That the Word May be Proclaimed: Selections from the Marten Lectures — Volume 1

That the Word May be Proclaimed: Selections from the Marten Lectures — Volume 1

Saint Meinrad Studies in Pastoral Ministry No. 3

DR. RICHARD STERN, EDITOR

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ORIGINALLY PRINTED AT ABBEY PRESS; EBOOK HOSTED BY PALNI PRESS

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Saint Meinrad Pastoral Studies Series

VERY REV. DENIS ROBINSON, OSB

For 150 years, Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology has striven to provide the highest quality education and formation for priests, permanent deacons and lay ministers for the life of the Church. This work has gone on because Saint Meinrad has always been convinced that the Church deserves the brightest, holiest and most ardent ministers for service to God's people.

Today more than ever, in a rapidly changing and expanding Church environment, the work of formation needs to find new and creative ways of raising up these ministers. The Saint Meinrad Pastoral Studies Series is intended to provide creative responses to critical pastoral issues in the life of today's Church.

The series features articles and reflections by Saint Meinrad faculty, staff and visiting lecturers on topics that touch the very heart of the Church's work in the 21st century. The series aims to reach those who are laboring diligently in these same ministries. Through these pages, we hope to provide some stimulus for critical thinking on important issues, as well as a source of intellectual and spiritual renewal for those dedicated to parish and diocesan life.

Preface

DR. RICHARD STERN

This book, the first of a projected two-volume set, is a collection of six of the more than 20 lectures presented by scholars in the annual John S. and Virginia Marten Homiletics Lecture Series at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology.

In 1986, John S. and Virginia Marten of Indianapolis, Indiana, made a generous grant to Saint Meinrad to endow a homiletics program. Shortly after I arrived to teach homiletics in the summer of 1990, Dr. Thomas Walters, then the academic dean, and I thought it would be a great idea to have an annual homiletics lecture. The idea was well received by the administration and the Marten family.

Along with the annual lecture, the Marten endowment has also made possible a first-rate homiletics/liturgics classroom in a renovation project in the late 1990s, which remains the envy of many larger seminaries. The Marten Lecture series has now been in

place for over 20 years. The list of lecturers and lecture titles is included in this book; the series is ongoing.

I think this is a marvelous and diverse collection of works. It has been my privilege and pleasure to personally invite each of these lecturers to speak at Saint Meinrad. I am grateful to each lecturer who has made his or her way to rural southern Indiana to the campus of Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology.

This collection is not intended to offer the very latest in homiletic theory by these men and women. Rather, it is a sort of pulse-taking or snapshot of what has been going on in the homiletics world over the last 20 years. These scholars are still very active in their various disciplines and continue to push the envelope in both the theory and practice of preaching. Nevertheless, as I reviewed all of them, I was struck by how important each of them still is. I have personally benefited from the work of all the lecturers before, during and after their short time at Saint Meinrad as Marten Lecturers. Their work is

important. That is why they were invited to bring their insights to Saint Meinrad.

In some small way, I hope the lecture series has been a way for these presenters to move forward in their thinking and research, at the same time they have provided a stimulus to those listeners who are now preachers to expand their own homiletic horizons. With that said, all the lectures contained within maintain their status as valuable and ongoing contributions to the important work of proclaiming God's Word for the people of God.

As I have read through each of these several times, I am struck first by the diversity of topics that have been addressed. At the same time, however, I recognize a common spirit that runs through each of the lectures. That spirit includes a great faith in the power of the Word and of the word. There is also a deep and common respect for the hearer as well.

As *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* notes, preaching is the responsibility of the whole Church. This does not mean that everyone can be a preacher, but that hearers and homilists are all responsible for and are empowered for the work of bringing the Word to fruition. As a hearer, I must do my best to listen for God's Word to me as an individual, but also to us as a Church.

There is finally, then, a consistent resistance to the individualization of religious practice. Church is more than a collection of individuals. It is a communal enterprise. While there are several Christian "neighborhoods" or faith traditions represented in these lecturers, they share this common spirit.

This selection is intended to be representative of the series as a whole. Topics have been wide ranging, as is the case with homiletics theory and practice in general. Some of the lectures did not translate well from their original oral/aural presentation to the written page.

In one case, the presenter, Fr. Robert Waznak, SS, has claimed his opportunity to preach directly to and with the saints. I suspect he has set them straight on at least a couple of matters. In a couple of cases, we could not locate the presenter in time or did not

receive the requisite permission in time for the preparation and publication of the volume. Ultimately, space limitations dictated the impossibility of including all the lectures.

I would be remiss in the extreme if I did not express my gratitude to the Marten family of Indianapolis, who made that initial grant to Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology to endow our homiletics programs. Virginia and the late John S. Marten made the original challenge grant in 1986. Since then, the Marten family has continued to be interested in and involved in the work of our school, as well as in the work of Saint Meinrad Archabbey as a whole.

In preparing the lectures for inclusion in this volume, we transcribed some of the lectures from the videos of the lectures. In other cases, lecturers provided us with manuscripts of their work. In a few cases, I have made slight edits to make the lectures fit the written nature of the volume.

I have endeavored to make only the smallest of corrections, without altering in any way the intention of the authors. What I am unable to communicate in this printed form is the grace and enthusiasm each lecturer brought to his or her presentation. I am grateful for the spirit they brought to the task.

With thanks to the Marten family, the Marten Lecturers, to Fr. Denis Robinson, OSB, our president-rector, who suggested the idea of this collection, to the monks, faculty, staff and students, and to all who have thus far benefited from the lectures, I hope the series will have a long and fruitful future. It is held the first Tuesday evening of October, with a workshop held the next day.

Dr. Richard Stern
Professor of Homiletics

Marten Lecture Series

1991 John A. Melloh, SM, "Preaching: Proclamation or Persuasion?"

1992 Thomas H. Troeger, "Tapping Hidden Streams: Receiving the Spirit through the Discipline of the Imagination"

1993 Walter Brueggemann, "Preaching from the Psalms"

1994 Mary Catherine Hilkert, OP, "Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination"

1995 David Buttrick, "Preaching into a New Century"

1996 Jude Siciliano, OP, "Preaching: Proclaiming a Just Word"

1997 Raymond F. Collins, "Preaching the Epistles"

1998 Robert Waznak, SS, "The World in the Biblical Text: New Imaginings for the Preacher"

1999 John S. McClure, "Collaborative Preaching: God's Empowering Word"

2000 James A. Wallace, CSsR, "Preaching to the Hungers of the Heart"

2001 Maurice Nutt, CSsR, "Just Like Fire in My Bones"

2002 Frances Trampiets, SC, "Shaping the Faith of Those Shaped by the Media"

2003 Stephen V. DeLeers, "Conceiving Everything Anew: Preaching the Gospel in a 'Whatever' World"

2004 Frank Matera, "Preaching in a Different Key: Preaching the Gospel According to Paul"

2005 Dianne Bergant, CSA, "Lectionary Preaching"

2006 Thomas Long, "Unleashing the Power of Scripture"

2007 Richard Fragomeni, "Toward the New Evangelization: Preaching Parish Missions for the Life of the Church"

2008 Deborah Organ, "Preaching Between Worlds: Theology and Method"

2009 Paul Scott Wilson, "Lighting a Fire: Preaching as Teaching and Proclamation"

2010 Andrew Carl Wisdom, OP, "Communicating in a World of Landlines and iPhones: Preaching Across the Generations"

2011 Rein Boss, "About Whom Does the Prophet Say This?"

2012 Lucy Lind Hogan, "To Teach, Delight, and Move: Preaching and Rhetoric in a New Age of Evangelism"

2013 Dr. Charles Campbell, "Preaching and Apocalyptic Imagination"

Marten Endowment: A Gift for Preaching

The homiletics program at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology has long focused on excellence in proclaiming the Word of God.

For decades, major support for the homiletics program has come from Virginia Marten and her late husband, John, of Indianapolis.

The John S. and Virginia Marten Homiletics Endowment has supported a fulltime homiletics professor, classrooms and preaching chapels, curriculum resources, professional development, and the annual Marten Homiletics Lecture and Workshop.

The Martens' dedication and support have ensured that seminarians and permanent deacon candidates develop the strong skills in communications and homiletics that will be essential throughout their ministry.

Thousands of alumni have benefitted from the vision of homiletic excellence that is shared by Saint Meinrad and the Marten family. We continue to be most grateful for their generosity.

John S. Marten

Virginia S. Marten

1. Tapping Hidden Streams: Receiving the Spirit through the Discipline of the Imagination

THOMAS H. TROEGER

Preachers and homilists[1] sometimes tell me the "spring has run dry," meaning the creative juices that used to feed their hearts and minds are no longer flowing. But sometimes that is, in fact, not the case. Instead of thinking the well has "run dry," I suggest shifting the metaphor and thinking "the well has become clogged." There is plenty of creative juice. The question is how to get to it.

I think of a small cabin that my wife and I owned in the wilderness of Maine. We brought water into the cabin in large plastic jugs until a native told us there was a well above our cabin that had been used to give horses water in the days when there was a stage coach route through the area. Our friend was sure it would flow again if I would dig it out.

The next day I took a pick axe, a shovel, a pry bar and a rake and went up the hill to where the native had directed me. The area was covered with leaves, branches and rocks that had fallen in. It did not look promising, but I trusted my friend was right and started raking and then digging and prying out the larger rocks.

1. I use the following pairings interchangeably in order to honor the ecumenical character of my audience: homily and sermon, homilists and preachers, assembly and congregation.

At first there was only the slightest dampness, but I kept at it. Eventually, there was a little trickle, black as ink, then brown as chocolate milk, then the color of tepid tea and, finally, clear, cold, excellent water. It had been there all along, and it simply needed to get unclogged.

How can homilists unclog their imagination and get the creative juices flowing once again? Sometimes listening to music helps or walking or doing some other activity that stimulates the brain in a way other than sitting at a computer or thinking in words. But in the last analysis, a homily requires words, lively, life giving words. So how then can preachers awaken anew their imaginations?

The response to that question requires something profounder than homiletical methods or writers' gimmicks. Homilists need a spiritual and theological understanding of the imagination. We need such an understanding because the very word "imagination" is often suspect in popular speech. We dismiss people's fears saying, "It is all in your imagination" or "You are just imagining that." But, in fact, the imagination is a complex and essential activity of the human mind and heart.

There are at least three different kinds of imagination: the conventional, the empathic and the visionary. By the term "conventional imagination," I mean the system of established symbols, meanings and values that allow us to participate in a particular culture: for example, the rituals of standing for the singing of the national anthem before a baseball game or dipping our hand in a baptismal fountain and making the sign of the cross.

In calling it "conventional," I am not dismissing it as inconsequential. Indeed, the conventional imagination is immensely helpful to us in creating some sense of stable, meaningful corporate life in our churches and our society. Our families and the communities to which we belong begin to shape our conventional imagination from early childhood. Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist, observes that, "Humanity is an animal suspended

in webs of significance he himself has spun."[2] For me, those "webs of significance" are the product of the conventional imagination. Everyone has an imagination, at least a conventional one.

This imagination is expressed through the metaphoric character of language. We are often under the impression that language is primarily literalistic and rational, and metaphor is ornamental: it adds poetry to the basic brew of prose.

But as W.V. Quine points out: "It is a mistake, then, to think of linguistic usage as literalistic in its main body and metaphorical in its trimming. Metaphor, or something like it, governs both the growth of language and our acquisition of it. What comes as a subsequent refinement is rather cognitive discourse itself, at its most dryly literal. The neatly worked inner stretches of science are an open space in the tropical jungle, created by clearing tropes away."[3]

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have demonstrated at length the power of metaphors to shape the character of our relationships.[4] For example, when people debate with one another, the dominant metaphors are often drawn from war, as in, "He blew his opponent out of the water" or "She demolished him." What would happen if we changed the metaphor to a dance? Maybe we would say, "I do

2. For a discussion of this concept in light of the development of the World Wide Web, something which did not exist when Geertz wrote his famous description, see http://carbon.ucdenver.edu/~mryder/iscrat_99.html.
3. "A Postscript on Metaphor" http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/issues/v5/v5n1.quine.html
4. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

not hear the same music as you do" or "We are not in sync with one another." The shift in metaphor shifts the terms and tenor or how we relate.

There are in the Bible shifts in metaphor that transform our understanding of God. For example, King David proposes building God a temple. Nathan the prophet initially accedes to the idea, but later dreams that God, who has always lived in a tent, does not need nor desire a temple (2 Samuel 7:2-7).

