be a way of making everything come together. A way of addressing people's needs. I'm hoping that the preaching comes out of the whole pastoral situation. So it can be all of a piece and somehow the experience of the parish will suggest topics, be that circular process.

I: So is preaching an attempt to articulate "their" experience as much as any particular message or story?

Jane: Probably a bit of both. My experience and their experience and relate them to the text.

I: What influences might you use in meeting that task?

Jane: Whatever comes your way, relationships, etc. are worth articulating, everything.

I: What, for you, shapes the messages you want to give, provides the language and structures for preaching?

Jane: I think simple language. Knowing my own limitations with how long you can concentrate for and how much you can take in, especially when it is just spoken and you are not making any kind of connection. So the standard sermon style itself I would expect to be short and simple and to the point. But then thinking about ways of presentation it wouldn't necessarily always be a written sermon that is then delivered. Because there are other ways,

like in drama and so on, and not all of them preaching. So I would be open to other ways of doing things.

I: What influences are you likely to encounter in your congregations?

Jane: I realize, of course, that I don't watch much telly or read many newspapers and that, therefore, I am out of touch with a lot of things that the rest of the world is in touch with. So it would be a case of finding things that were common.

I: Why are you out of touch?

Jane: No time!

I: Are the media a waste of time?

Jane: Aye. Reading newspapers is important and certainly keeping up with current affairs is important. But I think that watching television compared to engaging in meaningful human relationships is really a waste of time. I think that you can have too much of it. I think in general that it is too much entertainment involved in television and it distracts people from things that might be more useful to them.

I: Is the problem the content of television programmes or the amount of time used in watching television?

Jane: It's both. It's too easy to be distracted from the world. That is what it feels like. It's too easy to just turn off and watch television.

I: So is the amount of TV use a problem or just a statistic?

Jane: Could be a problem.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Preaching Structures -- James

James is a married male in his early forties who has also begun theological training after a number of years in another career. A conservative student, he has a long history of involvement in the Church, latterly as an elder. He is a moderate television viewer with a somewhat ambivalent approach to that medium. He considers the educational aspects of television to be the most important and generally prefers factual programmes and sport. James is one of the few students in the group who considers that television and the communication of the gospel are fundamentally incompatible. "The functions of the two are simply too different," he claims. As such, he does not see a great need to recommend programmes to his congregation, though he might wish to warn them away from certain excesses, such as violence and sexual content.

James is basically satisfied with the preaching he hears, though he considers it only *fair*, stating that it is as often boring as inspiring. Like many of the students, James' main complaints are the lack of excitement and relevance in the preaching he hears. He identifies

part of the problem as being a lack of images and stories to buttress the idea structure of the sermon.

He is quietly confident in his preaching ability, and has had some experience already. Oddly enough, given his complaints about the preaching he hears, James considers that logic and clear idea statements, though necessarily illustrated, are more important than rich images and stories. He does lean slightly toward an emphasis on the communication aspects of the preaching event over the more content oriented aspects.

- TRANSCRIPT -

I: Are there aspects of the ordained ministry which you prefer over others?

James: As an elder I enjoyed taking part in services.

I: Are you excited about leading worship and preaching?

James: Leading of worship is something that I quite enjoy doing. I've become quite relaxed, with the experiences of attachments, to the idea of leading worship.

I: How do you view the place of preaching within worship?

James: Very important. I wouldn't say it is the most important. Worship, period, is important and preaching is a part of that, to me.

I: Do you have preaching models?

James: No, I don't think that there is any one individual. I may pick up bits here and there, but no one individual.

I: What, for you, is the purpose of preaching?

James: To use the Bible to touch people's lives. What I would want to do would be based on the Bible, but coming from that I would want to encourage people, to challenge people, make people think about where they are going. There would be a variety of messages as there is a variety of persons in the congregation. But behind it all is the one salvation message.

I: How do you achieve this purpose?

James: Two main starting points: either I start with a passage of scripture and then let that mull over in my mind, and then I start to think what does that passage have to say to the people that I will be speaking to; sometimes I will be starting with a theme and then thinking through what passage of scripture will relate to that theme and then continuing on with the process. It tends to be a long process, so I prefer to start as early as possible.

I: What are your sources?

James: I would use a commentary for the passage itself. Then I would look through the books that I have, just to see if anything sparks off. It's hard to say. It tends to just lie around in my mind for a while so that wherever I am things can just occur to me, on the train or in a museum. Part of the process would be trying to get it down into some sort of three points or

whatever. I don't know whether it is a good technique or not, but I find that the introduction is very important. I can struggle with that for ages. But once I've got some sort of structure and I've got an introduction, then I find I can go forward from there. The introduction is important to capture people's attention. To give them something that they can start following. And also because I think that it's just, for me personally, it's good to get off the starting blocks.

I: Can you give some examples of what you mean?

James: Sometimes when you start from scripture you can retell the story using other words that can lead to talk about a situation, real or fictional.

I: Do you anticipate any blocks in this communication?

James: I think in general people don't have a good attention span. Sometimes older people just begin to doze off, which may be a physical reaction more than a spiritual one. I think I am conscious that it is a very different sort of situation than what people are in the rest of the week. It's more formal. They're just sitting there in rows, silently, unable to move, focusing on one particular thing. People listen to the radio and they're ironing, you know, they're not just listening. That is a more natural situation. As well as that, then you've got the problem of relevancy. If people don't think that what you're saying is of any relevance to them, then they'll switch off.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Preaching as Mobile -- Dave

Dave is a married male in his mid to late thirties who has been involved in mission work. He is now seeking to formalize his ministry and perhaps to move into another direction. A conservative student, Dave would not be adverse to calling himself a charismatic, though he is cautious about labels.

He is a moderate television viewer with a generally positive approach to that medium. He considers the educational aspects of television to be on a par with the entertainment aspects, and generally prefers factual programmes. Dave believes that not only is television an appropriate medium for the communication of the gospel but that it already is taking place in such programmes as *Songs of Praise*. Despite this, the only programmes he might recommend to his congregation would be of the documentary type, though he might assume that religious programmes would be watched already. He would also be keen to warn the congregation away from the darker side of the medium, such as violence, sexual content and the occult.

Dave is not satisfied with the preaching he hears, stating that it is usually too complex, boring, irrelevant and too short. Despite his years as a missionary, Dave is not at all confident in his preaching ability. He considers the more image oriented elements of preaching to be the most important. He very clearly would put the content matters ahead of the communication elements of preaching.

- TRANSCRIPT -

Dave: I used to work with a missionary team. My job, for the last 10 years, was particularly related to the area of evangelism. I was connected to [a denomination], a local church, but my main emphasis was on people who were outside the church. I'm waiting for the church to tell me whether I'm training for parish ministry or specialized ministry. I struggle with the idea of models for a range of ministries. I question the amount of time spent in administration. Also I question the crisis response aspects of ministry. There seems to be no time for building and training, you're always responding to disaster when it is happening. So many people are crying out for help with the questions of raising their kids, priorities at home or at work. And all of that is not being met, at least at present, in the church.

I: What role does worship and preaching play?

Dave: Keeps me going! I couldn't do what I've done without having a church context, a family, where there is a strong emphasis on worship, and the worship is contemporary, and there is good teaching from scripture about God and what He's doing, about Jesus and the Holy Spirit, things like that. Because that provides the motivation for going out, for taking the message further out to the people. I think the tensions I feel in preaching and worship relates to people who are unchurched, that there is a need for contemporary worship and a preaching which is geared and specific to people's needs. So many churches that are doing a lot of damage to young Christians because they are inflexible in their worship. There's very few people who seem to be able to carry on and grow in a Church of Scotland context from an unchurched background. -- Unchurched people hunger to hear the Bible preached and taught, the problem is when that isn't happening.

I: The problem is when the preaching is different from their experience?

Dave: Yes. I see preaching as something mobile. Preaching is something that brings the message of the gospel to people where they are. I've always been a wee bit hesitant about preaching in a church which is full of people who've already heard the message. I'm working out that there is a great need for preaching within the Church itself, and that preaching is more than just simply telling people the message. There are all the ramifications of all that. The wholeness of the gospel. I'm new to the idea of preaching in the pulpit.

I: Do you have models for this type of preaching?

Dave: Yes. [A Glasgow preacher]. Very forthright and evangelistic. Followed by something of an expositor. I think I respond to a passionate minister even if he is wrong.

I: You see passion or sincerity as something important?

Dave: Yes, yes. Our local minister is in his 50's, when I first came to the church I could no way bring a person to that church to hear that gospel. But he's definitely changed. He's obviously late in life discovered afresh the reality of Christ. His preaching now is more Christ-centred, and he believes it. I wouldn't say that he is a model for preaching because he is sometimes very difficult to follow, but there are times when he does actually stick to a text, and it's great. But you can see how he believes it. Where before it just about morality and things like that, which didn't seem to be the sort of thing that you come to church to hear.

I: Would you say that there needs to be a difference in structure and style in preaching to churched and unchurched?

Dave: Yes. In the church you are working from different presuppositions, you can assume

that they might be familiar with the Bible, you can use Bible references. With the unchurched, you've got to go a wee bit further back. You've got to be able to address what they feel, questions they might have, issues that they might have. But it would be weighted more like that and you would probably use less scripture.

I: And is language different as well?

Dave: So much jargon! Christians -- we carry so much jargon around. But then so do people who are not Christians.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Preaching as Witness -- Robert

Robert is a married male in his late thirties who has relatively recently become a part of the Christian Church. After a number of years in another career he has determined that his calling was to the ordained ministry. He considers himself a liberal Christian. He is a moderate television viewer with a somewhat ambivalent approach to that medium, considering television an opportunity for the church but also a great waste of time. He prefers factual programming, including religious television, more than any of the fictional programmes. He is not against entertainment, *per se*, but is concerned at the amount of time he, and his family, spend in front of the set. Robert does believe that television and the communication of the gospel are compatible, but could not name any programmes where the gospel is clearly the focus. And he would not, on the whole, see it his task as a pastor to recommend television programmes to his congregation.

Robert is very satisfied with the preaching he hears, stating that it is often inspiring and even passionate at times. He was very hard pressed to find anything negative to say at all, and only grudgingly confessed that on rare occasions the sermons were not exciting.

He is quite confident about his own preaching ability, though he confesses that he has a lot to learn. He was not willing to differentiate between the idea oriented elements of preaching and the more image related ones, considering them all of equal importance. And he was equally as mixed in his prioritizing of communication elements and preaching content. He is, for example, one of the few students who gives a relatively high position to *Response* for preaching; yet lists *Witness to Christ* as the number one element.

- TRANSCRIPT -

Robert: Since 1984, I have been involved in the leadership of the Church. I have done quite a bit of leading the Youth fellowship.

I: So why ministry now?

Robert: I remember reading in *Heralds of God* a quote that said something about preachers

having the need to proclaim what they had discovered to others. For me it was either go and serve God completely, or none at all, there was no kind of half measure. It was that compulsion as much as anything. I discovered something incredible, life changing, it was too good to keep to yourself.

I: What do you see as the minister's tasks?

Robert: I had always seen the minister as someone apart, or above, intellectually, spiritually, whatever. But now I see that ministers are human. I see certain gifts that I may or may not have myself. But since having had opportunities in leading worship, I am more encouraged that maybe I do have some gifts in doing that. I'm not sure what sort of ministry I will have in terms of years or in terms of gifts. I don't see myself as being anything special in terms of ministry. You get some ministers who are born to it, going to be outstanding. Other ministers that are just doing a damn good job in a parish setting. I would be quite content if I could do that.

Hopefully I have sufficient gifts to do [parish work]. Preaching, especially, I feel, is something important that I know very little about, and yet I feel is vital and nothing has happened in the church to change that, the centrality of proclamation from the pulpit. There are other aspects of worship which worry me more, leadership-wise, prayer for one. I think public prayer alone, (pause) getting more competence in doing it, I find, is a very difficult thing to do. Prepared prayer, which is the only kind I've tried, extemporary prayer scares me to death. I'm slowly building up confidence in my leadership abilities. You've got to have confidence in your leadership abilities. People, even in this enlightened age, still expect the minister to get up and lead.

I: How would you define preaching?

Robert: Preaching is directed to my fellow men and women, prayer is directed, in a major sense, to God. Preaching is something that comes back to that initial compulsion to go into ministry, you want to pass on what you've discovered. Preaching speaks to me first, and then I pass it on to others. That is something that I could do. I'm learning things every time I sit down to tackle a text or work on a sermon theme. I feel that if I can understand it then it is not beyond the comprehension of the people who are sitting with me. It is the other aspect that bothers me. For instance, in the church where I am just now, where the congregation has higher capabilities than other congregations that I have been in, higher level of intellect, they come from professional backgrounds. I'm taking my first major sermon on Sunday. I approach that with a great deal of trepidation. I've heard the kind of preaching that takes place there, and know the kind of congregation that is and that's quite daunting. I don't see myself as intellectual or academic, and it worries me that my sermon will be flawed in the sense that there might be flaws in the logic or it might not be as competent as they would expect. Yet there are other congregations, without suggesting that there are any "down there" rather than being "up there," where I would feel a lot more at home.

I: What would you see as the difference?

Robert: I'm beginning to suspect that I might have a sort of latent class consciousness that I wasn't aware of. I notice that in here because a great number of people in the university system come from middle class backgrounds. I also find that in rural or small town congregation the people are, their preconceptions are less, there's a sense of a greater need. These are just very ordinary, down to earth people that you might meet on the street. And they come not just with no preconceptions, I'm finding no intellectual barrier. I suspect that these people, in my current placement, may know more than me, not just about their lives, but about the gospel as well. ... I feel very much at home with people where I've got to know their pastoral problems. Where I've meet them regularly week after week, I know them as

people. And I recognize certain qualities in them that I recognize when I go to other rural communities, you see the same kind of person coming forward. Here in the city congregation, I feel I don't know them well. I don't know what their expectations are. I don't know where they are coming from.

I: So what IS the purpose of preaching?

Robert: I don't think that I've ever sat down to put a definition together. But the one that springs to mind for me, proclaiming the gospel as good news. The best example is witnessing to Christ. I find again and again that when I've got my aim right, the sermon has spoken clearly about Christ and what Christ means in your life. So I think the sermon has to keep coming back to that, more than anything else the sermon is proclamation of the good news and what that can mean to people.

I: So is it imparting knowledge or information?

Robert: "Knowledge," I would be reluctant to say. I don't think that anyone is going to come to Christ by being given information, a piece of knowledge that they didn't previously have. I'd love to know just what it was that does convict people. I think that that is what I would be aiming for. I'm not sure yet how that comes over. Whether it is partly through giving them details that they weren't aware of. I suspect it is more them coming to grips with something that has been said. Suddenly something touches them, more than just intellectually, but touches them as a whole person. They suddenly realize that this message is speaking to their whole lives and it is something that they must come to terms with. So that is more than giving them an intellectual statement that they didn't already have. I don't yet know how that comes about. On the rare occasions where I have had feedback, its been one of those odd sermons where you've felt that someone has taken over and what you set out to say isn't what came out at the end of the day, something far greater had come out of it. I'd love to be able to tap in that.

I: What directs this preaching process?

Robert: Sometimes I explore a text and something comes out. Something I never realized or noticed before. And then the sermon tried to get that something across.

I: That still sounds like imparting information.

Robert: I suppose so. But it isn't knowledge that I discovered, something that I set out to work out. There is more to the work of sermon preparation than just me and my head. You are taken out of yourself, or given something from beyond yourself. I can't think of anything to call this but the work of the Holy Spirit. And when you hear this you want to make sure that it gets across. Sometimes you want to come down out of the pulpit and grab them by the lapels and say this is simple what I'm trying to convey here.

I: What sort of language do you use?

Robert: I like to use Parable, when I can. Parable in my mind works because you've got to come to grips with it. You've been presented with an open ended question. And even if you try and ignore it and say "it's got nothing to do with me", that is a response. I don't see that as imparting knowledge, I see that as presenting them with a life situation; presenting them with the gospel coming into interaction with their life situations. Where I feel my preaching often falls down is that I find it difficult to tie it into life. I find it easier to preach a message which tends to sound like something from some of the preachers that I've admired, the ones that speak with real warmth and emotion. But I find it difficult to tie it into people's lives.

I can't come up with images or illustrations, things that make people say yes I've been there, I know that feeling. Sometimes you feel that preaching isn't getting through because they don't relate it to their life. But I see that improving as I get to know people better, as a pastor.

I: What resources might you use to help you?

Robert: I've tried books of illustration, which I find are deadly. Occasionally a good illustration comes forward, that needs to be reworked. The other type of illustrative material is "exegesis of life". But I'm constantly afraid that the illustrative material that I am using from my own life is not striking a chord.

I: Did anything strike you as you completed the TV section of the questionnaire?

Robert: Didn't relate section on television to preaching. Perhaps related as both were communication.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Preaching as Engaging the Imagination -- Carl

Carl is a single male in his early twenties who is a long term member of the Church of Scotland. After a few years in another career he has entered theological education with a view to the ordained ministry in some capacity. He considers himself a liberal Christian, and is heading toward a ministry in some form of Christian Education. He is a heavy television viewer with a generally positive view of that medium, though he is somewhat concerned about the effects of television on family life. He enjoys both factual and fictional programming, listing his favourite viewing as Comedy and News. This makes him somewhat rare in this student group as many of the rest were quite suspicious of comedy as a genre. He is also unique in that he considers "escape" to be an appropriate function served by television. Like Robert, Carl believes that television and the communication of the gospel are compatible, but could not name any programmes where the gospel is clearly the focus. And he^{is} unsure as to whether it would be his task as a pastor to recommend television programmes to his congregation.

Carl is also satisfied with the preaching he hears, stating that it is often passionate and entertaining. His main complaints, and they were minor ones, were that occasionally the sermons were too short and, also occasionally, they were not exciting.

He is quite confident about his own preaching ability, and is willing to experiment with styles and structures. While not claiming that ideas were unimportant to preaching, he unquestionably prefers Images and Stories as more effective. Carl clearly considers communication and dialogue high priorities in preaching, though he also rates Witness to Christ and Biblical Exegesis quite highly. He is unique in considering Biblical Exegesis so highly, as most of the students would put it at the bottom of the content list.

- TRANSCRIPT -

I: Tell me how you came to be training for ministry.

Carl: All my life I wanted to be a preacher. I don't know why particular, except that I listened to preachers and felt the effect that that can have on a life. I also knew that I could make a difference. I heard so much preaching that was not as effective. So, for the last ten years or so I have had this great desire to make a difference. It was, in part, a decision to change the language away from stock phrases, to make it more real, more able to touch people's real lives.

I: Do you have images of good preachers in mind as you prepare?

Carl: Lots. I remember in particular reading Peter Marshall's sermons. I was excited by the way he used all the senses in preaching. He is probably the most prominent preacher I look to. But I also listen to politicians who can talk to people as if they are real. Some of the American civil rights campaigners, like Martin Luther King, who spoke with such passion about real things, and to ordinary people. The Kennedy and Nixon campaign, was a good example of plain talk. Even Thatcher, in her change from an authoritarian to a more softer image. All of these can, I think inform us, or me, as preachers. In fact they may be the preachers of today. But there are those in the churches who are doing good work. I hear a preacher with a very traditional structure, but he's a master executor. Though I wouldn't use his style at all, I am in awe of how well he does the job.

I: What is the "job" of preaching?

Carl: I think it's lots of things. It is partly teaching, partly relating the gospel to today. But it is about helping the congregation in making their own decisions, not always to give answers. In a way preaching is to help get people out of themselves.

I: How do you get people "out of themselves?"

Carl: I would use their experiences and experiences that I have had with them. I'd use story part of the time. I'd use their imagination, because for a lot of them television is an escape. They watch soaps to try and get out of themselves, it gives them a half an hour of release. I think you should use their imagination, use something they are familiar with, something they can relate to. I don't think that I would use what they see as a structured sermon. All sermons have structure. But I wouldn't say, right, here is where we're going and this is how we'll get there. I try and involve the whole person.

I: So is preaching an escape?

Carl: I don't think it is providing an escape, I think it is using the tools of their escape to help to lead them out of that and ground them back down in reality. Using their situation to help lead them out. I think that if you use their imagination they'll remember, whereas if you stand up and give them a printed out monologue, a great exposition, even someone from my congregation [working class] they'll get nothing from it. Which is again the difference in the congregation. I think you have to tailor your preaching, your style of preaching to a congregation. That is not to say that you'll tell a story every week. But I think that you have to see where the people are and to tailor your style. But of course you have to be happy with the style before you can use it or else it won't be effective.

I: So how do you feel about TV use in your congregation?

Carl: For a lot of them it is very necessary to have an escape. Because they are in difficult situations and for a lot of them it is the only release that they get. They don't get away for holidays, so it is necessary to help them deal with the life situations they face: alcoholism, poverty, etc.

I: Is the kind of TV important?

Carl: Not really important. I think that I could honestly say that I am really not that concerned, as such, as long as they don't look at that as the ideal. And try to escape into it as an artificial reality. Unfortunately, they are where they are and it is very difficult for people to escape from their situation. As long as they don't build an impossible ideal out of it, I don't think I would be terribly concerned. The problem comes when they see something and say, "right, I want that and I'll use any means to get it." Knowing from the start that there is no way to actually achieve what they set out to do. I think I would be more concerned about that aspect.

I: How do you avoid that?

Carl: I think it is very, very difficult. Just by speaking to people and being seen with them and discussing all sorts of areas of their lives with them, just visit. And with the sermon you can help to ground them again. I think you are replacing their escapism with something real, and you're showing them that they are real, helping them down the road. It's not an escape, it is a different ideal from, say escapism in television. But you are using the language that they understand, but using it in a different way. And you don't leave them in the clouds but you bring them down, not with a bump because you are using a familiar language, but you bring them back gently to the ground of reality.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

Preaching as Interpretation of Reality -- Carrie

Carrie is a married female in her early forties who has been a long term member of the Reformed Church. After a number of years in another career she has returned to study with a view toward the ordained ministry. She considers herself a liberal Christian. She is a moderate television viewer with a very positive approach to that medium, which perhaps is more a reflection of her general "take it or leave it" attitude than a real commitment to television advocacy. Her favourites are News and Soaps, and watches little else. Her commitment to *Coronation Street* is quite strong but she has little desire to watch much else. Carrie is unique in that she considers the primary function of television is to stir the imagination. She also believes that television and the communication of the gospel are compatible, but could not name any programmes where the gospel is clearly the focus. And not only would she not, on the whole, see it as her task as a pastor to recommend television programmes to her congregation, she was almost offended that anyone would suggest that it was.

Carrie is very satisfied with the preaching she hears, stating that it is often inspiring and passionate, though sometimes boring and outdated. She was not, however, inclined to be generally negative.

She is a bit unsure about her own preaching ability, though she has some clear views on what makes for good preaching. She was not willing to differentiate between the idea oriented elements of preaching and the more image related ones, considering them all of equal importance. Though she was keen to suggest that whatever the structure and content of the sermon it must in the end be logical. She found it quite impossible to prioritize certain communicative and content elements of preaching stating that they are, in the end, so interrelated that it was hard to see how one could really communicate without something to communicate, for example.

- TRANSCRIPT -

I: Tell me why you've decided to train for ministry.

Carrie: I had been, for a number of years a teacher in religious subjects. I began to experience a call to ministry through the community of faith. It wasn't, at first, my decision but others talking to me about how they saw me and what they thought I could be and do. You need the community of faith to bounce it back to you. If you've got the old ladies with whom you are pastoring saying "oh, if only you were a minister" then that's got to help.

I: Do you have models for ministry?

Carrie: Oh, definitely...but perhaps more facets from here and facets from there. I can't see ministry in any terms other than an holistic approach, where pastoral work feeds into theology which is then changed by the existential work which is done in pastoral work, which then comes out in the preaching. I can't see preaching as the be all and end all...maybe that is a problem for me, in that I want to be in ministry in the Church of Scotland. But I think it is more a problem for the Church of Scotland.

I: Why a problem?

Carrie: We can't seem to get rid of this subject - object divide. It's not even an "I - Thou", it's a preaching that's delivered to passive recipients. In fact there is a twist in the logic somewhere because although it comes over as preaching to a passive congregation, but the congregation is mentioned again and again in terms that you should alter your theology to suit the congregation. So the negative aspect of what the congregation feeds in, apparently, is present. But not a positive dynamism.

I: What do you base that view [of a passive congregation] on?

Carrie: Because the vehicle used for preaching that is most desirable, apparently, and certainly the most commonly accounted, is the vehicle of propositional type, or lecture type preaching. And it still is a hangover from the historical reasons that preaching became dominant in the first place, which is the need to educate. Now I don't know if we need to rethink that historical reason which has now become a block.

I: What other options might you suggest?

Carrie: When you talk of preaching as storytelling or poetry is mentioned the reaction might be that not everyone can be a poet. But not everyone has to be a poet, it is a question of models. If you carry those models around then you are going to strive towards that. I think

it is very important to sort out what kind of models and metaphors are fixed out there in what we are trying to do, because then we will follow, even though it will be a struggle, even at a subconscious level, that that is what we are going to work toward and that is what is going to come over not just in our words but in our body language as well, those are our structures.

I: So what do you see as the purpose of preaching?

Carrie: I think that there is constant need for interpretation of reality. Trying to interpret present reality in terms of the Christ who is the revealer of the truth within that reality. So it's an interpreting process, it's an offering of a new vision, a different vision, another way of looking at what's actually happened. It has got to relate to what's happened, it's got to relate to what is genuinely regarded as reality. And it's got to reflect that in some way. You've got twin poles. Your preaching has got to be biblical and it also has to relate to the real world that you are preaching to and from and out of. It's a circular activity because the world is being challenged by Christ for you, and you've got to lay that challenge before the congregation who are also being challenged. And if you can open a window, make less opaque the reality of Christ in the world.

I: How does one do that? Where do you start?

Carrie: With people. The pastoral side of ministry is getting involved at the ground level where people are. The task of ministry is overcoming alienation. Preaching is of a piece with ministry, but is different because you are using words. It has to be answerable to scripture at all time, scripture has to be normative for preaching.

I: Do you see preaching as in any way competing with television, say?