Scholars believe what may lie behind Nathan's reversal on the issue was a debate about whether or not a temple was an appropriate way of honoring the divine presence. Changing from God in a tent to God in a temple would require a major shift in the way the conventional imagination understood the deity. Jesus Himself will later shift the metaphor again when He says of Himself: "I tell you something greater than the temple is here" (Matthew 12:6).

Shifts in the primary metaphors we live by are seldom easy. They often meet great resistance because the conventional imagination is a powerful reality. I think of Martin Luther King Jr. Think of what it took to overcome the reality of segregation. Or consider the rise of feminism and the immense resistance to women overcoming the stereotypes of sexism.

Or recall Vatican II and its liturgical reforms. I have spoken with many older priests who recounted how difficult it was to stand at the altar facing the assembly when they had been taught as young ordinands not to engage eye contact with people as they served the host.

In Protestantism, a lot of the conventional imagination is carried by its hymns. In recent years, many denominations have been publishing new hymn books, and there has been strong resistance to changes in the language to make the hymns more inclusive of women and more sensitive to people with physical disabilities.

Also, there have been efforts to eliminate metaphors drawn from war. When the United Methodists proposed eliminating the beloved hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers," they received a massive amount of mail in opposition, more than they had ever received on any

other issue. This is significant data for us who preach. It indicates what a deep grip the conventional imagination has on people. It is sometimes for good and sometimes for ill, but it is a part of life that homilists cannot avoid.

The second kind of imagination that I want to consider is the empathic imagination: the ability to enter the world of another: another individual or culture or community. The empathic imagination is a prerequisite to helping others. We recognize this in popular speech when we ask, "Can we stand in someone else's shoes?"

Sometimes when we read a first-person account of an experience unlike any we have ever known or dreamed, we leave ourselves behind and we begin to see and feel things in the world that we never even suspected existed. Our empathic imagination takes us to the nerve of another's experience.

A keen empathic imagination is essential to being an effective homilist. One of the greatest developments in the last 25 years in homiletical scholarship has been much more attentiveness to how homilies are received and processed by the assembly. Instead of focusing exclusively on the role of the preacher in creating and delivering sermons, there is an ever-growing understanding of the complex act of communication between homilist and congregation.

The third form of imagination, the visionary imagination, draws on the first two but includes the capacity to perceive, understand and reshape the world in ways that extend beyond the conventional imagination, often challenging its distortions and inequities. The exercise of the visionary imagination is not to be confused with changing another's world in order to fit the preacher's own conventional predilections and tastes.

Milton Crum, who taught homiletics at Virginia Theological Seminary for many years, used to counsel his students that when they arrived in a new parish, they should initially treat it as though they were visiting someone's home for a meal. He pointed out that upon first entering the house, they would not think of instructing

their hosts in how to rearrange the furniture and what art to dispose of.

Likewise, there is a need for new pastors to get some sense, some feeling, some intuitive grasp of the conventional imagination that they have entered. For without that, they will not be able to exercise their visionary imagination in effective ways.

It is revealing to note how commonly we judge speakers to be good by how well "they captured our imagination." When a homily captures our imagination, it has the theological potential for doing something much greater than merely holding our attention. Garrett Greene believes that God redeems the world by capturing our imagination for the divine purposes of saving and restoring us.[5] The preacher's imaginative work is in the service of God's imagining what we human creatures can be, do and say at our best.

Television and the World Wide Web are always trying to capture our imaginations for commercial purposes, to create a hunger in us for what we do not need. They are stiff competition for us homilists who are trying to be vessels of the living Spirit in an effort to win the human imagination for what is holy, gracious and utterly essential for the abundant life of the Gospel. This means that the work of preachers has to be rooted in a mature and enduring spirituality.

Garrett Greene believes the task of homilists is to develop a "link" between the imagination of the hearers and Scripture. I agree with Greene, but I ultimately prefer to think of it as a link between the hearer and God, not just the Bible. For to be biblical, we need to move beyond the Bible to the Holy One to whom the Bible gives witness. I am wary of the biblical world enforcing a stultifying conventional imagination that is closed to the Spirit, whose movements are as free and sovereign as the wind (John 3:8).

Marjorie Hudson, a character in my novella, *The Parable of Ten Preachers*, puts the matter this way:

5. Garrett Greene, Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination, W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

> Before there was a Bible, there was God. If we can't find in the Bible what we need for a sermon, the Bible teaches God is loving enough to help us find it somewhere else. That is what I like best about the Bible; it is not as limited as the people who want to limit God to the Bible. The Bible keeps pointing beyond itself to stars, to mountains, to rivers, to wind and flame, to Jesus who won't stay put between the covers of a book. So if you want to be biblical you have to get outside the Bible in the same way the Bible gets outside itself.[6]

Marjorie understands revelation to be greater than Scripture alone. Hers is a Catholic theology that honors the resources for faith found in experience, reason, tradition and the magisterium of the Church. Drawing upon these realities, I find the Bible itself to be more dynamic than a sheaf of pages between two covers.

I open the Bible and the wind and fire of the Spirit leap out and make me eager to find out where in our world are they blowing and burning now? I discover the living Spirit of God is often in places and issues that the Bible and the conventional imagination of faith ignore or address in an antiquated manner.

For example, several years ago, a good colleague, who had worked as a therapist with abusers, asked me if I knew any hymns dealing with abuse. He wanted to preach a sermon and preside at a service on the issue. There were hymns for Good Friday and the abuse of Christ, but that was not what he wanted. He wanted a text that dealt directly with the violence perpetuated in our day upon women, and so he commissioned me to write one.

Our conversation revealed that the conventional imagination did not adequately deal with physical violence against women. My friend was asking me to engage my empathic and visionary imagination to produce a poetic text that could be sung as a hymn,

6. Thomas H. Troeger, The Parable of Ten Preachers, Nashville: Abingdon, 1992, pp. 43-44.

thus expanding the Church's conventional imagination. Here is what I wrote:

> Holy and good is the gift of desire.
> God made our bodies for passion and fire,
> intending that love would draw from the flame
> lives that would shine with God's image and name.
> God weeps for all people
> abandoned, abused.
> God weeps for the women
> whose bodies are bruised.
> God weeps when the flame
> that God has infused
> is turned from its purpose
> and brutally used.
> Holy and good is the gift of desire …
> God calls to the women,
> God calls to the men:
> "Don't hide from the terror
> or terror will win.
> I made you for love,
> but love must begin
> by facing the violence
> without and within."
> Holy and good is the gift of desire …
> God knows that our violence
> is mixed with our dust:
> God's son was a victim
> of violence and lust,
> for Jesus revealed
> that women will trust
> a man who in action
> is tender and just.

Holy and good is the gift of desire ...[7]

I begin the hymn with a positive affirmation of the gift of sexual desire, because if the Church is only negative about human sexuality, it will not be able to proclaim an attractive alternative to the egregious use of gratuitous sex in advertising and entertainment. The hymn text represents an effort to expand the Church's conventional imagination so that it sees and engages the reality of abuse that cries out for the compassion of the Gospel.

Looking back on the creation of this hymn, I am reminded of Paul Scott Wilson's work, *Imagination of the Heart*, in which he develops the metaphor of the gap between two electric wires holding opposite charges and the spark that leaps between them. In a way, the two opposite wires in the hymn are the brutality of abuse and the divine intention that the gift of desire would produce "lives that would shine with God's image and name."

Here is a simple way a homilist might work with Wilson's theory in creating sermons: read the lections for the coming Sunday all week long as if they were captions beneath the stories and commercials you watch on the morning news or the blogs you visit each day. Sparks will fly.

Most of the time, however, acts of visionary imagination arise from more complex processes that we may not be consciously aware of in the act of creation. The visionary imagination thrives at the confluence of many streams. I want to demonstrate this with another hymn text. I use hymns because they are compressed and obviate the need to make this article too long by illustrating it with the full texts of homilies. I wrote the following poem when one of my dearest friends was dying an agonizing death at the age of 37.

Risen Christ, may death be swift

7. Thomas H. Troeger, Borrowed Light: Hymn texts, prayers, and poems, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 81.

for a friend whose fight is done –
not as winter dusk
bleeding darkened light
from a vanished sun,
  not as slow as your own death
but as swift as your last prayer,
"Abba, I commend
all I am to you
trusting in your care,"
  and as swift as earth to thrill
when God's trumpet breaks the skies
and restored by you
all our broken flesh
healed and whole shall rise.[8]

Where did the poem come from? Of course, it came from grief, profound grief, and I was aware of that while I wrote it. But years later as I look back on it, I can see that it was also fed by a number of different sources that preceded the immediate occasion of its writing.

In the same way, homilists, if they study their best homilies, will discover that they were fed not only by the need to get up and preach, but by the deepest currents in their souls, the energies set off by being immersed in the conventional imagination, by exercising the empathic imagination and by an experience that pulled them beyond the boundaries of their familiar world to behold a new landscape in the heart.

In the case of this hymn text, I believe that one of the subconscious influences was the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in which Orpheus descends to the underworld and bargains with Hermes to let Eurydice return to the world of the living. Hermes agrees on the sole condition that Orpheus will walk in front of Eurydice but never – not even once – turn back to see if she is

8. Borrowed Light, p. 166.

following him. Orpheus starts up the path to return to the land of the living, but just as he is about to enter it, he looks over his shoulder to see if Eurydice is behind him, and she fades back into the underworld, utterly lost to him.

I have long loved a poem by Rilke based on this story and since high school I have performed the haunting flute solo from Gluck's opera based on the story. It has often been a way of my expressing sorrow and lament, including in many church services. Furthermore, I am aware of how much early Christian iconography portrays Christ as Orpheus, and I recall there are early Church fathers, among them Eusebius and Clement, who imagine Christ as Orpheus, bringing the music of grace to the instrument of our humanity.

In other words, long before I wrote the poem, I was immersed in the conventional imagination of the Greek myth and the way it had been used in the early Church and the European musical tradition. It was a part of my being and, I am sure that in ways I do not know, influenced my creating the hymn text.

Another hidden stream was probably my growing up in upstate New York on a mountain lake where the winters were long, dark and cold and where I used to watch the last lingering light fade from the sky in the early evening. I was not thinking of that when I wrote the poem, but somehow it came out: "not as winter dusk/bleeding darkened light/from a vanished sun."

The novelist Barbara Pym makes a similar observation about the impact of climate and geographic setting upon the imagination: "Back at my own church, on a cool greeny-grey English Sunday. We start with a George Herbert hymn – 'King of Glory, King of Peace' – very English, like a damp overgrown churchyard. What different conceptions one could have of God according to the country one was in – those sun baked cemeteries in Marseilles."[9]

9. Barbara Pym, A Very Private Eye: An Autobiography in

People often ask me where I get so many ideas for homilies and poems. They want to know if I have a method for turning on the creative process. I cannot point to a program that I run in my brain, but I can say there appear to be at least three conditions that facilitate imagination:

- Immersion in the conventional imagination that celebrates its positive functions
- A willingness to reinterpret the conventional imagination in ways that correct its limitations and distortions
- A conviction that reality is much more open and unpredictable than we currently imagine.

Each of these three qualities is found in the biblical accounts of Christ. Christ was immersed in the conventional imagination of His own community: He regularly attended synagogue and knew the Scriptures intimately. Christ was willing to reinterpret the tradition to claim its true purpose, as when He affirms the Sabbath is made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath.

And the conviction that reality is more open and unpredictable than we imagine finds confirmation in the resurrection and Pentecost. Both point to the astonishing openness of a world whose possibilities for renewal are far greater than we dare to believe.

Who would have thought that the victim of a calloused religious establishment and a brutal political regime would arise to empower his followers? Surely not the disciples on the road to Emmaus or the others cowering behind closed doors or Mary thinking the risen Christ was a gardener. And who would have thought that a little band of disciples who had run for cover at the crucifixion would be empowered by the wind and fire of the Spirit to spread the Gospel around the world?

Diaries and Letters, eds., Hazel Holt and Hilary Pym, New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, p. 195.

The creative energies that can empower homilists to capture the human imagination for the purposes of God are alive in the Bible's witness to Christ. There God speaks to us as a friend who sees possibilities in us that we do not see ourselves.

Through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, God says: "I imagine you as loving and generous and just and at peace with one another. I imagine you as living in harmony with the rest of my creation. I imagine you as claiming the imagination I gave you when I made you in my image. I imagine you redeemed and whole, fully alive with the abundant life of the Gospel. I imagine you as a witness to my glory and to the grace of Christ and to the fire and wind of the Spirit."