Carrie: Preaching doesn't have to be in competition with the world. I love the world. I don't think it has to be in competition with the world. But what it has to be in competition with is our values which have arisen in the world and have become idols which get in the way of (pause). Music, for me, is one of the highest expressions of our desire to worship and to express joy. But music can be used wrongly, music can disturb and hurt and bring out the absolutely worst aspects. So preaching, I don't like to think of it as being in competition with other aspects of culture, it shouldn't be anti-culture at all, it should transform culture, it should pick out from culture those aspects which have wonderfully high aspirations, how else can we reach God? Words are utterly and totally inadequate and I think that Luther was right and we have no right to get up there. I think that there is an audacity in our (pause) there is an audacious stance that everyone takes. You risk so much, because I do think in the end that words are probably quite pathetically inadequate. But we've got to use them. We've got to take that leap of faith.

- END TRANSCRIPT -

EDINBURGH PREACHERS

PREACHING PRACTICE: SERMON ANALYSIS

Sixteen sermons were submitted for analysis. Two of the sixteen were presented orally only, recorded on audio tape. The preacher submitting the tape claimed not to preach from a script as preaching "is an eyeball to eyeball activity." Of the rest, four were handwritten but full manuscripts, and ten were more or less full typewritten scripts. Four of these last ten

were complete and well presented, as one would expect an essay or article to appear. The remaining six included various handwritten corrections, additions and, in a few cases, clear delivery aids. These delivery aids consisted of various unusual punctuation marks indicating a pause or change in thought or mood, assorted marks for emphasis such as highlighting and underlining, and occasionally a time check indicator. However, the time indication appeared only in a sermon which was presented on television as part of a Sunday worship broadcast and the preacher was asked to keep to a specific time. This same preacher submitted a total of three sermons and the others showed no such time indicators on the manuscript.

Illustrations

Personal Experience Illustrations

The type of illustration that dominates is the "I remember when I..." type. The preacher uses a personal experience to introduce a subject, define an idea, or (when used in the introduction) to break the ice and remind the congregation that the preacher is only human. When a personal experience illustration is used at the beginning of a sermon its primary intention is to introduce humour. Whether the story directly relates to the main theme of the sermon or not is apparently beside the point. Its function is more attitudinal, setting a comfortable, informal tone so that the sermon can then proceed more like a conversation between equals than a proclamation from on high.

Introductions are not the only place where personal experience illustrations are used. More than one preacher used personal experiences like punctuation. Each point or section of the sermon would either begin or end with a personal experience that attempted to make the concept more concrete. Neither were all of these illustrations meant to be humorous. While none of the stories related in the sixteen sermons was tragic or oppressively sad, a few were intended to convey a quite serious message. One personal story, or experience, involved a preacher in conversation with another clergyman about whether the energies focused in the Gulf War could be utilized as effectively for peace.

That illustration was typical of the serious ones in that it was almost a propositional statement that was put into a "real life" context. It carried few descriptive words and no emotive ones designed to convey the full experience mentioned. The purpose of the illustration was to restate an idea. In the end, it could hardly be said that an illustration of this type actually "illustrated" anything.

Out of the sixteen sermons, fourteen had personal illustrations. Clearly, the injunction against using the word "I" in preaching, which is still quoted by homiletics instructors from time to time, holds little place in the practice of these preachers, most of whom were trained over twenty years ago. The ability to bring one's own experience into the pulpit is highly

valued by these preachers. Most modern homiletics texts no longer prohibit the use of the "I illustration." Indeed it is more likely to be argued that without the "I" in the pulpit the sermons are groundless and conceptual. Communication theory recognizes the importance of the messenger in shaping the message. Homiletics now realizes that factor as well.

However, if the only or the dominant type of illustration provided is the personal experience of the preacher a number of risks are run. The first and most serious is that the subject of the sermon moves from the gospel of Christ to the preacher him or herself. It is also possible for the preacher to become the hero or the professional Christian (or indeed the opposite: the prime bad example) as the faith is communicated through such a narrow focus. And ultimately, the function of the illustration, to enable the hearer to more fully understand an idea, can be muted by the simple fact that the preacher's experience is not the experience of all those who come to hear. Thus the attempt at dialogue, through illustration, becomes further monologue.

Biblical Illustration

The second most prevalent type of illustration is the biblical illustration. There are two kinds of biblical illustration represented in these sermons. The first is the use of a supporting or secondary text to illustrate the main text. Saying "as it says in Jeremiah..." when the declared sermon text is Romans is one attempt to illustrate a point with further examples. The difficulty with this practice is that occasionally the new text quoted is as obscure or complex as the one being illustrated, therefore causing more confusion. This type of biblical illustration is actually rarely used in the sermons studied. Only one preacher uses it more than once.

The other, more common type of biblical illustration is "re-telling." Here a text is recast in modern language and retold as a part of the sermon, usually the introduction. Sometimes the preacher tries to recapture the sense of the biblical event by telling what life was like in "Bible times." The preacher, sometimes through painstaking research, reveals the details of first century Christian life or pre-Christian Israel so that the congregation can feel, to some degree, that they are there participating in the event as it happens.

Another type of retelling is to not only change the language of the biblical story but to "up-date" it in various ways. Here the preacher uses biblical and modern day imagery interchangeably. One of the motivations for this practice is for humour. The image of an Old Testament prophet denouncing three martini lunches, or the apostles arguing over whose name is first on the letterhead of Jesus & Co. are undoubtedly humorous. The preachers in the sample went to various extremes in this act, some more clearly wishing to emphasize the humour than others, but none becoming truly outrageous in their claims. And yet the

motivation is not solely entertainment. This manipulation of the biblical event is a subtle way of claiming that their story is our story, that human nature has not changed in the hundreds or thousands of years since the text was created. Therefore, two purposes are served in this up-dating. On the one hand the hearers become more familiar with the biblical texts, and on the other the "contact point" for their own lives is made more clear without explicitly drawing attention to it. It must be said that the preachers here were not satisfied with the subtle approach and proceeded from the up-dating to reiterating those points of contact.

Literary or Historical Illustration

A third type of illustration (used primarily by one preacher, though at least two others used it more sparingly) is the "literary illustration." Again there are two types of this. One type is to quote passages of other genres of literature, usually poetry, in the body of the sermon as a way of emphasizing a biblical or theological point. Robert Burns' poetry received two quotations, one quite long. Emerson received one mention, as did Douglas's *The Robe* and a Easter Cantata by Simpson and Stainer. There were a number of other literary figures that were mentioned and who contributed a phrase or two, such as John Buchan and Tolstoy. The majority of these were used by one preacher in two of the sermons in the sample.

The other form of this "literary" or perhaps more accurately called the historical illustration is the anecdotal. Here a quote from or about a famous literary or historical figure is used to illustrate a more abstract statement. Sometimes called "name-dropping," this practice is shunned by some. But it can be quite effective, especially if the personage is well known and respected in the community. One would suspect, however, that the sermon in the sample that mentioned Lady Violet Asquith, Winston Churchill, Martin Luther, Van Gogh, Wittgenstein (and his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*), Bertrand Russell, Alistair Maclean, Gottlieb Spangenberg, and John Wesley might seem a bit overwhelming to some congregations. Perhaps the idea behind such a range of luminaries is that there is someone for everybody.

As a subset of the literary or historical anecdote, many more preachers are likely to mention famous Christian figures as illustration. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mother Teresa appeared in three sermons each. Terry Waite, Luther and Wesley each appeared twice. D.L. Moody, Billy Graham and Gordon Wilson of Enniskillen were mentioned once. The experience of such people can have great impact on hearers who already respect them.

Common Experience Illustration

A related type of illustration is the "common experience" illustration. Here, rather than telling of some significant personage, the preacher attempts to tell the congregation their own story, the events in the life of the congregation or a more general human experience. The

most common use of this in the sermons was relatively minor. The preacher would ask a question ("Have you heard any good news lately?") and then go on to discuss a common experience (listening to or watching the news media) drawing attention to a particular dimension of that common experience (it's all bad news). Similarly, the preacher makes a statement ("Many of us must be being deeded just now with catalogues and charity appeals...") designed to get agreement, and then interprets that experience ("It sometimes feels as if the whole world's miseries were landing on our doorstep.") to draw attention to the sermon theme (world poverty). This type of illustration can be quite effective as it provides a common ground from which the preacher can move into interpretation or connection with other less common experiences or understandings. Three of the sixteen sermons used this as an introduction.

Two of the sermons muted the effect somewhat by moving quickly from this very specific, but common, experience to a personal experience that while even more specific would have fewer points of contact. The complaint is not that illustrations should become more universal or more general in order to have wider appeal. In fact, as Craddock argues, the specific communicates more concretely, and therefore more effectively, than the general. When, however, the illustration moves from inviting the hearer to remember a specific experience of his/her own to hearing the preacher's experience it actually becomes less specific and much more difficult for the congregation to claim as their own. The content of this type of illustration, then, is gathered from the realm of the experience of those living in the same or a similar context. It calls for preachers to employ what have been called "seeing skills," the ability to observe the gospel, at work in or absent from, the activity of human intercourse.

A major argument of this thesis is that perhaps the greatest common experience of our modern age is the television watching experience. Here is a vast field of images and stories to which the majority of the population has easy access and enjoys with regularity. Yet, only one preacher made passing reference to a television programme, and even that was used to illustrate a quite obscure point that had no real bearing on the sermon itself, though it made an interesting entrée into the subject. Another talked about the feeling of anticipation when waiting for a favourite programme. Two others spoke briefly in general terms about the media; one saying that it must be used, though he did not discuss how or even to what end.

It is not surprising that television was largely ignored in these sermons, given that few mention any sort of common experience at all. And, as we have seen, the preachers are ambivalent toward the medium and their own viewing time would be far below the national average. Yet is it disappointing that given the predominance of television imagery, the preachers manage to avoid making much if any mention of the experience.

A few of the sermons contained more general "sentence illustrations" (such as in a sermon about faith "for example, when we get on a bus or a train, we put our faith and trust in the driver...") attempting to tap into a common experience, some more successful than others. This type of illustration was, however, underused in favour of the types already mentioned.

Community Experience Illustration

Even more underused is the illustration that attempts to make the common experience one of community experience. It was, I believe, troubling that all but two of these sermons could have been preached to any Christian congregation. A few might have proved somewhat difficult in moving from a congregation of professional people to one of a more working class orientation. But the sermons were, for the most part, devoid of any specific contextualization. Only one preacher, who submitted two sermons, used the experiences of the local congregation as illustration for his preaching.

It is a function of preaching to tell not just the story of the gospel, but the story of the Christian community, local as well as historical. One function of this type of illustration is to make the gospel relevant to the local situation. As the preacher draws attention to the events taking place amongst the people who have come to hear, the gospel is heard arising not just out of a text and not just out of a history, but out of daily life as they live it. Describing how the congregation relates to one another, how they interact within the larger community, how the value systems and beliefs are already shaping their practice can be much more revelatory than relating anecdotes of literary and historical figures, though there is room for both.

To be fair, it must be stated that a number of the sermons were submitted by Methodist lay preachers whose practice is to be itinerant and, therefore, might not be as aware of local situations as the clergy who preach to the same congregation week after week. This makes it much more difficult, though not impossible, to relate the story of the congregation. As stated above, however, one simple link that can be made is through the common experience of television. Here is one area where even strangers find points of contact.

As argued in the last chapter, the television context demands relevance. The gospel itself demands relevance. Preaching is one place, hopefully out of many, where the relevance of the gospel is emphasized. Relevance can be understood, at least in part, to be that which relates to our common experience.

Themes

In addition to asking how the preachers are communicating, which is the main thrust

of this section, it is useful also to ask what they are communicating. Before turning to investigate the details of the use of imagistic and feeling language, a quick look at the range of themes represented in these sermons would be useful.

Most of the sermons have clearly stated themes and a minimum of digressions or extraneous material. At least three have no clear theme and seem to be about a range of topics, even when supposedly centred on a text. One sermon states a theme but then actually presents something different. Out of the sixteen, including those that are somewhat unclear, there are five with a biblical theme, three focus on a social issue, four orient around the Church and the final four are about human life and relationships in a more general way.

Biblical Themes

The biblical themes include a biography of Paul, an interpretation of "the created things will be shaken and removed" in Hebrews 12, the calling of the disciples, an interpretation of the crucifixion, and a model for testing the relevance of the Good News. All of these sermons represent an attempt to move the themes out of the text and into the lives and consciousness of the hearers, some with more success than others. The least immediately relevant was the sermon on Paul that, while interesting, could have been delivered as an introductory lecture in New Testament. It was a way of focusing attention on a particular character. Perhaps the preacher's intent was that the congregation would be free to interpret their own Christian experience in light of Paul's. However, this was not clearly indicated as a goal of the sermon. Other sermons with biblical themes were quite explicit in stating the points of contact. Some used quite recent events to interpret biblical texts: e.g. the former Yugoslavian situation as "shaking the foundations." There is clearly an attempt on the part of these preachers to do more than simply "teach what the Bible says."

The other sermon themes are not unbiblical or non-biblical by any means. All of the sermons submitted have a clear connection with the biblical text and all but three use the text, explaining and re-telling, for a considerable proportion of the sermon. Categorizing them as something other than "biblical themes," therefore, is not meant to imply that they have no biblical base.

Social Issue and Church Themes

Under social issues there were two sermons on world poverty and one on identifying with the outcast. The sermons on Church related themes included one defining preaching, one on living in Christian community, one on Pentecost, and a three part definition of faith. The Pentecost sermon could be considered a biblical theme, except that the sermon itself uses the Pentecost story to define the Church. The sermons in both of these categories have clear and

firm connections to biblical texts. And, for the most part, they seem to be easily applied in the lives of the hearers. All of the social action sermons, for example, give clear action statements to work along side the more attitudinal aspects. The sermon on preaching was delivered at a special recognition service for a lay preacher and therefore was quite appropriate to the event. In addition, this sermon managed to refer directly to the participation of the congregation in the preaching event. The Pentecost sermon was delivered in a specific context and used the community experience illustrations mentioned above.

Human Life and Experience Themes

The last category includes some of the sermons that were less clearly defined. Some were quite obviously about a specific way of living in community, such as a sermon on gratitude and one on defining "the complete life." Another sermon seemed in the end to call upon the hearers to be nicer to people because they might be having a rough time too. Somewhat vague at times, this sermon seemed not to be grounded in a text as much as was the norm. The final sermon in this category was reputed to be about "the suffering community." The difficulty was that at times the Church was identified as the suffering community and at times the suffering community was that community with which the Church must learn to identify and to assist. There was a call for Church people to work for change to end suffering and a call for Church people to suffer for their faith. In the end, the experience of reading this sermon was confusing, it is hard to imagine what the experience of hearing it might have been.

APPENDIX E

IMAGINATIVE PREACHING: SAMPLE SERMONS

Provided here are two examples of imaginative preaching. These sermons have both been preached in local church and conference worship settings. In addition they have been used in various class situations as discussion starters. As to the latter they both engendered some considerable comment, not always favourable.

The two sermons are similar in some ways and yet different in others. They both employ a somewhat narrative structure and utilize historical imagination. The first is a more traditional narrative retelling of a text with a short image based purpose statement at the end. The second is a weaving of three narratives separated by time and personal distance, with each episode starting and ending with the same or similar words.

Imaginative preaching takes many forms. These sermons are presented, not as perfect examples but as attempts to employ the language and construction that, I believe, communicates most effectively in a television context.

Each sermon will be followed by a brief analysis as well as indication as to how it was received by the respective hearers.

SERMON 1: R.S.V.P.

Matthew 22:1-14

October 11, 1987

The king stood in the middle of the huge palace banquet hall watching the ice sculpture slowly lose its shape. It once looked remarkably like dolphins cavorting in the waves. Now it looked more like a stringer of carp fished out of a shallow pond. The whole dinner was beginning to take on the aspect of dead fish. The main course was chilling, the dessert was melting and the appetizer was being nibbled away by nervous waiters and cooks. The king motioned to his servant one more time. Looking over the servant's head to his son who was practically crying in a corner he asked one more time:

"None of them? Out of all of those I invited not one of them is going to come? Is the circus in town? Is it a shiner's convention? What could be so spectacular to keep EVERYONE away from a party with the king?"

The servant looked around nervously, hoping someone would bail him out so he wouldn't have to tell the story yet again. Not a soul could be seen, except the honoured son who was not looking very honourable as it appeared that no one cared if he got married or not. Seeing no way out the servant began again.

"I went out as you ordered sir. I took the guest list in hand and proceeded to the first address. I announced the party was ready and he said to catch him next time."

"Next time?," said the king, "I'll show him next time. Sorry, go on."

"Well, sir, there isn't much to go on to. One said he had too much work to do in his field, another said he had some details at his business to oversee, one had to catch a caravan, and

another was working on the great Israeli novel, or so he said." He wanted to go on listing the excuses that were given him by the many names recorded on the guest list, but he could see that the king wasn't listening to him any more. He was off muttering about great Israeli novels and saying I'll give them something to write a great Israeli novel about.

The king was peeved. Peeved? He was enraged. His blood pressure shot through the roof, his face turned a rather unpleasant sort of mottled vermilion, and he began to mutter. It was the muttering that was the worst. He muttered his anger, he muttered his frustration, he muttered instructions to his servants who swallowed fearfully and ran out to make his mutters manifest. And before they were done the streets ran a sickly red not unlike the king's face as he muttered moments before.

The king caught his breath and seem to come to himself. Realizing that those on the "to invite" list were no longer able to come, he hit on a great plan. Calling his servants together he put his plan into action. Pacing back a forth like Pat O'Brien in the Knute Rockne movie he said,

"All right men, we've taken it on the chin up til now. They've kicked us around pretty good out there. We are startin' to look pretty bad, and dinner is startin' to look even worse. Well, let me tell ya those people aren't worth the trouble it takes to invite them again. So forget them. Go after the others. I want you to get on out there and bring THEM in."

The servants looked at each other and then back at the king. "Bring WHO in?"

"Everybody, anybody. Get on out there and invite the people who have never been invited before, the people we usually turn away from, the people who haven't eaten a decent meal in weeks, the people who are just hanging around the street corners because life has nothing to offer them any more. Get on out there and bring them in."

And with a great shout of "go team" they ran out of the hall to invite the unavoidable to the banquet of the century. In the street corners they found them, in the alleys and the tenements, the run down hovels and the dark smoky bars, the nursing homes and truck stops. All the places the decent people wouldn't go, they went. And they invited. "Big doin's at the palace. Everybody is welcome. And we mean everybody."

Much to the surprise of the inviters, the invited accepted the invite. And they came and filled out the hall. The king was even helping set out extra chairs there were so many. The music played, the food was served; the servants moving quickly through the crowd refilling plates and glasses. The king was toasted with so many novel toasts that he asked someone to write them all down. "Mud in my what?" Even the son blew his nose and began to enjoy himself, joining in on some of the more questionable lyrics to familiar very proper tunes. The party lasted well into the night, getting only louder and more boisterous as time went on. And a good time was had by all.

Well, not quite all. There was one guy, over there in the corner who was not having a good time at all. In fact no one would sit with him for very long because he was making sure that they didn't have a good time either. You see he was sceptical. He was sure that there was a catch to all of this. "Nothing is for nothing," he quoted louder and louder as people began to move away. "We are going to have to pay for this. I don't even know why I came. There is nothing for me here. I don't like this food, I don't like you people, and I hate the music those poor excuses for musicians have been playing all night." He was really not much fun to be with, to put it kindly. He was quickly becoming a dead weight dragging down the buoyant party balloon.

The king, enjoying himself terrifically but still keeping a close eye on the proceedings, noticed the quiet corner. Not really quiet as the man complained loudly about all the activities around him. But it was an island of frowns and furrowed brows in a sea of laughing faces. Not wanting to see another party go down the tubes, he goes to the man. "Not having a good time." "I'll say I'm not," the man began before turning around to see it was the king himself who inquired. When he noticed who it was he became speechless. Stammering nonsense, unable to explain or excuse himself.

The king called the royal bouncer and said "Get him out. We don't need that kind in here." At the king's command they picked him up and tossed him out the door. Limping down the hill back to his very humble home, the man had the uneasy feeling that he had somehow missed out on something more important that he could really know.

- - -

Jesus came to invite us all to the party he called the Kingdom of God. There are those who are not worthy to be a part of this kingdom. Those are the ones who choose to ignore the invitation. Not necessarily out of malice or evil intent, but simply because they do not wish to put this invitation at the top of their priority list. These are the ones who make light of the call Jesus extends to all the world. "I have more important things to do than to be a part of that," they say. They are not worthy, because they have decided to be not worthy. They are not made unworthy by anyone but themselves.

Jesus came to invite us all to the party he called the Kingdom of God. There are those who are not chosen to be a part of this kingdom. Those are the ones who do respond to the invitation, but believe that that is all they need to do. Once accepting they come to fill up their space, but do not enter in the festivities. They are just there, but are not really a part. They take no responsibility, and offer no input. They are not chosen because they have decided to be not chosen. They are not thrown out by anyone but themselves.

The king is throwing a party. It is in celebration of the wedding of his son. You have your invitation. This is going to be a party you don't really want to miss. So make up your mind if you want to be a part of this event or not, make up your mind if you want to involve yourself, to be more than a bystander or corner sitter. And notice the invitation, down at the bottom, in the corner, it says R.S.V.P. Do it now, we would hate to be without you for long.

ANALYSIS:

This sermon is traditional in many ways. The narrative structure is quite direct, following along the lines presented by the scripture text. Even the final three paragraphs are suggested in the text and are not a gloss provided by the preacher. Matthew's retelling of the parable of the wedding feast includes a statement of implications in verse 14. In some sense that verse represents stepping out of the story and drawing out some sort of 'moral' or ramification of the events presented in the first thirteen verses.

A decision was made to keep to the characters as represented in the text: King, son, servants. Rather than "up-dating" the story to a more modern "businessman" or "land owner," the story as present suggests a fairy tale. The fairy tale genre is still an effective communicator. It allows both identification and distance.

The element of humour was a conscious decision as well. Some quite terrible things take place in this story, and yet the impact is not so overwhelming as to be a block to the communication. This is, in part, due to the humour of the preached story. Humour resonates with most people, even though unexpected in the pulpit. It establishes rapport and begins to take down defenses.

Finally, the imagery was almost overdrawn. The details of the ice-sculpture and the colour of the king's face might seem to be extraneous trivia. And yet, in the trivia we find recognition and the ability of the hearer to "see" the scene thus described.

RESPONSE:

When preached in a class setting for discussion, the response has been largely, though not totally, favourable. Reference has been made to the imagery and the humour as effective and not offensive. Many comments attested to the fact that this story, though it seems to simply repeat the text in a different language, is actually a definite interpretation. The scene with the royal bouncer, for example, is often picked up as an effective way to handle a difficult text. The king's reaction to the refusals also was appreciated by many hearers.

Some of the more negative comments referred to the image of the son as less than heroic. This was, it was said, supposed to be Jesus and he should not be depicted in such a fashion. This introduces the whole concept of story and allegory. Do the characters stand for certain figures in both text and sermon, or is the story a thing in itself with the referent being the action or result rather than the personalities? Is it possible to translate one kind of story into another kind of story without losing the audience familiar with the text?

On the other side, there are those who were in favour of narrative as a means of communicating the gospel, but were disappointed the I felt the need to weaken at the end and put in the requisite "religious bit." Those last few verses did not, I feel, break the narrative in a significant way. It also allowed for a point of contact between text and listener. But some of the hearers wanted the more radical ending of letting the story speak for itself.

SERMON 2: A DAY FOR WORDS

John 21:1-19
A Meditation for Communication Conference

3 May 1992
Geneva, Switzerland

It was not a day for words

The last words were spoken the night before - *I'm going fishing*

Not really words - but mumbled emptiness,
stuttered hopelessness

And the response was more a resigned shrug than actual words

But now in the harsh light of morning there were no words,

just the slow creak of a boat as it rose and fell,
the hissing drips of an empty net dragged up yet again

and the sighing splash of it hitting the water one more time.

It was not a day for words - but for aching muscles and blistered hands.

It was not a day for words

The last words were spoken the night before

not really words - but hissed anger,

bitter hurt shaped into barbs that cut to the bone

But now in the cruel light of morning there were no words,

just the jangle of keys and the impatient tap of a shoe,
the slamming of steel doors

and a silence so loud

it drowned out the traffic noise on the road to the city

It was not a day for words - but for clenched teeth and eyes that stared only ahead.

It was not a day for words

The last words were spoken a moment ago, a lifetime ago

Not really words - but a sacrifice of personal shame

a revelation of a secret life

But now in the hollow light of morning there were no words,

just the ticking of a clock echoed by the beating of our hearts,

we sat together on the floor of the room we had shared since boys,

but now it was an alien landscape -

our knees nearly touched,

but we were miles apart

It was not a day for words - but for brothers become strangers

and sweat like great drops of blood.

It was not a day for words

Yet something pierced the silence. A question from the shore,

a command, a groaning net, a whispered hope.

Did he speak, did he dare? *It is the Lord* he said

or wanted to say,

or perhaps it was just the fish flopping in the net

Whatever it was, it was enough to make them move.

Peter, not one to look when he could leap, dove into the lake and swam for shore.

The rest put oars to work and rowed as if their lives depended upon it -
and in a strange way they did.

Boat and swimmer reached sand at the same time. Piling out, they stood wordless,
muscles quivering from exertion,
noses lifting to the smell of fish and bread,
eyes stinging from drifting smoke,
hearts pounding from hoping too much,

As this man - this apparition, their Lord - the stranger invited them to eat.

It was not a day for words

Yet something pierced the silence. A tear, a ragged breath,
would she speak? Would he seize this small opening?

The car rolled on,
together they rode to their separate destinations,
together they carried their hurt and their pride
like a chip on the shoulder.

He glanced out of the corner of his eye -
was that her turning away just a little too slowly,
did she make the first move,
did he win this battle of stubborn wills?

He saw her eyes grow wide with sudden fear, jerking his head around he saw that the
cars in front had stopped, he hit the brakes with the speed of panic, the screech was
as painful as the silence had been, the smell of burning rubber turned their already
twisting stomachs, and then ...

like the pause after a storm,
like the silence after a benediction
they stopped
inches from the car in front.