If we homilists capture the imaginations of our listeners with the great and holy imagining of God, then their hearts will become unclogged and they will taste and feel "a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

2. Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination

MARY CATHERINE HILKERT, OP

Just before Christmas in 1979, *Time* magazine featured as its cover article a piece entitled "American Preaching – A Dying Art?" The author's analysis of the state of preaching in the United States at that time went like this:

> 'The Word became flesh,' says John's Gospel of the incarnate Christ of Bethlehem. In Christmas sermons before some 75 million Americans this week, words about Christ will become flesh in the person of the preacher. Through their strange and marvelous craft, Christianity has been transmitted and reshaped for every age since Christ himself went 'preaching the Gospel of the kingdom.'
>
> "For many American churchgoers, though, a Sunday sermon is something merely to be endured. Many preachers and parishioners alike think that passionate and skillful preaching has grown rarer and rarer in individual congregations in postwar years. The chilling of the word is a major contribution to the evident malaise in many large Protestant denominations these days. For Roman Catholics, the sermon has not been as important, but rather a kind of spiritual hors d'oeuvre before the Eucharist."

Almost 15 years later, the situation has not changed significantly. A sociological survey was conducted in 1988 among lay church members in four denominations in the United States – Roman

Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran and Methodist.[1] Parishes or congregations were asked to list in order of priority their highest hopes and expectations from their church and then to rate how successfully each of those expectations was met.

All four denominations listed "preaching" as their first priority and "spiritual life" as their second. When asked how successfully their church met their expectations, all four denominations indicated their disappointment in both areas.

We who are Catholics in the post-Vatican II Church might validly protest the caricature of preaching as a mere "hors d'oeuvre before the Eucharist." The liturgical reforms of Vatican II have certainly underscored the centrality of the homily in all of our sacramental worship (SC, 35, 53).

The documents on the roles of bishops and priests reemphasize the bishop's responsibility to see that the Word of God is proclaimed effectively in the local church and that "priests … have as their primary duty the proclamation of the gospel of God to all" (BP: LG 25, CD 12; Priests, P04, CD 28, LG 28). What is even more remarkable is the emphasis on the responsibility of all the baptized to share in the preaching mission of the church (AA 2, CD 35, GS 43).

Nevertheless, the concern about the "chilling of the word" remains. Almost 25 years ago, Paul VI identified the problem in his *Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization*: "In our day, what has happened to that hidden energy of the good news which is able to have such a powerful effect on the human conscience? To what extent and in what way is that evangelical force capable of really transforming people of this century?"[2]

1. Dean R. Hoge, Jackson W. Carroll, and Francis K. Sheets, Patterns of Parish Leadership: Cost and Effectiveness in Four Denominations (Sheed and Ward, 1988).
2. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi, December 8, 1975, no. 4.

When preachers, pastors or sociologists of religion gather to identify why there is not more energy surrounding the preaching of the Church, questions of the theology and spirituality of preaching rarely are the focus of the discussion. Even the homiletic literature to date is very limited in those areas.[3] The wager of this lecture, however, is that one factor contributing to the blocking of the power of the Gospel in our day is precisely our understanding of where the word of God is located and what the preaching event is meant to be.

Most theologies of preaching to date have been developed from the perspective of the Reformation traditions, usually in neo orthodox categories that have highlighted the utter transcendence of God's Word, the sinfulness of the human situation and some form of law-gospel paradigm for preaching. Thus, for example, in his classic book, *The Preaching of the Gospel*, Reformed theologian Karl Barth asserts that, "It is not the function of the preacher to reveal God or to act as his intermediary. When the Gospel is preached, God speaks: there is no question of the preacher

3. In a recent survey of homiletic literature, Ronald Allen noted: "Preaching is preeminently a theological act. Yet, there is a near lacuna in our literature: we give little attention to theological analysis of the preaching event." ("New Directions in Homiletics," Journal for Preachers, Easter 1993, 21.) Similar observations have been made by David Buttrick, Homiletic: Moves and Structures (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 486; John A. Mel loh, "Publish or Perish: A Review of Preaching Literature 1968-1981," Worship 82 (1988) 506-07; and Robert P. Waznak, "A Second Response [to David Buttrick]," Worship 62 (1988) 273.

revealing anything or of a revelation being conveyed through him." (p. 12)

Barth is clear in his conviction that the proclamation of the Gospel is to be proclamation of the Word of God – not some human word. Preaching is not supposed to interpret the world or human experience religiously or to tell the stories of women and men, no matter how inspiring – it is to express the Word of God.[4] The preacher is to announce what God has made known in Jesus Christ.

Barth's theology of revelation is explicit: God's Word is revealed in Jesus, in the Scriptures, in the proclamation of the Church. It is not revealed in human history or human experience; neither is it mediated by the preacher or the community. Revelation is totally God's action. The preacher is the herald who bears witness to God's sovereign power and grace in Jesus Christ.

When the authentic Word of God is preached, the Spirit of God calls forth the human response of obedience to the Word. Barth reminds us, however, that the relationship between humanity and God is "effected from on high by a divine miracle. [We are] not naturally disposed to hear the Word of God: we are children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3).[5]

The theology of preaching that emerges from the Lutheran tradition is classically described as a law-gospel hermeneutic. The preacher first diagnoses the human situation under the burden of God's law, which we have no power to observe. As Richard Lischer, professor of homiletics at Duke University, describes it: The "first word" to be said about the human condition is the "bad news" of our failure to live in fidelity to God's covenant, resulting in the condition of enmity with God. We are "children of wrath."[6]

4. Molt, Church in Power of Spirit, 207.
5. Ibid., 80.
6. Richard Lischer, A Theology of Preaching (Nashville: Abing don, 1981), 50.

Having confronted the congregation with the law, the preacher then announces the Gospel: the good news that in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we are no longer "under the law"; rather we live in the freedom of the children of God. The bottom line is, of course, Paul's famous phrase: "Where sin abounds, grace abounds still more" (Rom. 5:20).

There is a profound truth to this Christian perspective on the preaching of the Gospel with its emphasis on the power of the proclaimed Word, the sovereignty of God, the radical alienation at the heart of the human condition and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. These are convictions that all Christians share, even if we don't all emphasize them in the same way that Karl Barth did, especially in his early writings.

What I'd like to explore this evening is another way of expressing the relationship between the divine and the human, what I'm calling tonight "the sacramental imagination." In an age of ecumenical dialogue and significant diversity within any specific religious tradition, it becomes difficult to identify clear distinctions between Protestants and Catholics. David Tracy has suggested that it may be at the level of "imagination" that the most significant differences occur.[7]

We might speak of two distinct Christian spiritualities that cannot be identified simply as Protestant and Catholic. For example, Anglicans, some Lutherans and some Methodists find themselves more at home in the sacramental imagination than in the forms of Reformation theology I have just described – what David Tracy calls the dialectical imagination.

7. For a very helpful overview of the distinction between the dialectical imagination and the analogical imagination, see Tracy's The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 405-445.

The dialectical imagination emphasizes the distance between God and humanity, focuses on the hiddenness and absence of God, the sinfulness of human beings, the paradox of the cross, the need for grace as forgiveness and reconciliation, the limits of any human community or institution including the Church, and the not-yet character of the promised reign of God.

The sacramental imagination (or what Tracy calls *The Analogical Imagination*) emphasizes the presence of the God who is self-communicating love, the creation of human beings in the image of God – restless hearts seeking the divine, the mystery of the incarnation, grace as divinizing as well as forgiving, the mediating role of the Church as sacrament of salvation in the world, and the "foretaste" of the reign of God, which is present in human community wherever God's reign of justice, peace and love is fostered.

It is in terms of anthropology that the dialectical and sacramental imaginations diverge most dramatically. The 1983 ecumenical breakthrough statement from the U.S. Lutheran Roman Catholic dialogue on "Justification by Faith" highlights the theological differences in this area:

> The Lutheran hermeneutical understanding of justification by faith in some ways heightens the tension with Catholic positions. It does so by excluding from the Gospel proclamation all reference to the freedom and goodness of fallen human beings on the ground that this would undermine the unconditionality of God's promises in Christ.[8]

It is precisely here that a contribution to the growing ecumenical discussion of a theology of preaching might be made from the sacramental imagination that views grace as active in and through humanity and creation. Grounded in the conviction that sin never

8. "Justification by Faith," U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue Statement, Origins 13 (October 6, 1983), #154.

completely destroyed the created goodness of humanity, the Catholic response to the debate initiated by Emil Brunner as to whether there is a "point of contact for preaching the Gospel of grace" – in other words, is there a touchstone in people's human experience for the hearing of the Gospel? – is clearly "yes."

The Catholic tradition has emphasized that grace builds on nature and that grace affects a real inner transformation of the human person. Karl Rahner has taken that insight even further in his claim that human beings always stand within the call to grace; God's offer of intimate friendship with humanity constitutes a basic orientation of every human person's life from the very beginning (in Rahnerian language, the supernatural existential). Human persons are actually constituted as "hearers of the Word" – all human beings, in fact creation itself, has been fashioned as "openness for the incarnation."

Because human persons are not pure spirit, but rather body – spirit, grace (or the invisible presence of God among us) needs to be made present in concrete, historical, visible ways. The spiritual mystery at the heart of reality is mediated in and through the ordinary events and persons of our daily lives, through human history and creation.

But that mystery of love at the core of reality remains "hidden" or "anonymous" unless it is brought to word. That is what both preaching and the sacraments (which Augustine called "visible words") do: they allow the grace that is the depth dimension of reality to be recognized and celebrated.

Catholic spirituality and theology have traditionally emphasized the continuity, rather than the discontinuity, between nature and grace, between creation and revelation, between our ordinary human lives and the extraordinary gift of God's presence and power among us. So it seems "fitting," as Aquinas would say, to speak of the continuity between human experience and Christian preaching.

Any Christian theology of preaching will center on Jesus Christ as Word of God. But what if, instead of emphasizing the difference of Jesus from the rest of us and the transcendence of God's Word, we were to focus on the mystery of the incarnation – the mystery that

God's fullest word has been spoken in history, in a human being, in human experience? What are the implications of believing that the Word of God is to be discovered enfleshed in human history?

While it may not be immediately apparent, all of this has implications for the concrete process of homily preparation and feedback. Those of us who are preachers, for example, might reflect on our process of preparing a homily.

Do I operate as if the Word of God is revealed to me in the biblical passage, in my prayer, and in my study of the commentaries by theologians, and think of the process of writing the homily as trying somehow to apply this Word of God to people's secular lives and a profane world? Or do I really believe that God's Word (a word of hope, of healing, of liberation, of resurrection) is being spoken in new ways today in people's concrete experiences and daily lives?

Is the same creative Spirit of God who was active in the his – tory of Israel, in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, in the Church of the past, and in the lives of the saints, still active among us today? If that's part of our theology of revelation, then reflection on culture, on people's lives and human experience, is necessary, not as a way to make a homily relevant or to get people's attention, but in order to even hear that the Word God is speaking today.

Naming the grace that is to be found in the faith experience of the community involves listening to and learning from the members of the community. Very practical decisions regarding team preaching, communal faith-sharing, dialogic modes of preaching, invitations to preach for those whose voices are rarely heard in the community and the creation of opportunities for response to preaching all communicate an underlying theology of preaching and revelation. The word of faith that the preacher proclaims is the community's word. The preacher speaks in the name of the community and proclaims the deepest convictions of the community.

That means the preacher needs the kind of contemplative awareness that seeks God in and through all the experiences of life. Another way to say this is that our sacramental imaginations need to be developed if we are to grasp the implications of the mystery of

incarnation for a theology of preaching. The mystery of the divine has become one with creation; God has become flesh in human history; the Spirit of God is alive and active and "loose in the world" and dwells among communities of Christian believers who live and speak in the name of Jesus.

Given that sacramental imagination, I'm suggesting this evening that we reflect on preaching as the art of naming grace in human experience. But if we are to do that, it is important to recall three things: 1) we are talking about human experience in its depth dimension; 2) in our world today, most people's experi ence of God is in the face of, and often in spite of, human suf fering; and 3) we get our clues as to how to identify grace in the human story from the biblical story and basic symbols of the Christian tradition.