When their eyes refocussed and their hearts slowed down,
they read, in their private silence,
the sticker on the ancient heap they nearly destroyed -
it was a joke of sorts,
a statement of faith in an old broken down car
and a dream on the rocks:

Till death do us part

It was not a day for words

Yet I longed for something to pierce the silence. A canyon had opened between us,
my brother and myself, a mountain too steep to climb.

his confession had rocked my naive security -
things like that happen to others, not me, not mine.

There were those I knew who would call him unclean
who would call him to repent,
who would call him at least to hide in silence and fear.

Yet - he was my brother, my flesh, my blood.

I opened my arms to embrace him in silence,
only to watch as he cringed from my touch,

so as not to share his shame.

It was not a day for words.

Yet words were what Peter got.

With the taste of breakfast still in his mouth,
he felt those words more than heard them.

The water from his impromptu swim still clinging to his back,
alongside his failure,
his cowardice,
his lack of faith.

The words lashed at him,
they pierced his side,
they were like nails driven into his heart:

Simon bar Jona - Do you love me?

Yes, Lord, I love you, he murmured

and wondered if he would ever be whole again.

It was not a day for words

Yet words were all they had at the moment.

They had faced two different deaths that morning,
and still their pride was not sated.

Yet - with an effort, a guarded risk - she said:

Do you love me?

Yes, of course, I love, he snapped
more quickly than he meant,
with more venom than he felt,
and was instantly ... sorry

But the cars ahead began to move and they drove on
and wondered if they would ever be one again.

It was not a day for words

Yet words are often easier than silence.

We sat and stared at each other in silence,
he withdrawn,
me confused

Until finally, from a hollow place inside, he said: *Can you -
Do you love me - still?*

You are my brother, what else can I do?

Yes, I love you.

He looked at me wanting,
but not daring to believe,

and I wondered if we would ever be innocent again.

And after this...Jesus said.....*Follow me.*

ANALYSIS:

This sermon took a few important elements from the text for its design. Both mood and structure were clearly suggested by at least a part of the chosen text.

The mood was clearly a sad, reflective atmosphere. Peter's words at both beginning and end reflected a resignation overlying a sense of failure and despair. The excitement in the middle of the text, seeing the resurrected Lord, is muted both by what comes before and after and by the hints that the recognition was not total.

The three denials redeemed by the three affirmations suggested very strongly a three part structure. The three movements of the text from despair to hope to struggling obedience also repeated the three part sense of the text.

From this the three stories told in three parts seemed appropriate. The first story is the text examined, as above, in the movement from despair to excitement and hope to a final accounting and warning. The story is designed to communicate the feelings of Peter and the disciples as they struggle through this event.

Feelings are dominant in all three stories. The second is a third person story of marital discord. The causes of the hurt are not explored and not important. The effects are what is central to this story. The third story is a first person encounter between two brothers. Again the details of the event are not revealed, though perhaps hinted at.

Despite the fact that feelings are central to the communication, however, the crux of the sermon is that love is more than a feeling. Jesus calls Peter to love him as an act of the will. The last line of the sermon, repeats this call to love. Husbands and wives, brothers are expected to love one another, but find it very difficult some times. What this sermon attempts to do was to communicate the experience and the depth of that difficulty.

RESPONSE:

Each time this sermon has been preached the response has been largely favourable. What is commented upon the most is the depth of feeling in the sermon itself. The experiential element of the sermon communicates very well. Some hearers found it hard to talk after the experience whether in a worship or a class setting. Identification was strongest from both the biblical text and the husband and wife story. The third, while many were interested in it, did not communicate the depth of experience. This was, perhaps, because it was a personal event that may not have happened in a like manner to anyone else. The second story was more universal in its particularity.

The negative responses tend to congregate around two poles. On the one had there are those who say they were unmoved by the event. It simply didn't touch them in any way. Without that emotional contact, the impact of the sermon would be much less. This is a risk

worth taking, however, as the possibilities for finding points of contact are much more powerful in an experiential sermon than an intellectual one.

The other negative comment was, in essence, nice story but it was not a sermon. This is, in my view, the more likely response of a majority of congregations. Because hearers have been trained to expect certain things from a sermon, a sermon such as this one would not fit into the patterns established and therefore often dismissed. Overcoming this reaction involves a long educative process. The thrust of this process is that hearers need to be given permission to bring their whole selves, experience - emotion - understanding, into the preaching event. For so long, preaching has been a "head exercise." Anything else doesn't seem like preaching.

SUMMATION

These are just two examples of the vast range of possibilities available to the imaginative preacher. On one level, these sermons miss a vital point; they are divorced from a specific context. They cannot in any real way function as a part of the on-going dialogue of the Church. Sermon 2, however, was written for a conference on Christian communication and as such both addressed what had gone before and became an important part of the conversation that continued for the rest of the week. But in this setting the context is somewhat remote.

On another level, these sermons embrace image, narrative and experience in a way appropriate to a television age. On the page some of the impact is lost, of course. But as an oral event, the power of imaginative preaching is well attested. Other preachers may be better story-tellers, have a greater fund of images at hand and be better able to make contact with the "whole person" of the hearer. These sermons represent one attempt at meeting those concerns.

APPENDIX F COURSE OUTLINE 1

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY PT 3 / HONOURS COURSE *HOMILETICS*

AIMS: This course is designed to examine the issues related to the nature and purpose of preaching, to investigate the preaching tradition, to explore implications for preaching in a media saturated society, and to construct models and structures for preaching.

*GOALS: To enable students to discover and incorporate in their own preaching ministry, the traditions and theology of preaching.
To stress the need for movement in sermon structure.
To emphasize the visual in preaching.
To provide models for preaching.
To relate content with delivery.*

I. DEFINING PREACHING

In this introductory session the class will explore their own models and understandings of preaching. This discussion will lay the groundwork for the remainder of the course where our personal models of preaching will be examined in the light of the traditional teaching in the Church.

TEXT: Walter Wangerin. "Preaching" in *Ragman and Other Cries of Faith*. New York: Harper & Row, 1986. pp. 71 - 82.

READING: Barr, B. "Pop Sermons" in *Christian Century*, September 17, 1969.
Barth, Karl. *Homiletics*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991.
Stott, J. *I Believe in Preaching*. Chapter 8: "Courage and Humility". London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982.
Thielicke, H., trans. by J.W. Doberstein. *The Trouble with the Church: A Call for Renewal*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1966.
Tugwell, S. *The Way of the Preacher*. London: Danton, Longman & Todd, 1979.

II. THEOLOGY OF PREACHING

How does theology inform our preaching and how does preaching inform our theology?

TEXT: Lischer, R. *A Theology of Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981, pp. 13 - 29.

READING: Barth, K. *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1978.
----- *Prayer and Preaching*. London, 1964.
Buttrick, D. *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987. pp. 449 - 459.
Craddock, F.B. *Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1985. pp.51-65
Dillistone, F.W. *Christianity and Communication*. London: Collins, 1956
Duke, R.W. *The Sermon as God's Word: Theologies of Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980.
Gonzalez, J.L. & C.G. Gonzalez. *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980.

II. CONT.

- Kraemer, H. *The Communication of the Christian Faith*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1957
- Ott, H. *Theology and Preaching*. Lutterworth, 1965.
- Pitt-Watson, I. *The Folly of Preaching*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978.
- Rahner, K. ed. *The Renewal of Preaching*. Ramsay, NJ: Paulist Press, 1968.
- Stott, J. *I Believe in Preaching*. Chapter 3: "Theological Foundations for Preaching". London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982.

III.A. AUTHORITY

How can we preach? What is the basis for Christian preaching in the church?

TEXT: Buttrick, D. *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987. pp. 239 - 250.

READING: Barr, J. *Explorations in Theology #7: The Scope of Authority*. London, 1980.
 ----- . *Holy Scripture*. 1983.
 Bonhoeffer, D. *Worldly Preaching*.
 Craddock, F.B. *As One Without Authority*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1979.

III.B. THE PREACHING TRADITION

An investigation of some of the key moments in the history of preaching.

TEXT: Holland, D.T. *The Preaching Tradition*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980. pp. 13 - 49.

READING: Blaikie, W.G. *The Preachers of Scotland*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888.
 Brilioth, Y. *A Brief History of Preaching*. Philadelphia: 1965.
 Hunter, D.G., ed. *Preaching in the Patristic Age*. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1989.
 Stewart, J.S. *Heralds of God*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946.
Twenty Centuries Of Great Preaching, 13 vols. Waco, TX: Word Books, c1971.

IV. USING THE BIBLE IN PREACHING

Exercises in the proper use of biblical texts for preaching. Analyzing the shape of scripture and finding context for preaching.

TEXT: Craddock, F.B. *Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1985, pp. 99 - 124

READING:

- Allen, Ronald J. *Contemporary Biblical Interpretation for Preaching*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1984.
- Best, E. *From Text to Sermon*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978
- Clowney, E.P. *Preaching and Biblical Theology*. London: Tyndale Press, 1962.
- Kaiser, W.C. *The Old Testament in Contemporary Preaching*. Michigan: Baker, 1973.
- Keck, L. *The Bible in the Pulpit*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978.
- O'Day, G.R. *The Word Disclosed: John's Story and Narrative Preaching*. St. Louis: CPB Press, 1987.

IV CONT.

- von Rad, G. *Biblical Interpretations in Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977.
- Wardlaw, D.M. ed. *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983.

V.A. ETHICS

Is there such a thing as the inappropriate / unethical sermon?

TEXT: McLaughlin, R.W. *The Ethics of Persuasive Preaching*. Michigan: Baker, 1979, pp. 36 - 59.

READING: Jabusch, W.F. *The Person in the Pulpit*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980
Kraus, H. *The Threat and the Power*. Virginia: John Knox Press, 1971

V.B. PREACHING ON ETHICAL ISSUES

Examining the relationship between preaching and modes of behaviour.

TEXT: Buttrick, D. *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987. pp. 225 - 234.

READING: Cox, James W. ed. *Handbook of Themes for Preaching*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991.
Montefiore, Hugh. *Preaching for Our Planet*. London: Mowbray, 1992.

VI.A. PURPOSE IN PREACHING

Preaching as evangelism, pastoral care, call to action, Devotion, Spiritual formation, etc.

TEXT: Switzer, D.K. *Pastor, Preacher, Person: Developing a Pastoral Ministry in Depth*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1979. pp. 50 - 69

READING: Adams, J.E. *Preaching with Purpose*. Michigan: Zondervan, 1982.
Barr, B. "Pop Sermons", *Christian Century*. September 17, 1969.
Capps, D. *Pastoral Counseling and Preaching*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980.
Carl, W.J. *Preaching Christian Doctrine*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
Skinner, C. *The Teaching of the Pulpit*. Michigan: Baker, 1979. (Esp. Ch. 4)

VI.B. THE SOCIAL CONTEXT FOR PREACHING

Interpreting the context of the preaching event. Who we are effects how we preach and how we listen.

TEXT: McElvaney, W. K. *Preaching from Camelot to Covenant*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1989. Ch. 3: "Preaching for Holistic Transformation", pp. 55 - 76

READING: Clark, Neville. *Preaching in Context*. Bury St. Edmunds: Kevin Mayhew Ltd., 1991.
Gonzalez, J.L. & C.G. Gonzalez. *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980.

VII. STRUCTURE - IMAGE AND LANGUAGE

How to move from sermon idea to sermon. Searching for framework for effective communication. Finding ways to enable message to be heard. The use of the imagination in preaching.

TEXT: Lowry, E. *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980. pp. 5 - 25.

READING: Buttrick, D. *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Craddock, F.B. *As One Without Authority*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1979.

----- *Overhearing the Gospel*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1978.

----- *Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1985.

Eslinger, R.L. *A New Hearing*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987.

LaCouer, L. "If Aristotle Could Hear You Preach" in *Pastoral Psychology*. October 1965.

Lowry, E.L. *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship between Narrative and Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985.

Massey, J.E. *The Making of the Sermon: Order and Movement in Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980.

Rice, C.L. *Interpretation and Imagination: The Preacher and Contemporary Literature*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970.

Troeger, Thomas. *Imagining a Sermon*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

Wilson, Paul Scott. *Imagination of the Heart*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

VIII. DELIVERY - EVALUATION

Focus on the tools and techniques of oral communication. How to provide not just class evaluation, but an on-going self-assessment of preaching.

TEXT: Wardlaw, D. ed. *Learning Preaching*. Illinois: Academy of Homiletics, 1989. pp. 125 - 141.

READING: Chartier, M.R. *Preaching as Communication*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

Brooks, R.T. "Preaching in an Audio-Visual Age" in *Baptist Quarterly*. July 1981.

Ellis, R. & A. MacClintock. *Do You Take My Meaning?* Arnold, 1990

Pieterse, H.J.C. *Communicative Preaching*. UNISA, 1987.

IX. PREACHING AND CHILDREN

Examining the purpose(s) and techniques of preparing and delivering Children's Addresses.

TEXT: Coleman, Richard. *Gospel-Telling: The Art and Theology of Children's Sermons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982. pp. 5 - 44.

READING: MacLeod, Ian. *More Talks for Children*. Edinburgh: St. Andrew's Press, 1992.

Surtees, Beatrice. *Talks for Children*. Edinburgh: St. Andrew's Press, 1988.

X. PREACHING IN CONTEXT OF WORSHIP

Seeing the sermon as a part of worship in balance with liturgy, hymnody, prayers, etc.

TEXT: Willimon, W.H. *Integrative Preaching: The Pulpit at the Centre*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981. pp. 89 - 101.

READING: Coggan, D. *Preaching the Sacrament of the Word*. New York: Crossroad, 1988.

Keir, Thomas H. *The Word in Worship*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

NOTE:

An important element of this class will be the participation of the students in preparing sermons, outlines and class presentations. Though the emphasis for this term is textual, there will be elements of application. Each class session will consist of one hour of preaching and evaluation, followed by an hour's seminar on the topic(s) assigned. Each student will preach at least once during the course to be evaluated in the context of the class and privately by the tutor. CEPT 3 students will continue into another term for a more direct workshop approach to preaching, presenting sermons for critique.

APPENDIX G COURSE OUTLINE 2

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY PRACTICAL THEOLOGY 1: PREACHING MODULE

AIMS: This course is designed to raise the issues related to the nature and purpose of preaching in a media saturated society and from there to move on to a discussion of structures for preaching.

*GOALS: To enable students to discover and incorporate in themselves the nature of preaching.
To stress the need for movement in sermon structure.
To emphasize the visual in preaching.
To provide models for preaching.
To relate content with delivery.*

PROLOGUE: Once, the preacher served many functions in society. He (because preachers were almost exclusively men) was frequently the only educated person in the town or village, he was literate in an illiterate world. The preacher therefore was the professional communicator. No one challenged this position in society and people flocked to hear whatever the preacher wanted to say.

Now however, this situation has changed drastically. In a mass media world, a world full of messages of all shapes and colours, messages wrapped up in 3-hour films and 10 second sound bites, surrounded by computer technology and psychological research into sound and image response, the preacher is an amateur in a world of professional communicators.

Another change that has taken place is in the lives of those who come to hear. Communication media have increased output astronomically. Messages in many forms are now beamed into people's homes 24 hours a day. These messages are packaged in the most eye- and ear-catching ways devised by the practitioners of drama and advertising. All are presented in such a way that the most trivial of content becomes the most relevant and important. It is no wonder that the hearers complain when toothpaste is presented as more important, more worthy of attention than the Word of God. Preaching suffers when the sordid lives of an oil-rich family in Dallas are presented more concretely and with more enthusiasm than the life of commitment to the gospel. Messages of amazing complexity are received and understood through the screen and stage. Is there still room for the pulpit? Can the preacher hope to be heard in a media saturated society?

This is a serious message for preachers to hear. Serious, but not, I believe, fatal. Preachers need to listen and learn from communication theory and technology, they need to be aware of the cultural trend in communication. Not to give up on the message of the gospel, but to understand the "competition." In this course we shall examine both the traditional understandings of preaching and the new shapes and images that media offers to enable the message to be heard in a television age. Along the way we must ask the question of the place of preaching in today's society, examine the other forms of rhetorical utterance, to test the relevance of the spoken word, and hopefully to discover a new vitality in preaching and to take up the challenge in terms of content and structure that media throws before us.

I. AUTHORITY: How can we preach?

Introduction: "A weekly arrogance" is how someone defined preaching. Preaching integrates how and why - content and communication. In order to examine what we do in preaching we must have an understanding of what preaching is.

I. AUTHORITY: How can we preach?cont'd

Exercise: In groups of four, come up with a definition of preaching. Definitions are then used in general discussion about the nature of preaching. To argue for an incarnational understanding of preaching.

Issues: Authority for preaching is not within ourselves. Has three sources:

- 1) Community/congregation: we have responsibility to articulate their experience, to speak to their needs. This implies understanding of those who come to hear our preaching. Also, wider community - Church, tradition, witness of the faithful.

- 2) Spirit of God: continuing revelation of God at work in the community. Calls for spiritual awareness, ability to see God.

- 3) Received Text: both of the former must be congruent to the Word of God as received by the Church. The Word of God meets us in the encounter with an ancient text.

Models of Authority: Buttrick (in *Homiletic*) recommends moving away from defining Authority in terms of Power and Wisdom. This recognizes that the authority for the Church is Jesus Christ crucified - *solus Christus*. Therefore, the locus of authority is faith-consciousness - in which we are brought before the cross of Christ by means of a remembered gospel message. Preaching remembers Jesus Christ crucified in the midst of a being saved community = preaching is mediation

THEOLOGY: how do we understand our task

If we understand preaching as mediation then how do we approach a theology of preaching; what do we mediate?

1. Our preaching, commissioned by the resurrection, is a continuation of the preaching of Christ.
2. In our preaching, Christ continues to speak to the Church and through the Church to the world.
3. The purpose of preaching is the purpose of God in Christ, namely the reconciliation of the world.
4. Preaching evokes response. The response to preaching is a response to Christ and is, properly, faith and repentance.
5. Preaching is the "Word of God" in that it participates in God's purpose, is initiated by Christ, and is supported by the Spirit with community in the world.

Assignment A:

It is early Friday afternoon, you are sitting in your study staring out the window in a bit of a daze. The familiar sight from the window doesn't even register. With a great effort of will you turn from the window and glance down at your desk. A nearly blank sheet of paper stares back at you threateningly. Scrawled across the top line are the words "Texts: Jeremiah 31:31-34 and John 14:15-17, 25-31." The rest of the page is supposed to be filled with your sermon. You thought you had it on Monday and Tuesday. But Wednesday night brought the biggest argument in a kirk session meeting you have ever seen. You struggle to remember what started it, but all that comes to mind is the silence and hurt faces as each member stormed out into the darkness with barely a civil word to anyone. You were just beginning to get beyond that this Friday, to get back to the sermonizing, when a knock came to the door. And now, an extremely tense hour later you sit staring at the window as a good friend and leader of the congregation makes his troubled way back home having told you he was recently tested HIV positive. With a deep sigh you reach for a pencil to begin to work on something, as you stretch past the little desk calendar the junior Sunday School made for you last Christmas, your eyes fall to Sunday's date and you notice with a bit of a shock that it is Pentecost. The question on your mind, the question I put to you for your consideration, is "What do you preach?" Give me a sentence, a theme, a brief outline.

Assignment B:

You are contacted by the local television company. They ask for you to help them out. They are doing a piece on suffering in modern society and would like to fill a "religious slot". They invite you to prepare a 2 minute spot that answers the question: If there is a God, why is there so much suffering? This is your chance, you accept.

II. STRUCTURE

Exercise: Spend some time listening to themes and discuss reasoning behind decisions - e.g. what was left out, what was changed, what was picked up, what became the focus, and WHY. Then, using products of assignment, consider how to construct a sermon. e.g. intro.- main points - conclusion OR storyline OR journey.

Issues: Getting started: Begin with a wandering imagination, exercise of "seeing skills," or a recognition of the "sacrament of living."

Examination of texts: imagination - experience - hopes.

How to move from wandering thoughts to "That'll preach!"

Not necessarily found in "theme" or "main point" -- not in terms of "needs" to be addressed. Rather to look for the point of intersection between gospel theme and human need or situation. Lowry sees this as essentially discovering the "plot" for the sermon.

(Construction O/H's and Handout on various methods)

Sermon construction: inductive vs. deductive, narrative vs. didactic, movement.

Craddock's method - reverse outline. Take the old style deductive method and turn it on its head. Begin with situation rather than solution.

Lowry's method - journey in *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, also plot development in *The Homiletical Plot*. To move through an ambiguity, focusing on a reversal by application of gospel, and then experiencing that application.

Narrative style - not the same as story preaching. Represents a style that evolves and explores rather than pronounces.

Movement - Buttrick's Homiletic; Moves and Structures.

Key Points: Pay attention to connectors. A good story flows or unfolds. Likewise a sermon should not leave people stranded on a point but bring them on to the next one.

Dialogue - sermon needs to engage congregation, not simply wash over them. Craddock says we need to provide something for them to do. Enter into dialogue by raising their questions and meeting their concerns. This involves a relationship and an awareness of those to whom we preach.

Assignment: Take previous assignment and remove texts. What text would you select to preaching on the Sunday following. What are the guiding principles? Liturgical calendar? Theme? Issues? What?

III. USING THE BIBLE

Exercise: Examine text choices. Why chosen, what emphasis, appropriate to context of text? ...

Issues: Preaching as exposition: Why have a text at all? Exploring meaning of 'Christian Preachers', refer back to models of authority. 3-fold AND Christ crucified.

- Process:
- 1) Selection of Text - Lectionary or individual choice - pro and con.
 - 2) First Reading of Text - Listen with own ears
 - 3) Establishing the Text - Alternate readings, problem translations, editorial additions. How much use in preaching?
 - 4) Determining the Parameters of the Text - Pericope, avoid misusing context, shape
 - 5) Setting the Text in Its Several Contexts - Historical, literary, theological
 - 6) Being Aware of One's Point of Contact with the Text - How one hears the text, what resonates with you as reader
 - 7) Putting the Text in One's Own Words - How would you communicate the text, the core or contact point of text, or the whole thrust or story of the text (CRADDOCK)

Use of Lectionary: PRO - Avoids dwelling on favourites, avoids slipping into fads of the moment, relates to Christian year, covers a wide range of books and themes, saves time CON - Might be out of step with current events, made sermon series' difficult, avoids a lot of important material, 'sanitizes' difficult texts Advocate use of lect. with freedom to depart if necessary.

Use of Text in Sermon: How much of the above work must appear in the sermon? What does expository preaching mean? Not related to form but to foundation. All of our preaching is based on Scripture, but all sermons do not contain scripture.

Assignment: Using the text of the Prodigal Son or the Lost Son or the Loving Father or the Two Sons (Luke 15:11-32) determine the purpose of the sermon by shifting the focus from character to character.

IV.A. PURPOSE IN PREACHING

Exercise: Look for themes related to characters of parables: e.g. Lost Son - Evangelism; Father - Devotional, Pastoral; Second Son - Transformation, Building up the Body; etc.

In groups of four or five work out emphasis of sermon, and biblical text based on an assigned purpose for preaching. 10 minutes only. The chosen reporter shares insights in larger group.

Issues:

The main emphasis in this section is to help the preacher avoid that awful question that may not be verbalized but often comes from those to whom we preach:

"So what?"

Purpose in preaching is a matter of intent. We are asking what is this sermon trying to do. We often do that by asking what the text is trying to do, but often the text offers a variety of positions. We are looking for the **dynamic word**.

Explore possibilities by changing the focus of our sermon. We usually stand with Jesus against the Pharisees or even against the Apostles. What happens when we put ourselves along side the 'bad guys' or at least the slow ones.

Some selected purposes include: Pastoral - speaking to needs or concerns; Devotional - helping to foster closer relationships with Christ, encourage prayer life; Evangelistic - aiming toward making commitments sometimes first time sometimes recommitment; Social Action - hoping to lead to an action response, writing letters, joining campaigns; Stewardship - making financial and time commitments; Other - ?

Purpose is here seen on a different level than that of aim. Purpose is specific, what I'm trying to do this time. Aim is general, what I'm trying to do every time I preach; reflects definition of preaching and underlies each purpose.

Some texts allow flexibility of purpose, such as the Prodigal Son where a variation of focus allows for a variety of purposes. Other texts may lead easily into only one purpose, and to attempt to wrench an evangelistic message out of a teaching text might be to misuse the text.

Some suggestions from David Switzer in *Pastor, Preacher Person*.

Ingredients of helpful preaching

1. Accurate Communication of Empathy
2. Respect - confidence in that person's ability to make responsible decisions.
3. Concreteness
4. Genuineness
5. Self-disclosure - being human
6. Confrontation - prophetic preaching - pointing out discrepancy between speech and actions for example.
7. Immediacy - aware of how you're being received

Assignment: Text: Matthew 22:1-14 (parable of feast). Describe the event.

IV.B. CHILDREN AND PREACHING

One of the most under developed areas of ministerial training is the whole area of children and preaching. Actually, the areas of children's participation in worship, education, development, spiritual growth and discipleship training are also woefully under examined. But these lectures are oriented around preaching.

How do we address children in our preaching? What guidelines can we determine for consideration regarding children's addresses? And what is the aim of the children's address? I intend to examine the how first and then briefly explore the why at the end.

ELEMENTS OF GOOD PRACTICE

1. A Designated Area.

It helps to maintain a sense of consistency and a comfortable setting for the event if the children know that when they are in "this place" "these things will take place." Normally, the front few pews are used as the children's area. It might also be helpful to get a sense of movement. Out of the pews to the chancel area perhaps, some way of signalling the beginning.

A key factor in the sense of place is the distance between preacher and children. I believe that we must be close, within "touching distance." This communicates, without a long theological explanation, a bit of what incarnation is about. It also helps the preacher keep control of the event.

2. Patterns

Some way of regularizing the event can be helpful for children. A standard beginning perhaps, or a common ending. Children pick up on behavioural cues through repetition. It may as simple as beginning each address with a 'good morning' and expecting a response. After a time, a response will come. If a clear signal can be given as to the ending, always ending with a prayer for example, then the children will know that the address has ended.

3. Children are the 'Audience'

Sometimes preachers address their children's addresses to the congregation as a whole, rather than specifically the children. This practice of 'playing to the gallery' means that the special moment just for the children is lost. They are not directly addressed, they are not made welcome, they are used as a way of talking to the adults. And I believe that children are aware of this. This does not mean that the adults can't 'listen in' and even benefit from what happens between the preacher and the children, but that the event is not primarily for the adults.