Human Experience in its Depths

Naming the presence of God in human experience requires pressing to the limits of human existence, where both the threat of radical human finitude and experiences of overwhelming meaning and joy raise the fundamentally religious question of the "ground of our being." At the boundaries of human life, "signals of transcendence" emerge within human experience. Secular language breaks its limits in trying to express "the other dimension" or the "surplus of meaning" disclosed from the depths of human experience.[9]

9. See Paul Ricouer, "Naming God," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 34 (1979) 215-227, and "Biblical Hermeneutics," Semeia 4(1975) 107-148; David Tracy, Blessed Rage for Order (N.Y.: Seabury, 1975) 91-131; Louis Dupre, The Other Dimension (N.Y.: Seabury, 1979); Langdon Gilkey, Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969). For Schillebeeckx's approach, which emphasizes a dialectical

While revelation takes place in human experience, it cannot be identified with human experience. Rather, as Edward Schillebeeckx has noted, "Revelation takes place in historical human experience in this world, but at the same time it summons us from what we take for granted in our limited world. It is therefore not to be found in any direct appeal to our so -called self evident experiences within the world. As experience, it is the crossing of a boundary within the dimensions of human experience."[10] At this boundary or final limit of human experience, we either speak of God or we must remain silent.

Thus one of the contemplative tasks of the preacher or preaching community is to reflect on human experience in order to identify the ultimate foundation of the mystery of human life: the God who often remains hidden. The ability to make that connection presumes that preachers are in touch with the human struggle – their own and those of others.

Both the prophets in the history of Israel, such as Hosea, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and the authentic early Christian preachers like Mary Magdalene, Peter and Paul were formed for their preaching through

disclosure of the experience of grace as the basis for naming God at the limits of human experience, see Edward Schillebeeckx, The Understanding of Faith (London: Sheed and Ward, 1974), 78-101; and Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord (chap. 2, n. 12) 29 -79.

10. Schillebeeckx, Christ, 62. Note also Schillebeeckx's further reference to "what proclaims itself in experience to be an astonishing and overwhelming event in reality, correcting and crossing all our plans and achievements" (Christ, 64). See also Avery Dulles, "Revelation and Discovery," in William J. Kelly, Theology and Discovery (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 1-29.

the profound, and usually painful, human experience of whatever aspect of God's word they were called to preach.

So, too, those who pray to become ministers of the word in our day are asking to be baptized in the experience from which that word emerged. Whether from our own life experience or from attending to the stories of others, nothing human should remain foreign to preachers if we are to grasp what it means to proclaim that all of humanity has been taken into God and redeemed in Christ.[11]

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke knew well that the authentic word can flow only from the depths of life experience. As he wrote to a younger poet:

> For the sake of a single verse, one must see many cities, people and things. One must know the animals, one must feel how the birds fly and know the gesture with which the small flowers open in the morning. One must be able to think back to roads in unknown regions, to unexpected meetings and to partings one had long seen coming; to days of childhood that are still unexplained … to days in rooms withdrawn and quiet, and to mornings by the sea, to the sea itself, to seas, to nights of travel … and it is not yet enough if one may think of all this. One must have memories of many nights of love … of the screams of women in labor …. But

11. Although he is operating out of a different anthropological basis, see Gerhard Ebeling's God and Word, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967). Ebeling argues that we need the word of God "to save [us] from choking on [our] own self because we no longer [have] any word with which to cry out of the depths of [our] self-contradiction and call upon that mystery that sur rounds [us]." (47)

> one must also have been beside the dying, must have sat beside the dead in the room with the open window and the fitful noises. And still it is not yet enough to have memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many, and one must have the great patience to wait until they come again. For it is not yet the memories themselves. Not until they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves – not until then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them.[12]

The contemplative embrace of life that Rilke describes as essential to the creative writer is all the more necessary for the preacher who is called to make the word a home, to dwell in the Word of God that is a word enfleshed.

Some would argue that this naming of grace that is already present in human life does not do justice to the power of the word to bring about salvation, not just to name it.[13] But because human persons live according to the meanings we perceive and construct, the naming of grace is no small matter.

Bringing a deeper dimension of human life to awareness and conscious responsibility has serious implications. A friendship forms before it is fully recognized and claimed, but when friends or partners explicitly claim the bond of love between them, they also deepen their commitment to one another and make decisions that will affect future choices.

Communities and individuals act in outrage and response when

12. Rainer Maria Rilke, Notebooks of Malie Laurids Brigge, trans. M.D. Herter Norton (N.Y.: W.W. Norton and Co., 1949), 26 -27.
13. See, e.g., Gerhard Ebeling, God and Word (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 42.

the innocent are violated, but meetings that clarify and analyze the structural evils that perpetuate individual crimes deepen the participants' anger and their commitment to justice. A change of perception or worldview is essential to a radical change of life. Even on the level of human words, we know the power of words to deepen or even create what they signify. What happens when someone speaks words like:

I love you.
This relationship is over. I want a divorce.
I'm sorry to have to tell you, your cancer is inoperable.
Here I stand; I can do no other.
You are hereby sentenced to life imprisonment.
I, Martha, take you, Juan, to be my husband.
I'm sorry your services won't be needed any longer.
You are forgiven.

Those kinds of words open up new futures – or cut off the future. They are not "just words"; they are symbols that evoke a deeper mystery, whether of love or possibility or belief or com – mitment or death. The relationship of love was there before the words were spoken. The problems in the relationship were there before any mention of divorce, but somehow with the words the reality of the relationship or commitment is deepened or changed.

In a real sense, those kinds of words have the power to create a new experience. Our world is not the same before and after words like that are spoken. We might call those words revelatory words, because they disclose levels of the mystery of human life that are too deep for words. When we are talking about preaching as naming grace, we are talking about a "naming" that has that kind of power.

Naming Grace in the Midst of Suffering

One of the fundamental challenges to any preacher of the good news that God is with us, however, is all the evidence to the contrary. Whether we turn to Haiti, Rwanda, Bosnia, our own city streets, battered women's shelters, the AIDS hospice, the unemployment line, the most recent story of child abuse, or the

more daily struggles of families and individuals gathered for Sunday worship, stories of suffering abound.

Is it really possible that grace abounds still more? Is the power of resurrection really active among us? Does the Spirit of God continue to raise the dead to life? As we listen for a word of God from that context of global suffering, believers continue to wrestle with what Karl Barth identified in 1922 as "every hearer's question" about the good news: "Is it true?"

Barth remarked on the contrast between what the liturgy proclaims and people's concrete lives:

> The whole liturgy says: God is present. The whole situation witnesses, cries, simply shouts of it, even if in the minister or people there arises questioning, wretchedness, or despair .... But what does "God is present" mean in the face of the great riddle of existence? ... Is it true? – this talk of a loving and good God who is more than one of the friendly idols? ... A passionate longing to have the word spoken that promises grace is the desire of every church-goer no matter how they express their want in so-called real life.[14]

14. Karl Barth, "The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching," in The Word of God and the Word of Man (N.Y.: Harper and Brothers, 1957) 107-09. Note also Nathan Scott: "Of all the myriad issues of life which the Christian pulpit is required to handle there is none so pressing, so inescapable, and so burdensome for the preacher as the problem of suffering, the mystery of iniquity, the strange and brutal haphazardness with which as it seems at times, acute misfortune is distributed amongst persons." Nathan A. Scott, "The Burdens and Temptations of the Pulpit," in Preaching on

The word of grace that all human beings, not only church-goers, long to hear cannot be spoken too quickly, however. Hope in the resurrection cannot be experienced as a radical experience of grace unless the cross of Jesus is seen for the profound sign of contradiction that Paul reminded us it is. Preaching the incarnation – which includes the whole paschal mystery – in the midst of a world of suffering is only possible if we take seriously contemporary experiences of anguish, impasse and the absence of God.

How can we continue to proclaim Jesus as universal savior in a world where so many human beings are deprived of basic human rights and the ecosystem is being rapidly destroyed? The ongoing experience of the crucified of this world calls for a rethinking of the mystery of the cross if preachers and communities of faith are to proclaim an authentic word of hope in the power of the resurrection in the midst of human suffering.

In a world of suffering, the last word about the cross may be that it is indeed a mystery of divine love, fidelity and solidarity, but the first word that must be spoken is of its scandal, injustice and absurdity. Not only political and liberation theologians, but most theologians reflecting on Christology today emphasize that the cross must be put in the context not only of the resurrection, but also of the life and ministry of Jesus.

As many have noted, it is no coincidence that Jesus did not die in bed. Jesus was executed as a political criminal and a religious blasphemer as the consequence of his "dangerous preaching" of the reign of God.

His healing ministry and His inclusive table companionship threatened traditional boundaries that distinguished insiders from outsiders in both religious and political realms. Jesus shocked religious authorities as He announced the forgiveness of sins, the prerogative of God alone. He touched lepers and spoke with

Suffering and a God of Love, ed. and with a foreword by Henry J. Young (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 7.

Samaritans. He formed bonds of friendship with, and invited into the circle of His disciples, women and tax collectors who collaborated with the oppressive Roman Empire.

A faithful Jew, He radically reinterpreted Jewish tradition and laws of Sabbath observance and ritual purity. The reign of God He announced in His liberating lifestyle and His shocking parables and beatitudes, the unconditional compassion of God that He embodied in His person and style of relating, even the joy and freedom He invited others to embrace, was a profound challenge to religious and political structures of the day.[15]

In the end, the one whose entire life proclaimed "God's 'no' to human suffering"[16] was betrayed by an intimate disciple, abandoned by many of His closest friends, handed over to the empire by religious leaders, sentenced by a political leader who knew Him to be innocent, mocked and tortured by soldiers, and executed as a criminal, dying on a cross between two thieves. The one who preached absolute trust in the reign of a compassionate God was left in darkness to face rejection of His mission and the utter silence

15. See John Dominic Crossan, "The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant," The Christian Century, Dec. 18-25, 1991, 1194 -1204, regarding the profound social and political challenge of Jesus' eating and healing patterns. For a synthesis of critical scholarship from a historical-critical perspective, see John P. Meier, "Jesus," New Jerome Biblical Commentary (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 1316-1328. See also Albert Nolan, Jesus Before Christianity, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992); Schillebeeckx, Jesus: An Experiment in Christology (chap. 3, n. 20); Jon Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978).
16. Edward Schillebeeckx's phrase, Jesus (chap. 3, n. 20) 178.

of God. Some theologians even speak of Jesus as abandoned by God.[17]

The cross of Jesus, like all human suffering, raises profound questions about God and God's fidelity and, to use the language of tonight's lecture – about naming grace in human experience. But one of the very reasons why we need the language and symbolism of the cross is to name the depth of human pain as religious, to show that the human struggle with suffering is ultimately a spiritual crisis. Jesus' cry continues in our world: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

In an age of massive and senseless suffering, including two world wars and the Holocaust, Edward Schillebeeckx wants to reject any version of suffering as "God's will" – instead he underlines the scandal of the cross. He has even suggested that, in one sense, we are saved in spite of the cross of Jesus, rather than because of it. Nevertheless, in the end, Jesus faced the cross as the final consequence of fidelity to His preaching mis sion with a radical hope in the compassionate God He knew as Abba.

He filled an experience that was in itself meaningless and absurd with meaning, love and a sense of solidarity with all the innocent

17. See Jürgen Moltmann The Crucified God (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), and "The Crucified God: God and The Trinity Today," in New Questions about God, Concilium Vol. 76, ed. J.B. Metz (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 26-37; and Sobrino, Christol ogy at the Crossroads; for "apparent abandonment" see Edward Schillebeeckx, "The 'God of Jesus' and the 'Jesus of God,'" Jesus Christ and Human Freedom, Concilium Vol. 93, ed. E. Schillebeeckx and B. van Iersal (New York: Herder, 1974) 110-126; Robert J. Schreiter," "The Crucified God," The Bible Today 28 (May 1990), 159-64.

who suffer. He filled what was utter disgrace with grace. What Christians celebrate is not the cross, nor the sufferings of Jesus, but the power of a love that is faithful even unto death. The triumph of the cross is the triumph of God's mercy bursting the bonds of sin and death.

It is not the cross that Christians preach, but the entire paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus. What Christians celebrate is that death and evil do not have final victory; the power of God does. The earliest Christian preaching was the good news that the death of Jesus was not the end.

In and through Jesus' love and fidelity, God has taken on the evil and suffering of this world and broken their hold, once and for all, with the stronger power of love. What is impossible for us is possible for God. Hence the mocking tone of Paul: "O death where is your victory?" The Christian hope remains that God can and will bring life out of death, that like Jesus, we and those we love will be vindicated and transformed.

But the dynamic of hope, like the power of resurrection, is beyond human control or possibility. Only God can restore the dead to life. Do we as Christian preachers too often resort to self help or human wisdom because we are afraid to attend to the lament of our congregations and to entrust the pain to God? Do we believe that God can and will bring life beyond death?

If our liturgies and preaching are to draw us more deeply into the paschal mystery that constitutes our daily lives, we need ways of remembering and ritualizing the scandal of the cross, as well as the victory and hope of resurrection.

For the sake of authentic faith in our day, we need to allow more dissonance in the harmony of the sacramental imagination and celebration. Lament disrupts the mood of praise and thanksgiving, but liturgy is meant to reflect as well as transform human life.

David Power proposes a serious challenge for Christian liturgists and preachers:

> In the present time of cultural disorientation and reorientation, there seems to be place for a fuller use of

> lament in Christian assemblies, but this requires the courage to let beliefs about God and about Providence be questioned. We may indeed grieve over suffering and oppression, bewail the calamities of the Jewish people, weep over the raped earth, look with sorrow on the church's treatment of women, but do we ever allow this to be a complaint against God?[18]

The first step toward overcoming suffering is finding a language that leads one out of the prison of silence, finding the language of lament and tears.[19] Naming the pain and grief and sin is part of the dynamic of naming grace. The double challenge for Christian preachers and communities gathered around the Word is to attend to the importance of lament, but at the same time, to witness to Christian hope in the power of resurrection.

All of this is to suggest that, when we listen to human experience in both its grace and disgrace, we listen for an echo of the Gospel,

18. David N. Power, "When to Worship is to Lament," in Worship, Culture, and Theology (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1990), 165. Note Power's further question: "Does not the very sacramen tal tradition in which we say Christ and the paschal mystery are represented seem at times to have been less than adequate? What has God got to say? Where is God, if not there? And if there, why in so clumsy a way?" (166).
19. See Sölle, Suffering (note 7), 61-86. "People's lives actually depend on putting their situation into words or rather learning to express themselves ..." (p. 76); "... 'learn to suffer without complaining' is bad advice. Nothing can be learned from suffering unless it is worked through" (p. 126).

which brings us to the final section of our reflections. On what basis do we name grace in human experience? Where do we find the clues for recognizing, proclaiming and celebrating grace?

Naming Grace from the Perspective of Christian Symbols and Stories

We cannot talk of grace occurring in human experience without recalling that human life is interpreted, and therefore experienced, through a variety of filters. We do not have raw human experience apart from some framework for understanding or perceiving. We interpret our lives in the context of multiple traditions – the traditions of our personal histories, our family stories, our ethnic roots, our culture.

We may modify, change or even reject those traditions based on new experiences, which do not seem to fit, but initially we stand within, and are formed by, traditions. We are formed in the context of meanings, which have been handed on to us. We are given language and cultural symbols; we do not create them.

In speaking of recognizing grace at the depths or limits of human experience, we are talking within the framework of a faith tradition which alerts us to a deeper dimension in our experience and gives us a language to name that dimension. We stand within the living tradition of the Christian community. Those who have gone before us in faith have handed on their story, their pattern for understanding and living human life. It is the story of Jesus as recounted in the Scriptures, as remembered, lived and celebrated in the community, and as retold uniquely in every age and culture.

What forms the sacramental imagination – that profound confidence that God is with us, the deep trust that where sin abounds, grace abounds still more, the radical hope that in the end "all will be well"? What enables Christian communities to proclaim: "Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life, Lord Jesus, come in glory"?

What Walter Brueggemann has called the "hopeful imagination"[20] is formed by symbols, stories and lives that subvert a culture of death and despair. In an age of individualism and hatred of the stranger, Christian communities gather at an inclusive table and promise to attend to the needs of the poor and the sick.

In an age of apathy and despair, Christians gather to give thanks and praise, to sing songs of joy and resistance. At both the beginning and the end of life, Christians gather around symbols of the tomb and proclaim that the Spirit of God brings new life out of death. When sick ness threatens to alienate us from all that we have known and loved, Christians keep vigil at the bedsides of the sick and the dying. In a culture that cannot imagine faithful relationships sustained over time, Christian communities witness covenant promises of fidelity and speak words of forgiveness beyond betrayal.

In a culture of power and domination, Christian communities anoint leaders ordained to wash feet and to call forth the gifts of others in the community. As human celebrations, even the most basic symbolism of the Church can, of course, be manipulated and used to reinforce, rather than subvert, systems of injustice, but our trust is that the power of the basic Christian symbols finally escapes any human control.[21] For precisely that reason, the symbols

20. Title of Brueggemann's book. Note also Prophetic Imagination, where Brueggemann is discussing the texts of hope in Deutero-Isaiah: "He gives people back their faith by means of rearticulating the old story. He gives them the linguistic capacity to confront despair rather than be surrounded by it" (77).
21. David N. Power, "Sacraments: Symbolizing God's Power in the Church," Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America 37 (1982), 50-66, and Mary Collins, "Is the Eucharist Still a Source of Meaning for Women?" in

are also dangerous to any system; they hold the power to reform the human imagination.

So, too, is retelling the Christian story dangerous. Explicitly calling to memory human suffering and the passion and death of Jesus is already part of the process of engendering Christian hope. Those memories are considered "dangerous" precisely because they move us to action and solidarity with those who suffer.

To express anger or lament over the violation of human dignity or of the earth is implicitly to express hope that the future can be different from the present. Shared stories fuel hopes, forge solidarity and empower action. But retelling the story of Jesus is "dangerous" for an even deeper reason.

The ultimate claim of Jesus' life, ministry and death was that the compassion of God is the power at the heart of human history and of the universe – the reign of God is at hand. Christians are con vinced that tragedy can be transformed precisely because the death of Jesus was not the end of His story. In the resurrection, the Spirit of God has broken the power of the bonds of sin and death and does indeed "make all things new."

That same Spirit has been poured out on all creation, holding open future possibilities in the most desperate of circumstances, sustaining the human capacity to endure and to hope, empowering a core of freedom in the depths of the human spirit. That hidden power of God that exceeds human capacity or imagination, the power of love at the core of all creation, is the grace that "abounds still more" in the face of human suffering and injustice. Because its source is always the utter freedom of God, not any

Origins 21(September 12, 1991), 225-229, and "Liturgical Spirituality in a Pluralistic Culture," Doctrine and Life 41(1991), 59-67.

human accomplishment, this mystery of God's presence and power among us is always a source of surprise.[22]

The symbols and stories of Christian hope "capture the imagination," however, only when they are proclaimed by authentic witnesses, like the first witnesses to the resurrection who risked rejection and even death in light of what they had experienced. The same symbols and stories will continue to capture the imagination today only if they are enfleshed again in living communities of hope and resistance.

Jesus did not proclaim the reign of God only in words; he enfleshed the good news He announced. Christians claim that in the resurrection of Jesus God's power has been poured forth in the world in a radically new way. The Spirit of God holds the future open and is active in the world, fashioning a new creation, making all things new. The sacramental imagination reminds us that God's Spirit is active precisely in and through creation and human communities.

If the Christian hope that death is not the end is to be a source of hope for a young person whose life is being cut off by the AIDS virus, for example, they need more than to hear the Gospel proclaimed. The sacramental embodiment of Christ's compassion is expressed

22. For different theological expressions of how the Spirit of God holds open future possibilities and engenders human freedom, see Karl Rahner, "Theology of Freedom," Theological Investigations VI (New York: Seabury, 1974), 178-96; Edward Schillebeeckx, "I Believe in God, Creator of Heaven and Earth," God Among Us (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 91-102; Jürgen Moltmann, "Creation as an Open System," The Future of Creation (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 115-30; and God in Creation, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985).

not only by a community gathered for anointing and healing, but also in faithful families and friends who "keep vigil" and do not leave them to die alone, in those who promise to remember their life through fashioning a piece of the AIDS quilt, in those who work to change discriminatory legislation and attitudes that isolate the sick and dying, in those who work to find a cure for AIDS, in those who console the grieving and listen to their pain, and in those who help them to find ways to be reconciled, to remember joy and to hope in the face of death.

The stories of resurrection are born amidst loss and pain, but they end in joy and hope – signs of a presence and power that go beyond the human imagination. To celebrate the presence of God in the face of suffering is to say that pain and evil shall not have the final victory. To celebrate that hope authentically is to be drawn into living witness, to do everything in our power to counter evil with love.

In Amy Tan's novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, four Chinese women gathered every week for the sharing of stories, feasting and for remembering "good times in the past and good times yet to come." One of the women recalls, "People thought we were wrong to serve banquets every week while many people in the city were starving .... Others thought we were possessed by demons – to celebrate when even within our own families we had lost generations, had lost homes and fortunes, and were separated, husband from wife, brother from sister, daughter from mother .... How could we laugh, people asked."

She explains that "it's not that we had no heart or eyes for pain. We were all afraid. We all had our miseries. But to despair was to wish back for something already lost .... So we decided to hold parties and pretend each week had become the new year. Each week we could forget past wrongs done to us .... We feasted, we laughed,

we played games .... We told the best stories. And each week, we could hope to be lucky. That hope was our only joy."[23]

Christian communities gather each week and celebrate not a new year, but the end of time – the feast of the eighth day. It's not that we have no heart or eyes for pain. But in the face of it all, we gather to celebrate the resurrection, to hear again "God's great joke." We feast, we celebrate rituals and we tell the best stories.

Those symbols and those stories enable us to speak boldly about the grace that lies ahead of us in the darkness. In the words of an early Christian Eucharistic prayer, we proclaim: "We remember your coming in glory." *That* hope is our deepest joy.

To tell the story of Jesus is to tell the final truth about the human story, and to tell the human story in its depth, as Jesus did, is to point to the mystery of God at the heart of human existence, to "name grace." In offering the good news of the Christian story, we offer not an interpretation of human life, but rather an invitation to "come and see" and to "go and do likewise." We invite others to make Jesus' story their own and, in doing so, to experience ordinary human life as graced.

> This is what we proclaim to you:
> what was from the beginning,
> what we have heard,
> what we have seen with our own eyes,
> what we have looked upon and touched –
> We speak the word of life. (1Jn. 1:1)

An earlier version of some of this lecture appeared in the article, "Naming Grace: A Theology of Proclamation," Worship 60 (1986) 434-448. A fuller development of the central insights is now available in Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination *(NY: Continuum, 1997).*

23. Amy Tan, The Joy Luck Club (New York: Putnam's, 1989) 11-12.

3. Preaching into a New Century

DAVID BUTTRICK

A few weeks ago, we were sitting in a Nashville coffee shop looking at a theater building across the street. While we watched, a moving van backed up to the stage door and workers started loading scenery into the van – a rolled up backdrop, some side flats painted to look like a Victorian garden. A play had closed.

But then, while we were watching, another moving van pulled up and, suddenly, new scenery was being unloaded into the theater. A new drama would soon take the stage. Wasn't it Karl Barth who described our world as living "between the times?" The phrase catches the current cultural mood. A world begun in the Renaissance/Reformation is closing down and soon something new will be taking the stage. So here's our question: What will preaching be like in the next century? What is the future of the pulpit?

I

Let us begin by facing the fact of change. All over the world there is turmoil. Everything that seemed so secure has been shaken. Russia is struggling to find a new political system. South Africa is rebuilding an interracial life. The Middle East is torn by conflict between modernization and a Muslim old-guard. Everywhere our world is troubled, and will be troubled for decades to come! We are passing through a period of epochal change not unlike the breakdown of the Greco-Roman world or the collapse of the Medieval synthesis.

Have you noticed, we've been rewriting dictionaries lately? Language that normally gives societies stability has suddenly been changing – our dictionaries, our Bibles, our liturgical texts. Ever since von Humbolt, we have known that language embodies

worldviews, so when language changes, as it has all over the globe, then – guess what? – a whole wide world is changing its mind.

During the last great epochal change, the shift from Medieval to a modern world, we saw feudal fiefdoms give way to nations, and cathedrals replaced by multiplying parish chapels. Now in another time of change, we can anticipate different political systems and new patterns of church life as well. So begin by marking the turmoil around us. The scenery is changing. We live "between the times."

Certainly, the world is widening. These days, to use a horrendous term, we are being globalized. So-called third- and fourth-world people are stretching awake. South America, Africa and Asia will be economic centers of the future, while the West – that's us – will be displaced. But locally, even in southern Indiana, we are being globalized.

We have Chinese "take-out" in our villages, and Argentinean wine in our supermarkets. Good heavens, Mariah Hill has a Mexican restaurant. Look over the products that fill our homes. How many have labels from somewhere else in the world – Taiwan, Japan, some new African nation? The world is widening everywhere.