We must also be more aware of the make-up of our 'audience.' What ages are there, who is new and who have been every week, who comes on their own and who come with family. All of these things, and more, keep us aware of the impact our words might have and help us to be inclusive rather than exclusive in our approach.

4. Interaction

Children want to be involved. Learning is best done experientially. The events remembered are those most active. A children's address should have real dialogue built in. It means letting go of prepared texts and letting the children participate in the preaching. Though the preacher has a message, the interaction may sometimes change the message, or enlarge it, or make it more real.

Children should be able to use their voices. Responding, asking, singing and shouting; allowing these activities in the preaching event allows children to be children and still be worshipping.

But children are more than voices. Bodies too should be freed in the children's

IV.B. CHILDREN AND PREACHING cont'd

address at times. Drama, movement, dance; all of these introduce an element of surprise but also involvement in the preaching event.

5. One 'Point'

Though we don't like to talk about sermons (whether for children or adults) in terms of 'points' per se, the idea of one clear theme, idea, object or image is crucial for children's addresses. The more visual the theme the better. An object is often used to become a focus. A problem arises when a preacher attempts to use an object to talk about a rather obscure point. While the object is remembered, the point of usually lost. Better to stick to simple ideas or clear images.

A story, while it may have a number of 'points,' is also a whole itself and therefore a sufficient focus for an address. The difficulty comes when a preacher tries to take out a moral or main point rather than letting the story speak for itself.

6. Brief

A children's address should be short, but not rushed. The message or story should be simple enough to deliver in just a few minutes. The impact of a short well-told tale is much greater than a longer rambling exposition.

But, even though short, it should not give the feeling that 'we are hurrying to get this over with so that we can get on to the real worship.' Children need to feel as though they are worth the time it takes.

7. Enjoy Yourself

If the preacher sees this event as a joyful expression of faith in worship, then the children are more likely to see it that way as well. This means we must relax, 'go with the flow' to an extent, laugh, and generally be present in the experience. Hard to legislate, but easy to recognize.

Finally, Why Children's Addresses?

An individual address or sermon may have any of a number of purposes. But the question over all is, why have them at all? What are we trying to have happen in this event.

My belief is that children's addresses are primarily to make the children feel welcomed into this experience called worship. That is all. They are not **primarily** to teach, moralize, condition, entertain, or anything else. Simply to make them feel welcomed. Because in feeling welcomed, they feel loved. And if they begin to sense that in Church they are loved then it can become a foundation upon which all the rest of Christian Education can be built. But Sunday Schools are about learning. The children's address is about worship and worship is an act of love.

Children experience this love first through the preacher. We need not be afraid of that. We stand as ambassadors of Christ. So if they sense that we love them, then we hope that sometime they will make the connection that God loves them too.

V. IMAGE & LANGUAGE

Exercise: Listen to images of the feast. Pick up language cues and reference points. What is perspective of image? What role is listener to take? What is mood of image?

Issues: Language: Visual - image oriented culture begins to lose ability to maintain coherent abstract thought.

Concrete - the general does not communicate as well as the specific. eg. - "the streets of every city are full of the outcast." "In the abandoned doorways of Prince's Street, in between the sock shop and the C & A, clutching cast off shopping bags full of precious rubbish, the man sits with vacant stare and slumped shoulder, accused by the well dressed busy people hurrying by of the great crime of not having any place to go."

Of the people - not condescension, but avoiding jargon. In a world full of specialists language can become a barrier.

KEY QUESTION: *What is the impact of a preponderance of visual media on listening skills of average person in the pew? Does this imply that sermons can no longer be intellectual? Is it possible for images to be seen as engaging intellect and emotion?*

Image vs. idea - is the "idea" behind the sermon sacrificed to the altar of the image. Or does the image become the idea, is the image the driving force of preaching? Is it fair to say that preaching doesn't pass on facts or information, but that it provides concrete images by which individuals and the community can begin to comprehend the reality of Christian living - to say "Now I see" ?

Illustration - ? Sermon as illustration rather than illustrations that put ideas into context. Language becomes illustrative. Why are the images in the illustration remembered even when the point was forgotten? Illustrations need to be relevant, follow language rules above, part of the context of the sermon.

Different types of illustration - sentence illustrations - metaphor. Liturgical illustration - litany repeated throughout. Story - be careful.

Some help from Thomas Troeger in *Imagining a Sermon*.

We can be more imaginative

1. Primary principle is that we are attentive to what is. *Amos, what do you see?*
2. Feel the bodily weight of truth - *logo somatic* (often in Children's Address)
3. Listen to the music of speech
4. Take parables from life
5. Reclaim imagination for the Church - Dream of new worlds

Assignment: Listen to your own voice, on tape if possible.

VI. DELIVERY

Introduction: Craddock's quote: "My preacher preaches as though it were not really important." Sounding as if you believe what you are saying.

Exercise: Reading of texts and impromptu readings.

Issues: Voice:

- TONE - vocal quality, pleasing to the ear, rich, full improved through work with vowel sounds primarily
- PITCH - frequency change, high soprano to low bass, variation important, use full potential of vocal range, avoid too much symmetry (i.e. dropping at end of each sentence)
- RATE - speed, variation can lead to emphasis as well as interest
- VOLUME - Must be heard, but use of microphones or projection enables variation, be careful of different room acoustics
- DICTION - This has nothing to do with accent, but rather is concerned with clarity of speech

Metalinguistics: "It's not what you said, it's the way you said it!"

Body language:

- STANCE - approach to the pulpit, i.e. does the pulpit become a crutch, prison, ivory tower, soap box?
- FACIAL EXPRESSIONS - do you agree with what you are saying? Speak of joy with a frown, death with a smile, commitment with a look of bored unconcern?
- EYE CONTACT - main means of including hearers
- GESTURES - laboured and uncomfortable, or free flowing and suggestive. If it feels unnatural, it probably looks unnatural.

"Personality":

- DRESS - what you wear and how comfortable you are wearing it
- ATTITUDE - not the same as style, more to do with presence and confidence, "tone of voice"
- "CHASM" - how far are you from your people, both in terms of space, physical distance and participation
- SINCERITY - believing what you say (sums up most of the rest)

Hearers:

- BLOCKS - being aware of how images and words will be received by those who are listening, what prejudices will keep them from hearing what you are saying? What community situations will draw their attention away from your words to seemingly unconnected events?
- FEEDBACK - reading the response from faces and bodies of those who listen. Not infallible but helpful.

APPENDIX H COURSE OUTLINE 3

This course was designed by members of the Practical Theology Department of New College over a number of years. The course manager for 1992-93 was Dr David Lyall, who was ultimately responsible for the overall course design.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY I

COURSE PROGRAMME 1992 - 93

This course is concerned with critical theological reflection upon Christian practice in the contemporary situation. While there is a particular emphasis upon the work of the ordained ministry, this is set within a wider context of a study of the ministry of the whole Church. The main topics covered are Ministry and Mission in Sociological Perspective, Worship, Preaching and Communication, Pastoral Care and Christian Education. Each module of the course is explored theoretically and practically and involves an element of field education. Course requirements include a five-day hospitals conference at the end of the Spring term.

CONTENTS

Aims and Objectives

Timetable

Notes on the Course

LECTURERS

DBF	Rev Prof D B Forrester	Worship
DL	Rev Dr David Lyall	Pastoral Care (<i>Course Manager</i>)
MSN	Rev Dr M S Northcott	Ministry and Mission in Sociological Perspective
IMcD	Rev Dr J I H McDonald	Christian Education
DCW	Rev D C Weber	Preaching and Communication
TSM	Rev T S McGregor (1)	Hospitals Course
MC	Rev M Chalmers (2)	Hospitals Course
DBM	Rev Dr D B Murray(3)	Hospice visit and seminars
DLC	Rev D L Collingwood (4)	Seminars

1. Chaplain, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary
2. Chaplain, Royal Edinburgh Hospital
3. Chaplain, St. Columba's Hospice
4. Tutor, Edinburgh Theological College (Scottish Episcopal Church)

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY 1

Aims and Objectives of the Course**AIMS**

1. To explore the nature of Practical Theology as a theological and practical discipline in dialogue with the social sciences.
2. To develop the ability to reflect critically and theologically upon the mission of the church in contemporary society.
3. To explore the role of the ordained ministry in the context of the mission of the whole church.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop
- (a) knowledge of the theological and other principles relevant to
the mission and ministry of the church
Christian worship
preaching and communication
pastoral care
Christian education
 - (b) awareness of contemporary writing in the above disciplines
 - (c) the skill to observe and to reflect critically upon both content and process in a variety of field education visits
 - (d) the ability to integrate at a personal level a developing theological understanding with both past experience and fresh insights gained from the totality of the course

AUTUMN TERM 1992

Week	Date	Title	Lecturer
1	October	I. INTRODUCTION	
	Mon 12	Enrol/ Programme/ Method	DL
	Tues 13	What is Practical Theology?	DL
	Thurs 15	Theology and Practice	DL
	Fri 16	SEMINAR A sharing of experience in the life of the Church. Working in pairs describe your own experience of the Church; then introduce your partner to the rest of the group identifying the diversity of background and experience in the group.	
2		II. MINISTRY AND MISSION IN SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	
	Mon 19	Theology and Social Science	MSN
	Tues 20	Sociology, Religion and the Church	MSN
	Thurs 22	Secularisation and Church Decline	MSN
	Fri 23	SEMINAR In buzz groups of two describe to each other the significant features of your own commitments and roles in relation to (for example) family, work, leisure, social concern. In plenary session let each tell the story of the other and consider together how your social experiences affect your own understanding of being a Christian.	
	Fri 23 - Sun 25 NEW COLLEGE WEEKEND AWAY		
3	Mon 26	FOCUS ON MINISTRY Rev Dr Hugh Ormiston, Industrial Chaplain.	
	Tues 27	Ministry in a Secular Society	MSN
	Wed 28	FIELD EDUCATION VISIT Tenma (UK) Corporation, Cumbernauld, Bus leaves New College 1 pm	
	Thurs 29	Models of Mission	MSN
	Fri 30	SEMINAR Michael Northcott 'Church and Society in Contemporary Scotland: Identity and Decline in the Kirk' (photocopy on reserve)	
	November		
4	Mon 2.	FOCUS ON MINISTRY Rev Ian A Moir, C.of S. Adviser on Urban Priority Areas	
	Tues 3	Mission, the Kingdom and the People of God	MSN
	Wed 4	FIELD EDUCATION VISIT Visit to Holy Trinity Church, Wester Hailes with Rev Ian Moir and Rev Stanley Brock.	
	Thurs 5	The Church and the Poor	MSN
	Fri 6	SEMINAR <i>Mission and Evangelism: an Ecumenical Perspective.</i>	
5	Mon 9	FOCUS ON MINISTRY Mr. Ian Baillie, Director of Social Work, Church of Scotland	
	Tues 10	Mission in a Secular Society	MSN
	Wed 11	FIELD EDUCATION VISIT Work of C.of S. Board of Social Responsibility in Edinburgh 1.30 - 4.30pm	
	Thurs 12	The Resurgence of the Sacred	MSN
	Fri 13	SEMINAR Nicholas Bradbury, <i>City of God</i> , Chapter 7, 'Pastoral Care in the Inner City'	

III. WORSHIP

6	Sun 15	FIELD EDUCATION VISIT St. Michael's Parish Church, Slateford Road, Service of Infant Baptism, 11am	
	Mon 16	FOCUS ON MINISTRY Rev. A Gordon Reid, Gillespie Memorial Church, Dunfermline. 'A Congregation responds to homelessness'	
	Tues 17	Worship and Christian Worship	DBF
	Thurs 19	Whose Worship?	DBF
	Fri 20	SEMINAR 'The Roots of Christian Worship' (<i>Encounter with God</i> Chapter 2)	
7	Sun 22	FIELD EDUCATION VISIT Roman Catholic Mass. St. Paul's R.C. Church, Muirhouse	
	Mon 23	FOCUS ON MINISTRY Rev. Iain A. Whyte, National Secretary, Christian Aid (Scotland)	
	Tues 24	Baptism	DBF
	Thurs 26	Occasional Services - weddings, funerals civic services etc.	DBF
	Fri 27	SEMINAR Baptism - 'Past Present and Future' (<i>Encounter with God</i> , Chapter 6)	
8	Sun 29	FIELD EDUCATION VISIT Charlotte Chapel, 6.30 pm Service of Believers' Baptism	
	Mon 30	FOCUS ON MINISTRY The Ministry of Spiritual Direction, Rev Murray Chalmers	
	December		
	Tues 1	The Lord's Supper	DBF
	Thurs 3	The Sunday Service	DBF
	Fri 4	SEMINAR 'Sacrament and Supper' (<i>Encounter with God</i> pp.57-61 and chapter 7.)	
9	Mon 7	FOCUS ON MINISTRY The Ministry of the Whole People of God, Mrs. Sheilah Steven, Eldership Training Co-ordinator, Church of Scotland	
	Tues 8	Prayer - Public and Private	DBF
	Thurs 10	The Renewal of Worship	DBF
	Fri 11	SEMINAR 'Worship in a Secular Society' (<i>Encounter with God</i> , Chapter 10)	
10	Mon 14	Class Exam	