Of course, "globalization" can be a religious term as well. Soon, yes, very soon, the world's religions will be showing up in your community. Catholics may well be troubled by rival steeples; "free-church Protestants" – we say with a degree of dismay. Well, what will we say of the Islamic mosque or the Buddhist temple that soon may be an option in American villages?

Worldwide, Christianity is a minority religion but, during the next centuries, it may well become optional, one of many religions in our own land. The dialogue with other religions has been deferred during the 20th century by the rise of biblical theology; but it is returning. Once more, the Christian pulpit will have to give an account of faith on a competitive basis.

Of course, the real rival to Christianity these days is not another religion, but no religion, no religion at all. Since the mid 19th century, when it became an "ism," secularism has swept Europe as well as the English-speaking world. So, here in America, the

Christian population has been shrinking steadily. The people who drop out are not leaving our parishes for other churches; they are leaving for no church at all. The secular realm has grown large and, as secular parents breed secular children, secularism will claim still more territory.

Do you read the comic strip "Doonesbury"? Recently, Doonesbury pictured a gothic church with only three people attending, two little old ladies and a decrepit gentleman huddled on a first pew. A young priest was standing in the pulpit, his arm raised in triumph, saying, "Our Day Will Come Again!"

We laugh at the cartoon but, in a way, are laughing at ourselves. For to most of us, the renewal of our parishes seems unlikely. We live amidst the collapse of what some have labeled "The Protestant Era"; the Catholic centuries having dimmed some 400 years ago. So again the question, in an unbrave new world, what will preaching become in the next century?

II

Before we go further, maybe we had better stop and affirm a hard fact: There will be preaching in the future. There will be preaching, probably quite unlike our Sunday sermons, but there will be preaching. There will be preaching because God has commanded us to speak.

Has not God commissioned preachers in every age since the world began? Count up the number of times the phrase, "The Word of the Lord came to ..." is found in the Bible? The Word of the Lord came to Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, the list is too long to recite.

As for the Christian Scriptures, count up the references to preaching the Gospel – they occur on almost every page of the Epistles. During his lifetime, Jesus commissioned disciples and sent them into the world with news of God's kingdom come. Then, later, the risen Christ commanded witnesses, "Go tell."

As Willi Marxsen has noticed, the command to "Go tell" is a feature of every resurrection account. Apparently God, in God's wondrous humility, has trusted the divine presence to our speaking.

So, yes, in the future there will be preaching. Why? Because God has called the Church and set the word of the Gospel on our inept, frightened, stammering, ecclesial lips and that, as they say, is that! So there *will* be preaching.

But, look, there's a deeper reason for our vocation, a more human reason. We will preach because people nowadays are lost. The problem of the modern world, said Paul Tillich, is neither death – a first-century epidemic, nor guilt – a Medieval preoccupation, but meaninglessness. Surely, he was right. People wander in and out of groups, each group with a different small scale social agenda.

If there is no obvious end-purpose to human life, as Philosopher Lyotard says, no "metanarrative" to give us meaning, then we will live and move and have our being in a series of short term purposes – "I will buy a car," "I will finish schooling," "I will get a job," "I will be married," "I will buy a house," "I will have a family," "I will make some money," etc.

These short-term purposes are urged by advertising agencies and fed by desire but, to keep life going, they must be satisfied and then replaced by still other short-term desires. With no plot and few values, people's lives are diminished. We are bored by the repetition of our small-scale busyness day after day.

As W.H. Auden put it, "Life goes on like the gnawing of a mouse / There's this little job and this little house." The terrible truth of our age seems to be summed up in the great confessional catch-phrase: "We haven't got a clue!" So let us acknowledge our calling: We are preachers and, at least until God's "will be done," there will be preaching. But the questions remain: What will preaching be like in the next century? What is the future of the pulpit?

III

Are you ready for some answers? There are few to hand out. But at least we can wave toward the future. What will preaching be in the next century? *Preaching will be less biblical, but more evangelical.* Repeat: Less biblical, but more evangelical. The phrase may seem a contradiction in terms; it is not. During the 20th century, we have

witnessed the rise and fall of a biblical theology movement. To avoid cultural compromise, we turned back to the Bible.

The results have been impressive. Think of the great commentaries that line our library shelves. Think of biblical research; archaeologists have shoveled the Holy Land from one end to another. And what of books, thousands of books, on biblical meanings – the biblical understanding of psychology, of death, of church, world, sex, suffering, marriage, old age, you name it, and it's been written!

For half a century, the biblical theology movement influenced our preaching. Early in the century, P.T. Forsyth called us back to biblical preaching, and Karl Barth insisted on preaching the Bible – "The Bible," he said, was emphatic, "The Bible and nothing else," underline the word "nothing." Most priests and ministers followed along. Once upon a time, 19th-century Catholics preached sermons aimed at providing some reasonable basis for faith; they wrangled with the mind of their age apologetically.

Twentieth-century preachers have simply preached the Scriptures with a kind of biblical imperialism. Of course, the only problem is that, along the way, churches have been emptying! (Wasn't it Harry Emerson Fosdick who said that, "Only the preacher proceeds [on] the idea that people come to church desperately anxious to discover what happened to the Jebusites."]

So can we admit that somehow or other biblical preaching has failed us? Sermons based on biblical passages have not provided meaning for a meaningless people. Maybe the problem has something to do with the lectionary. Can a little scrap of Scripture, six to eight verses long, interpreted in a 10-minute homily, offer meaning for life? One of my doughty British grandmothers had a box divided up into 31 compartments. In each compartment was a rolled-up little scroll with a printed Bible verse. So each day Grandmother could tweezer up a Bible verse Word of God to guide her steps.

Now, ask yourselves, is lectionary preaching any saner? Rightly, the lectionary serves the Church year and the Church year, in turn,

helps us to recall the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord as the meaning of our lives. But if lectionary passages become separated from theology – not to mention systematic study of the whole Bible – then lections may provide no more than a schedule of little moralisms and/or pop-psyche insights from the pulpit.

To be blunt, there is more biblical preaching today than ever before in history and yet people are still biblical illiterates and, worse, have no theological meaning in which to live their lives. We are called to preach the Gospel, a message that will give meaning to life. But can any little snippet of Scripture declare the whole Gospel? The question we face can be phrased bluntly: Can we find a way to give meaning to meaningless people?

Look, look at our predicament: We get little minute-long news items from all over the world on the TV. We get short minute-long political bites from candidates for office. And then, on Sunday, we get little swatches of Scripture in church. What we cannot seem to do is to put all these bits and pieces together into any consistent pattern of meaning. The great Christian myths – creation and fall, redemption and consummation – have faded along with any widespread sense of the presence of God-with-us.

Secularism has eroded common faith. After all, late, leisurely breakfasts with *The New York Times* crossword puzzle is an attractive option! But the world will not come back to fill our churches until we are able to address the secular arena and offer something to make sense of life. So if we do preach Bible, then we must do so in such a way as to interpret not only Scripture by the human world and human meanings. After all, if the Bible is "a lamp unto our feet," it is not because it shines down at our feet, but ahead of itself giving light to the world!

Now stop and take note: There's a kind of pulse in the history of the Church. There are times when the Church pulls away from the world and there are times when we go out from ourselves into the world with news of God. For most of the 20th century, the Church

has drawn away from the world. Instead, we have gone back to sources.

So we have preached Bible passages, talking about biblical backgrounds and biblical meanings, and we have chased down early Christian origins for the liturgy – Hippolytus is big-time these days – and we have dedicated ourselves to preserving ourselves in a time of cultural upheaval. Of course, we have forgotten our Lord's blunt words: "Those who would save their lives will lose them!" – a fixed formula that surely applies to churches as much as individuals.

Can we be a Church without preaching good news in the wide world – a world, incidentally, that God loves? The agenda of the Church can never be itself! No, our Lord did not live out His life for 33 years redecorating the stable in Bethlehem. No, He walked out into a wide world and, at risk to Himself, announced God's new order. In our century, the Church has withdrawn from the world.

So now once more, the pulse beat! We must begin all over again to converse with the worldly world – something at which Catholics have always been rather successful. We must present the Gospel message evangelically but with apologetic smarts. Secularism has spread so that the world we live within is suddenly a mission field all over again. Yes, we will preach the Bible, but again and again we will reach beyond the biblical paradigm to relate the Gospel to the changing world we live within.

Let Billy Graham speak with a limp Bible in his hand, but early Christian preachers strode into the Gentile world without benefit of Scripture. They preached good news. There was a science fiction novel a few years ago in which, after some global catastrophe, a remnant human race gathered. The leader of the ragtag group stood up and, with a kind of crazy confidence, raised his fist and shouted, "With us the world begins all over again."

Was that the attraction of the first Christian missionaries? They announced the world's new beginning in Jesus Christ and invited people to join God's new humanity. Now, in turning of the ages, our message must be as compelling. In a broken-down world, we say, "Come be members of God's new creation." A message, incidentally,

a bit more exciting than an invitation to attend a local parish quilting bee. Like the Lord Himself, once more we must dare proclaim God's new order. So, yes, in the future, preaching will be less biblical but, oddly enough, more evangelical.

IV

Again the question: What will preaching be like in the next century? What is the future of the pulpit? Answer: *Preaching will rediscover eschatology.* We will turn once more to the future of God.

During the past century, preaching has looked backward. We preachers have been obsessed with the past tense. Maybe we were reacting to the 19th century. For in the 19th century, we watched the rise of the sciences. The descriptive sciences demystified the world of nature. In sermons, preachers used to argue from the beauty, goodness, order of nature to a benevolent God. But the descriptive sciences examining the natural world found no trace of the unseen God. H.G. Wells said it bluntly:

> There was a time when my little soul shone and was uplifted by the starry enigma of the sky .... Now I go out and look at the stars as I look at the pattern of wallpaper on a railroad station waiting room ....

So what was the result: The result was that apologetic theology simply collapsed. Oh, yes, churches still trundled impressionable youth off to sylvan retreats, hoping that somehow they'd get some feel of God there. But for the most part, the pulpit simply handed nature over to the scientists and looked for evidence of God elsewhere.

Now the same sort of thing happened to "religious experience." Long ago, Grandma and Grandpa were convinced that the so-called religious affections in some manner mirrored the unseen gestures of God. After all, had not John Bunyan chartered the movements of the soul, tracing the path of everyone's *Pilgrim's Progress*? And did not the sacraments span our lives? But then, in the late 19th century, we began to hear from another science, then called "The New Psychology."

Nowadays, all of us live A.F., After Freud. So what Grandma used

to call God has been relabeled "anxiety hysteria" and, if Grandma is extremely religious, then as "paranoia." Again, we were dealing with described phenomena that to an analyst displayed no obvious evidence of God. No wonder Freud himself discussed religion as *The Future of an Illusion*.

So the natural sciences and the social sciences exorcised the presence of God; God was evident neither in nature nor in the movements of the soul, except to those who, like Kierkegaard, dared to leap into faith. Oh yes, there were mysteries of nature as well as mysteries of the deep-pool self, but a "God of gaps," as Bonhoeffer observed, is no God at all.

So, with the rise of science and psychology, the Church caved in. If there was no revelation in nature or in human nature, where then was revelation? Answer: history. The Church turned to history. God was revealed by mighty acts in history that comprised something called "salvation history," beginning with creation, the call of Abram, the exodus, the giving of the law, the monarchies, exile, and restoration – all were mighty acts revealing God.

So preachers availed themselves of the historical-critical method, reconstructing historical situations in search of elusive revelation. Of course, the ultimate revelation was said to be the history of Jesus Christ, a personal embodiment of God.

Now all these revelations, including the ultimate revelation, were written down in a book which, happily, the Church possessed, namely the Bible. So, though once upon a time God acted in history, now the history of God is available to us in book form.

Thus there was a chain from the unknowable, transcendent God to Jesus Christ, the Word of God, to the Bible, a witness to the Word of God, to the Church that interpreted the Bible, to sermons that recited the biblical message, to the people of God in Catholic pews. With nature ceded to the scientists and experience handed over to psychology, Christianity ended up with a past-tense history-book Bible. No wonder, back in the '60s, we began to hear from "Death of God" theologians!

Look, if all we can do is to read history in Scripture and apply

it to the world today, we will be in trouble. For our past-tense Bible contains first-century views of women, which are clearly sexist, and early hostile Christian anti-Semitism, and goodness knows what else. The only solution is to preach Scripture in the midst of an expectant faith, a faith that looks to the promises of God that call us beyond such literal prejudices.

At the turn of the ages, when, as the Bible says, people's "hearts are failing them for fear of what is coming on the earth," the pulpit must once more turn to the future of God. The promise of the kingdom of God was not invented by liberal theologians. No, the kingdom of God was the Gospel Jesus preached, and it is still central to the Gospel message. Look, if we know that God's new order will be inclusive, that it will welcome those whom we tend Pharisaically to reject, if it will ring with "the shout of them that triumph and the song of them that feast," then in the light of God's promises we can guess where God is at work in our world. We also can recover the Gospel's original gladness!

There's a true story about the island of Jamaica. Back in 1969, the island was granted liberty. Freedom would take effect on August the sixth, but the announcement was made in June. As a result, the island started partying for two months because they were living in the promise ahead of time.

Sermons are glad announcements of God's future, a future we celebrate in Eucharist. We have spent a century seeking the perfect anamnesis or chattering about Eucharist as a representation of past event. No, Eucharist is also an ahead-of-time celebration of the future of God, filled with real presence of risen Christ, and as such is an enactment of the same Gospel we preach. So, what will preaching be in the next century? Our pulpits will recover a sense of the future, a vision of the promised kingdom of God.

V

Now then, can we admit that the kingdom of God is a social vision? The kingdom is neither hidden in our hearts nor a marijuana dream of liberation theology radicals. No, the kingdom of God is as wide as the world. Jesus preached a new social order and not,

emphatically not, some secret in a believer's heart. So here's a gesture toward the future: Preaching in the next century will move beyond personalism to speak of salvation in terms of human community.

Well, if we are honest, we'll have to admit that it's about time! Ever since Luther, Protestant Christianity has tended to focus on the inwardness of the individual believer – what Catholics have often labeled a "fiediest heresy." Protestants have cherished an objective word of God Bible, but also the subjective inward testimony of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. (No wonder that in every age we have been troubled by a charismatic left wing and a fundamentalist right wing.)

Certainly in the past two centuries, Protestant individualism has been predominant. Nineteenth-century pietism arose, swept through Methodism, and in the 20th century continued in what Philip Reiff once labeled the "triumph of the therapeutic." As a result, we clerics have preached a Gospel designed for personal self awareness. We have tended to describe sin in psychological terms – our hates and prides and, above all, our anxieties – and we have described salvation in much the same way; salvation is feeling good inside of ourselves. By the way, priests have preached in much the same way.

But these days the promise of inner peace doesn't seem to do much. Shall we tell the millions of American workers dumped by "downsizing" corporations to have a little Jesus in their hearts? Good heavens, they want jobs. Or shall we preach Jesus as a prince of inner peace to citizens of Sarajevo? Our age has rediscovered what the Bible calls the "powers that be." If the liberation theologians have taught us anything, it is to read the Bible as a social promise. Sin is being in bondage to the social dimension of powers that be and salvation is a social liberation.

So in the future we will struggle to discover the social, interpersonal nature of sin. Is sin something that is fabricated in social groups before it is internalized? Perhaps. When Paul tries to explain how come Christ was crucified, he does not point to

the human heart; he says bluntly, "the powers that be." Perhaps sin begins as a society attempts to preserve itself against the sweep of time and destiny. But more, we must begin to picture salvation not as a one-by-one ticket to heaven for one-by-one people, but as a new society with God and neighbors, as an interpersonal miracle of grace.

Maybe individualism began with the Greek invention of the soul – so some scholars suppose. But individualism has all but destroyed preaching. How can the Gospel relate to Eucharist if it is narrowly personal? For at table we do not see individuals feeding on their inward faith. No, we see the people of God prefiguring the future promise – "They will be my people and I will be their God!"

There's a wonderful little parish church in the American Southwest. The congregation meets in a deserted school building. Crowded in, many people are sitting on the floor to hear a sermon. Then, they stand and gather around a borrowed kitchen table. They are black and they are white, Chicano and Indian. And you look around and see in their difference the promise of all humanity together.

There's someone's black baby in your arm and with your other arm you're supporting a shaky old man. And they sing, the people sing, to the tune of "John Brown's Body," "Mine eyes have seen the coming of the Kingdom of our God, a kingdom that is coming according to the Word." In the new century, we will preach the future of God, picturing salvation as a new creation community. And we will celebrate our social salvation as Eucharist people.

VII

Listen, when you spin a crystal ball, you're always guessing. God alone is Lord of the future. Preaching will probably be shaped in the other world, in the barrios of South America, among the thatched huts of tribal Africa. In 1900, 80% of the Christians in the world were in Europe and North America. Now 70% of Christians are in Asia, Africa and South America.

Christianity is enlarging in these lands by a quarter of a million people every week. In our world, we are beginning to discover our

own minority status. But we have a chance now, as never before, to rediscover our calling. We have been picked out to be preachers. Let us find a new and lively speech for the future, a future still filled with the sweet promises of God.

4. Collaborative Preaching: God's Empowering Word

JOHN S. MCCLURE

For those of you who don't know, I am a proponent of what I call collaborative preaching. I do not assume that this is the only way to engage in a theologically sound pulpit ministry – but I do hold that it is a form of pulpit ministry that is timely and can be a significant *empowering ministry* in churches who take lay involvement and participation in the Church seriously. I will return to describe what I mean by collaborative preaching later, and tomorrow.

Let me give you a brief summary definition of collaborative preaching to tide you over: The word "collaboration," of course, means "working together." Collaborative preaching is a form of preaching in which homilist and hearer work together in a group (the sermon roundtable) to establish and interpret topics for preaching. They also decide together what the practical results of those interpretations might be for the congregation. The homilist then goes into the pulpit and re-presents the dynamics of this collaborative conversation in the sermon.

The title for my lecture tonight is "Collaborative Preaching: God's Empowering Word." Empowerment is one of those words that we hear all the time these days, yet I am never quite sure that we know what it means, or why it is important for the Church and its ministry. One of the most useful definitions of empowerment that I have found is in the work of an old friend of many of us, Rollo May. According to May, empowerment includes two kinds of power: *nutritive* power (power for others), and *integrative* power (power with others).[1]

1. Regina Coll CSJ, "Power, Powerlessness and

Nutritive power is nutritious, it feeds power to others, by giving it away. It is power *for* others, shared power, power that has the other person's well-being in mind, power that is undergirded by love. Nutritive *empowerment* includes all the ways that leaders invite or permit others to assume responsibility for the direction of their own lives and to assume leadership roles themselves. It is all the ways a leader includes followers in an active role in the interpretation of their situation and in making decisions about the future.

I will say more about nutritive empowerment at the end of this lecture, because to my way of thinking, nutritive power (power for others) is the means or pathway to integrative power (power with others). Tonight, however, I want to concentrate first on *integrative* empowerment in ministry. Then I want to move on to consider how nutritive power provides a pathway to integrative empowerment in our churches.

First, integrative empowerment. Simply put, integrative empowerment is power with others. It is generated when people are integrated with one another. Integrative empowerment is sparked when spiritual conversations, connections and alliances are formed between persons or communities that are, in reality, very different from one another. Integrative *empowerment* includes all the ways that a leader connects people within one community or between communities.

In our generation, integrative empowerment requires that we develop a "public theology" for preaching.

A Public Theology for Preaching

Public theologians assert that the central task of the Christian ministry in the late modern period is to "resist the gravitational pull of privatization"[2] that has gripped the churches, and to re connect

Empowerment," Religious Education 81, no. 3, (Summer '86): 417.

2. "A Spirituality of Public Life" in Parker Palmer, Barbara G.

the Gospel message with the public realm. According to Parker Palmer, the word "public" is a metaphor for the "ebb and flow of the *company of strangers*, which happens in relatively unstructured and disorderly ways: on the city streets, in parks and squares, at festivals and rallies, and shopping malls, neighborhoods and voluntary associations."[3]

Public life is a "messy middle layer" between formal social or political institutions (such as the government) and the private realm (of family and friends) "from which the stranger *qua* stranger is excluded."[4]

Philosopher of communication Jurgen Habermas speaks about this realm of the public as "the lifeworld." According to Habermas, in our world today, this "lifeworld" is being squeezed from two sides. On one side is what he calls the "system" (of exchange/money, media, and corporate and political institutions). On the other side is the private realm – the ever-expanding cult of the individual, accumulation and the closed family.

The communicative goal of voluntary organizations like the Church, therefore, is to wage a war for this messy middle layer – strengthening it so that community is not lost, and so the "system" can once again become a servant, rather than our master.

According to Palmer, we cannot be spiritually alive as Christians unless we venture forth into the public realm and encounter the "strangers" who live there. The stranger is the *other* who presents us with what Edward Farley calls the "mysterious presence of something which contests my projecting meanings on it, an

Wheeler, and James W. Fowler, (eds.), Caring for the Commonweal: Education for Religious and Public Life (Mercer University Press, 1990), 159.

3. Ibid., 152.
4. Ibid., 152-3.

unforeseeable depth which … cannot be cognitively or emotionally mastered."[5]

Theologically, the stranger represents both the Holy Other and the human *other*: the dual foci of the great commandment. As Christians, we are commanded to love God, the Holy Other, who is the ground of all love and justice. We are likewise commanded to love neighbor, the human *other*, whose vulnerability invites us beyond ourselves into the realm of compassion, suffering and responsibility.[6]

Patrick Keifert identifies three ways to think of the stranger in relation to the Church: 1) as the outsiders who come from beyond the Church itself; 2) as "inside strangers" who "remain outside the intimate group that usually makes up most of the leadership in a congregation"; and 3) as a description of "the irreducible difference between two persons that exist in any encounter."[7]

When I use the word "stranger," therefore, do not assume that I am speaking of persons who represent some exotic form of experience or behavior. I am simply re-conceptualizing the way we think about the people all around us, in the Church and beyond. The realm of the stranger is *one step beyond the realm of identification.* Once we cease to assume that we can identify with the person sitting next to us, or the person we think we know so well, and once we learn not to project our own meanings or expectations onto them, then we enter into that uncharted territory where they might instruct us as strangers.

Strangers are all around us, in the pews next to us and beyond the sanctuary doors. There's Martha who, age 68 and childless, battles

5. Good and Evil, Interpreting a Human Condition (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990), 39.
6. Farley, Good and Evil, 41-42.
7. Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 8-9.

loneliness. There's Susan, a lesbian, who wonders what to do with her sexuality in both culture and Church. There's Bill, a busy lawyer, who is often angry and suffers under the oppressive weight of the upper middle class rat race.

There's Clara, a heavy smoker dying from lung cancer, living in fear and denial because her family owns part of a huge tobacco interest. There's Bob, a missionary, who sometimes wonders if what he does really makes a difference. There's Jenny, a 7-year-old, who feels a great love for God and who wants to give more to the Church and to the poor. There's Carol, a single parent of three children, struggling at the bottom of the pay scale. And there are many, many others in the church and in the community around us.

To ask these people what kinds of interpretive spins they put on the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to embark on an adventure in the public realm. If we ask what in particular they see in the Gospel that is meaningful for their lives, we will hear all kinds of things, some of which will seem to us to be heretical.

Yet, if we dare to involve these diverse folk in a roundtable process through which they are invited to wrestle with the Scripture, theology and confessions of the Church, and are expected to come to terms with the Gospel and with each other, we will create an opportunity for a preachable Word to emerge that may bind the Church and the world together in solidarity and hope.

This is the adventure that follows when we take the discernment of the Word of God out of the private realms of the pastor's study and the devotional closet into the public arena, where strangers within and beyond the Church hold us accountable to the unique reality and particularity of their own spiritual experience.

There are at least two usual ways to miss out on this adventure in the public realm. One way is to "try to gain enough power to enforce our own standards on the alien experience."[8] According to Palmer, "(this) takes the form of religious institutions and hierarchies

8. Palmer, "Spirituality," 155.

controlling the definition of 'orthodoxy' and suppressing all signs of 'heresy.'"[9] Homiletically, it takes the form of preaching in which a clerical elite rehearses timeless exegetical pearls of wisdom and dated doctrine, or repeats platitudes and formulas that are supposed to have magical efficacy.

The second way to miss out on this adventure in the public realm is to create and fortify something called a "private life."[10] Palmer asserts that "instead of encountering, engaging, and growing from the diversity within and outside us, we have tried to avoid it altogether by building high walls of privatism."[11] Congregational life is given over to what Richard Sennett calls the "ideology of intimacy,"[12] the idea that "the purpose of human life is the fullest development of one's individual personality, which can take place only within ... intimate relationships."[13]

When this is the case, worship and preaching tend to go in one of two different directions. The first direction is toward anonymity and bureaucratization. Worship becomes either an aesthetic or entertainment experience in which one simultaneously is left alone in one's private world and is engaged by a constant barrage of entertaining or aesthetic stimuli. Sermons resemble after-dinner speeches that entertain us, or they become moments of highly crafted aesthetic or oratorical wonder. This is worship controlled by the metaphor of the home theatre.