SPRING TERM 1993

IV. COMMUNICATION AND PREACHING

	January		
11	Mon 11	Theology and Christian Communication	DCW
	Tues 12	Christian Communication in a Mass Media Age	DCW
	Wed 13	FIELD EDUCATION VISIT Audio-visual Unit, 22 Colinton Road, (Seminar Groups A & B)	
	Thurs 14	FOCUS ON MINISTRY Church Music 1, Rev John Bell	
	Fri 15	SEMINAR Colin Morris, <i>God in a Box</i> , Chapter 11, 'Christianity as Communication' pp.208-23	

- 12 Mon 18 **FOCUS ON MINISTRY** Church Music 2, Rev John Bell
 Tues 19 Defining Preaching DCW
 Wed 20 **FIELD EDUCATION VISIT** Audio-visual Unit, 22 Colinton
 Road, (Seminar Groups C & D)
 Thurs 21 Preaching Structures DCW
 Fri 22 **SEMINAR** Donald Coggan, *The Sacrament of the Word*,
 Chapter 6, 'Towards a Definition of Preaching' pp. 105 - 116
- 13 Sun 24 **FIELD EDUCATION VISIT** St. Paul's & St. George's Church,
 York Place, 11 am
 Mon 25 **FOCUS ON MINISTRY** Church Music 3, Rev John Bell
 Tues 26 Using the Bible in Preaching DCW
 Thurs 28 (a) Purpose in Preaching DCW
 (b) Preaching and Children
 Fri 29 **SEMINAR** Exegesis for Preaching. Texts: Genesis 18:16-33,
 Amos 5: 18-24, John 4: 1-30, I Corinthians 1, 18-25
- 14 Sun 31 **FIELD EDUCATION VISIT** Holyrood Abbey 6.30 pm
- February
 Mon 1 **FOCUS ON MINISTRY** Church Music 4, Rev John Bell
 Tues 2 Image and Language DCW
 Thurs 4 Delivery and Evaluation DCW
 Fri 5 **SEMINAR** Preaching Practice. Texts: Genesis 18:16-33, Amos
 5: 18-24, John 4: 1-30, I Corinthians 1: 18-25
- V. PASTORAL CARE**
- 15 Sun 7 **FIELD EDUCATION VISIT** St. Giles, 11.30 a.m.
 Mon 8 **FOCUS ON MINISTRY** Rev John Harvey, Leader, Iona
 Community
 Tues 9 What is Pastoral Care? DL
 Thurs 11 Understanding the Person DL
 Fri 12 **SEMINAR** Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care
 and Counseling*, Chapter 3: 'The Mission, Biblical Bases and
 Uniqueness of Pastoral Care and Counseling'
- 16 Mon 15 **FOCUS ON MINISTRY** Parish Management Skills 1, Rev
 Andrew Anderson
 Tues 16 The Nature of a Helping Relationship (1) DL
 Thurs 18 The Nature of A Helping Relationship (2) DL
 Fri 19 **SEMINAR** Henri Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, Chapter 3,
 'Individual Pastoral Care'
- 17 Mon 22 **FOCUS ON MINISTRY** Parish Management Skills 2, Rev
 Andrew Anderson
 Tues 23 Changing Patterns of Family Life DL
 Wed 24 **FIELD EDUCATION VISIT** Lothian Marriage Counselling
 Service 12noon - 2pm (Mrs. Mary Lawson). Bring a sandwich,
 coffee provided.
 Thurs 25 Marriage Preparation DL

	Fri 26	SEMINAR 'Marriage and the Family;' 'Marriage, Theology of' in <i>Dictionary of Pastoral Care</i>	
	March		
18	Mon 1	FOCUS ON MINISTRY Parish Management Skills 3, Rev Andrew Anderson	
	Tues 2	Family Pastoral Care	DL
	Wed 3	FIELD EDUCATION VISIT Day Conference at St. Columba's Hospice (Groups A & B)	
	Thurs 4	Loss as a theme in pastoral care	DL
	Fri 5	SEMINAR Ian Ainsworth-Smith and Peter Speck, <i>Letting Go</i> , Chapter 1	
19	Mon 8	FOCUS ON MINISTRY Parish Management Skills 4, Rev Andrew Anderson	
	Tues 9	Pastoral Care of the Bereaved	DL
	Wed 10	FIELD EDUCATION VISIT Day Conference at St. Columba's Hospice (Groups C & D)	
	Thurs 11	The funeral as a pastoral act	DL
	Fri 12	SEMINAR Stephen Pattison, <i>A Critique of Pastoral Care</i> , Chapter 4: 'Politics and Pastoral Care'	

Note (a) A five day **HOSPITALS CONFERENCE** which is integral to the course will be held at the end of the Spring Term. The dates will be as follows;

Tues 16 - Thurs 18 March: Royal Infirmary
 Mon 22 - Tues 23 March; Royal Edinburgh Hospital

(b) **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION VISITS** take place in the Spring Term - a selection of at least 3 from a choice of 7 or 8 (Some Sundays, some midweek. More details will be given in due course.

SUMMER TERM 1993

VI. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

	April		
21	Tues 20	Foundations of Christian Education	IMcD
	Thurs 22	Foundations of Christian Education	IMcD
	Fri 23	SEMINAR John Westerhof III, <i>Will Our Children Have Faith?</i> , Chapter 4, pp 79 - 103	
22	Mon 26	FOCUS ON MINISTRY Christian Education	
	Tues 27	Christian Education in Practice	IMcD
	Thurs 29	Christian Education in Practice	IMcD
	Fri 30	SEMINAR John Carrie, <i>The Primary School Assembly</i> , pp. 1 - 38	

May

23	Mon	3	FOCUS ON MINISTRY Christian Education	
	Tues	4	Christian Education in Practice	IMcD
	Thurs	6	Christian Education in Practice	IMcD
	Fri	7	SEMINAR <i>Bulletin 2</i> , 'Curriculum Guidelines for Religious Education'	
24	Mon	10	FOCUS ON MINISTRY Christian Education	
	Tues	11	Religious Education in Schools	IMcD
	Thurs	12	Religious Education in Schools	IMcD
	Fri	13	Final session	

NOTES ON THE COURSE

1. SEMINARS

Seminars will meet each Friday from 11.05 - 11.55 am as follows:

Group	Place	Staff member
A	Blackie Room	Mr Weber
B	Martin Hall	Dr Murray
C	Room 66	Mr Collingwood
D	Room 101	Course lecturer

The purpose of the seminars is to help all of the students to understand the assigned readings, to incorporate lectures and readings, and to make connections beyond the class through the experiences of ministry of members of the class. Therefore, it is the task of the leader to imaginatively present the material and to solicit a pertinent sharing of views and experiences from the whole of the class. The leader, in most cases, will begin with a short summary or outline of the material. This should only take 5 or 10 minutes, setting out the main points and raising critical questions. The presentation should be clear, structured and illustrated with examples, overheads or posters, if possible. The leader then turns to the group and invites reactions, questions, responses. This can be done in a variety of ways: through direct questions, role-play, controversial statements; in small groups or in the whole seminar group. The seminar leader is concerned not just with information but the process and presentation as well. A session that engages with the topic is one that is remembered.

It is the student leader, not the staff person, who is 'in charge' of the seminar. The staff person (a) will be a resource for the group and (b) will consult with the student leader as soon as possible after the group providing feedback on such matters as leadership and process.

2. COURSE ASSESSMENT

For degree courses 40% of the marks given for continuous assessment and 60% for the degree examination; in certificate and licentiate courses the continuous assessment mark is counted as 60% of the total, 40% being allocated to the degree examination.

The continuous assessment components are as follows:

(a) **Seminar Paper (10 marks)** A Seminar paper of 2,000 words is to handed in not later than two weeks after the week in which the seminar took place (EXCEPT THAT PAPERS HANDED IN DURING THE SUMMER TERM MUST MEET FACULTY DEADLINES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF ASSESSED WORK). This paper will be based upon the reading for one of the seminars (probably upon your own presentation). This is to be given to Miss Hocking in the Departmental Office and will be marked by the member of Staff in charge of that module. (Please indicate this on the front of your paper).

(b) **Class exam (10 marks)** This will be held at the end of the Autumn Term.

(c) **Field Education Diary (20 marks)** Field Education is a major component of the course and students are required to keep a Diary which will constitute a major component of the continuous assessment. The material should be presented in an A4 loose-leaf binder in four sections:

- (i) Sunday visits to churches for services of worship
- (ii) All other Field Education visits except Christian Education visits
- (iii) Christian Education visits
- (iv) A 2,000 word essay on 'Pastoral Care in a Hospital Setting' reflecting upon the hospitals course.

This Diary must be much more than a record of events attended; it should be more of a personal journal exploring some (or all) of the following questions:

- Your expectations prior to the event
- What you actually observed/heard
- What you did NOT see/hear (and perhaps expected you would)
- The 'unspoken assumptions' and hidden agenda in the various situations e.g. ethos, attitudes, ways of doing things
- The implications of the event for your understanding of ministry
- Theological issues raised for you by the event.

3. HOW TO GET THERE

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Nov 4 | HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, WESTER HAILES Get bus to wester Hailes Centre. Nos. 3,32,33,28,29,52, C5,C55 |
| Nov 15 | ST.MICHAEL'S PARISH CHURCH, Slateford Road, Buses 4, 34, 44 |
| Nov 22 | ST.PAUL'S R.C. CHURCH, Pennywell Road, Buses 27, 28,29 |
| Jan 13/20 | AUDIO-VISUAL UNIT, 22 Colinton Road (Opp. George Watson's College. Any bus to Holy Corner e.g.23 and 5 mins. walk or 45 (every half hour) right to door |
| Jan 31 | HOLYROOD ABBEY at Junction of London Road and Dalziel Place
Buses 4,5, 15,26,44 |
| Feb 24 | LOTHIAN MARRIAGE COUNSELLING SERVICE. Any bus down Hanover Street, e.g.23. Or a few minutes walk from Princes Street |
| Mar 3/10 | ST.COLUMBA'S HOSPICE Bus 23 to terminus (north) then 5 mins walk (overlooks Firth of Forth) |

REQUIRED READING

Students are expected to have a detailed knowledge of the texts for the seminars. Copies of Forrester, McDonald and Tellini, *Encounter with God: An Introduction the Study of Christian Worship*, (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1983) and the other texts will be available for students and will be on reserve in the library.

RECOMMENDED READING

Campbell, A.V., *Rediscovering Pastoral Care*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, revised ed. 1988

Campbell, A.V., ed. *A Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, London: SPCK, 1987

Forrester, D.B. ed. *Theology and Practice*, London: Epworth, 1990

Mitton, C.L., ed., *The Social Sciences and the Churches*, Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark

Gill, R., *Beyond Decline*, London, SCM Press, 1988

Rodger, A.R., *Education and Faith in an Open Society*, Edinburgh: Handsell, 1982

General Synod, *Children in the Way*, London: National Society 1988

Ian C.M. Fairweather and J.Norman MacDonald, *Religious Education*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1992

John Carrie, *The Primary School Chaplain*, Church of Scotland, 1991

Selected book lists will be issued for the various sections of the course.

APPENDIX I

SERMON EVALUATION CHECKLIST

PREACHER AND CHURCH: _____ DATE: _____

SERMON TITLE OR TOPIC: _____

TEXT: _____ TYPE OF SERMON: _____

I. ORGANIZATION

VERY
GOOD

FAIR

WEAK

Introduction

Does it catch interest? () () ()
Does it set direction? () () ()
Appropriate length? () () ()

Structure

Is there a central idea or theme? () () ()
Is the movement clear? () () ()
Are there any digressions? () () ()
Are there adequate transitions? () () ()

Conclusion

Does the conclusion return to the
central idea or theme? () () ()
Appropriate length? () () ()
Is the ending clear? () () ()

Image / Illustration

Are there any visual elements? () () ()
Do they illuminate? () () ()
Was there a variety of images? () () ()
Were they used appropriately? () () ()

II. CONTENT

Responsible use of Biblical text? () () ()
Does the sermon have substance
/ depth? () () ()
Does it deal with real life? () () ()
Does it proclaim the gospel? () () ()

III. DELIVERY

Voice

Projection () () ()
Quality () () ()
Variety () () ()
Rate () () ()

Use of Language

Diction () () ()
Enunciation () () ()

SERMON EVALUATION

	VERY GOOD	FAIR	WEAK
<i>Physical Presentation</i>			
Posture			
Presence	()	()	()
Gestures	()	()	()
Eye Contact	()	()	()
Other Body Language	()	()	()
<i>Communication</i>			
Degree of 'aliveness'			
Ability to convey mood	()	()	()
Ability to convey meaning	()	()	()

IV. WORSHIP

<i>Organization</i>			
Clear progression through service			
Incorporated variety of elements/styles	()	()	()
Worship not 'prelude' to preaching	()	()	()
Involved congregation in worship	()	()	()
<i>Content</i>			
All elements related to clear and stated theme			
Theme appropriate to gospel	()	()	()
Prayers for people directed to God (not additional sermons)	()	()	()
<i>Delivery</i>			
Leader's presentation			
Hymn singing	()	()	()
Mood appropriate	()	()	()

List questions or issues you would like to raise with the Worship leader.

What were the worship leader's or the worship event's most valuable moments?

What were the weaknesses?

Evaluator: _____

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