At the other end of the continuum, worship and preaching become attempts to *recreate the private sphere* in what Mark Searle calls "the psuedo-family atmosphere cultivated by suburban

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. The Fall of Public Man (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 259.
13. Kiefert, Welcoming the Stranger, 24.

fellowshipping. Worship becomes what Robert Bellah calls a 'life style enclave.'[14] Preaching will usually be folksy and intimate in style, with an abundance of storytelling and heart-rending self disclosure by the preacher. This is worship controlled by the metaphor of "family" as "folks like us."

Throughout such worship and preaching, God is usually fairly domesticated. To use Palmer's language:

> God is made an inmate of the private realm. Gone is the strangeness of God, the wild and alien quality of holiness that was so well known to primal peoples (witness the Hebrew Bible). In its place is an image of God as a member of the church family circle. God is like a kind and comfortable old friend, a God who comforts and consoles us – and even reinforces our prejudices – but in no way challenges or stretches our lives.[15]

Unwittingly, many churches create a private realm in which neither the human stranger nor the strangeness of God has any place, a den of comfort in which parishioners can remain anonymous and not have to encounter anything that is strange or alien.

Kiefert points out how the stranger was very important to the worship and preaching of Israel.[16] Worship was not a human device to hold God or others at bay; worship was a gift from God of God's self. This gift was offered in both the preaching and the worship of the people of God and was available to all. The stranger was invited to worship, and the needs and hopes of the stranger filled the preaching that guided the people of God in their journey away from

14. Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 72ff., quoted in Ibid., 34.
15. "Spirituality," 158.
16. Welcoming the Stranger, 57ff.

sectarianism and nationalism toward becoming a truly universal faith.

From the three mysterious strangers who visited Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:1-21), to the centurion who begged Jesus to heal his slave (Luke 7:1-10), to the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with her tears (Luke 7:36-50), to the stranger who broke bread with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), the Biblical testimony reminds us over and over that strangers "may be God's special envoys to bless or challenge us."[17] The history of the Church's mission is a testimony to the many ways that people of other nationalities, cultures and experiences re-interpret the Gospel so that the message comes alive in new, life-giving ways.

The reality of the stranger in our midst, therefore, *anticipates a Church not yet revealed* and becomes for us today a symbol of the next generation of believers, those who do not know the limitations of this generation's rituals and creeds. All these new believers know is that there has been a Word of hope spoken in the wilderness and that perhaps they can share in the discernment and articulation of this Word in this day and age. This will only happen, however, if the Church dares again to reach across its carefully defined boundaries and welcome these strangers into conversation.

Preaching that Empowers

We now turn to the question: How can preaching express integrative power? Recent attempts to develop public theologies suggest several commitments that preachers must have if they are to form deeper alliances of spiritual power within the community of faith and between the community of faith and the world in which we live.

First, we must attempt in our preaching to re-connect the private

17. John Koenig, New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 3.

realm and the public realm. We must strive to take ourselves and those around us who have become satisfied with living cloistered lives of religious and personal self-protection and enter into some form of teaching-learning encounter with the strangers both within the church and just beyond the walls of the church building. We must seek out the unique, strange and sometimes bizarre interpretations of the Gospel that are around us in our culture, in the minds and hearts of good church people, and latent within the recesses of our own lives, and come to terms with these in the pulpit.

We do not do this in order to appear contemporary and inclusive, to develop market-driven leadership strategies, or to make preaching more relevant. We do it because we believe that the Word of God becomes known when real people, who are in reality more different than they are alike, strive to discern and express their solidarity in Christ. We do this in order to cultivate within the theological imagination of our Christian communities an understanding of the other, the stranger, as the potential bearer of wisdom and insight, rather than the bearer of threatening values.

Second, we must cultivate in our worship and preaching a sense that our proclamation of the redemptive work of Christ is in continuity with the creative Word of God, the Word that created and breathed life into the world. John Calvin, in Book I of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, asserts that the Scriptural testimony to God's revelation in Jesus Christ is a "help … to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe."[18]

Like a pair of "spectacles," biblical revelation helps us see clearly the hand of God at work redemptively in the world.[19] In the same

18. ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XX (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 69.
19. Ibid., 70.

way, Roman Catholic scholar Karl Rahner has pointed out how Christian worship is the redemptive culmination of the "liturgy of the world and its history."[20] Our preaching must never proclaim Christ as if Christ's redemptive work related only to a selective history of salvation. Our homiletical imaginations must become large enough to embrace the relatively chaotic depths of both the inner life and the public life.

In order to accomplish this, the focus of preaching must move from the center of the Christian community to its margins, from the pastor's study to the sanctuary door. The preacher must stand at the boundary of the community, at the place where its cultural linguistic *mythos* is being challenged and assailed by the often silenced voices of strangers and of the "God beyond the gods." Such preaching struggles to discern what the redemptive power of Christ is in this one world and in this one history.

Third, we must preach in such a way that the Church becomes a community of both ecclesial and public memory. Not only should our preaching remember and celebrate the history of the Church and the history of a particular congregation, but also we must remember especially the things that our culture and Church of privatism tend to forget.[21]

Christine Smith, in her book, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession and Resistance*,[22] encourages the preacher to remember the radical equality of all human beings before God. She invites preachers to remember the disabled, the sick, the aged, the dying, the abused, the unsuccessful, and all who have been relegated to the margins by our society.

20. "Secular Life and the Sacraments," The Tablet (6 March, 1971) 236-38; (13 March, 1971) 267-68. Quoted in Searle, "Private Religion," 41.
21. Ibid., 42-3.
22. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

We must cultivate in our preaching what Elaine Ramshaw calls a "critical memory." This means that we must work to recall the history, not of the conquerors, in order to display power and protect the status quo, but of the oppressed, the marginalized and the everyday saints, in order that all may find themselves present in the way that we narrate the story of God's saving activity in Jesus Christ.

Nutritive and Integrative Power Together

The pathway to integrative power runs through nutritive power. I do not want it to sound as if I want to encourage preachers to stand on platforms and harangue congregations for being victims of privatization, pleading with them to become "prophets like me." Neither do we need to sneak up behind parishioners with stories or parables in which the congregation consistently wears the "bad guy" hat of social alienation and privatization.

Instead, we must place preaching into a larger process in which we slowly pry open the private realm by placing people face to face with each other in a context in which otherness, rather than homogeneity, is valued and taken seriously. My desire with collaborative preaching is to help to re-create congregations as learning communities where Christians share power and permit themselves to be instructed by each other's differences.

The only way to accomplish this is to include others in the theological interpretation of their situation and in making decisions about their own future. This requires that we take a good hard look at *how* we prepare and preach sermons and how we lead our congregations. We have to examine carefully the hidden curricula in our governance, programs, worship and preaching.

We must ask methodological, rhetorical and communicational questions. We must look at the relationship between our preaching style and our leadership style. Alfred North Whitehead reminds us that "style" is "the fashioning of power."[23]

23. The Aims of Education (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 12.

Is there a style of preaching that is appropriate to express the kind of nutritive power that supports and fosters integrative power? I believe that there is. I call it collaborative preaching.[24] Let me project a hypothetical scenario that will suggest what I mean by collaborative preaching.

What if preachers saw themselves as parish-based "hosts" like Barnabas or Lydia, or Philologus and Julia, rather than as itinerant prophets like Jesus or the apostle Paul? What if preachers put together sermon brainstorming groups that would meet weekly to engage in critical roundtable conversation about the biblical text for Sunday morning? What if this group not only included the usual always-involved church members but also part-timers, folk on the margins of the community, missionaries on furlough, even members of the surrounding community?

What if this group changed regularly, with five members rotating on and five members off every two months or so, so that within a couple of years, in the average-sized congregation, a hundred or so members would have had the chance to be involved? What if the names of those in the group were printed in the bulletin on Sunday morning in order to foster feedback and accountability?

What if this group were given a *leading role* in helping the preacher to study the Bible, establish topics to preach, interpret these topics and decide what the congregation could do in light of these interpretations? What if the dynamics of their conversation were described or imitated from the pulpit on Sunday morning, so that the entire congregation was "let in" on this ongoing conversation?

Would this kind of collaborative process help the pulpit ministry empower members of a congregation to stand with others

24. See my forthcoming book entitled: The Roundtable Pulpit: Collaborative Preaching and Congregational Leadership (Nashville: Abingdon Press, summer, 1995).

(integrative power) at the same time that it expressed power for others (nutritive power)? I believe that it would.

Collaborative preaching is not a new idea. It has been suggested, even tried, by well-respected homileticians and pastors for at least 40 years.[25]25 But only recently has it been explored theologically,

25. In the 1963 Lyman Beecher lectures entitled Parish Back Talk, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 76-82, Browne Barr advocated a "sermon seminar" to assist the preacher in sermon preparation. Later, in The Ministering Congregation, (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1972), 75-82, he and co pastor Mary Eakin described how the sermon seminar could become an integral part of an entire program of lay ministry. Homiletician John Killinger saw collaborative sermon preparation as a way to recover congregational interest in preaching. Listen to the cassette tape series by John Killinger entitled: "How to Enrich Your Preaching: An Eight-Session Cassette Course for Individual or Group Use" (Nashville: Abingdon Press, Abingdon Audio Graphics, 1975). Collaborative models were also suggested by theoreticians of parish dialogue such as Ruel Howe and Clyde Reid. See Ruel L. Howe, The Miracle of Dialogue (New York: The Seabury Press, 1963), and Clyde. H. Reid, "Preaching and the Nature of Communication," Pastoral Psychology 14 (1963), 40-49. More recently, Don Wardlaw has identified collaboration as a way to help the preacher correlate today's social context with the ancient social context of biblical passages. See "Preaching as the Interface of Two Social

homiletically and practically as a viable, ongoing form of pulpit ministry. It is my belief that collaborative preaching may be one important road to travel in our quest for a way of preaching that actually empowers others to become the church of Jesus Christ.

I have chosen in this lecture to accentuate one theological trajectory for collaborative preaching – its ability to empower congregations – to welcome the strangers in our midst into the fullness of liturgical, homiletic and congregational participation, to connect us with the "public" in our midst and beyond our church doors, and to share power and authority in interpreting our mission.

Let me mention briefly six other benefits of collaborative preaching.

First, it dramatically increases biblical literacy in local congregations. In essence, the method puts together inductive Bible study and preaching. In order to teach collaborative preaching, I have to spend as much time teaching my students how to lead Bible studies as I do teaching them how to prepare sermons that "listen" to what happens in Bible studies.

Through collaborative preaching, laity learn the Bible, and they learn what the Bible is for – i.e. proclaiming the good news to our generation. Laity are also empowered as interpreters of the Bible for their own daily lives. No longer do they feel that they need "experts" on hand in order to read the Bible devotionally. If you couple this

Worlds: The Congregation as Corporate Agent in the Act of Preaching," Arthur Van Seters (ed.), Preaching as a Social Act: Theology and Practice (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 55-93. Pamela Ann Moeller, in her book entitled A Kinesthetic Homiletic: Embodying Gospel in Preaching (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 21, includes corporate sermon preparation as an integral part of her performative homiletic.

practice with the use of the lectionary to set the text each week, then your congregation will learn even more.

Second, collaborative preaching teaches congregations what preaching is, and what it is for. Lay participants say things like: "I never realized that so much Bible study went into preaching." Or, "Now I know how important preaching is." Collaborative preaching tends to up the ante of appreciation for preaching and to make better listeners out of our congregations.

Third, collaborative preaching closes the gap between preaching and the real lives of hearers. *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, (approved by the Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, National Conference of Catholic Bishops), states that "the preacher provides the congregation of the faithful with words to express their faith, and with words to express the human realities to which this faith responds." (6) Furthermore, "the preacher represents the community by voicing its concerns, naming its demons, and thus enabling it to gain some understanding and control of the evil which afflicts it." (7)

Collaborative preaching does not assume that preachers can do this enormous task simply by "identifying" with hearers. The range and breadth of human life and of the demonic in human life requires a careful exegesis of human life and the demonic *in this place and time*. In our socially diverse context today, it is more likely that we, as preachers, cannot identify with our hearers – and so we must *ask* them about their lives and about their afflictions.

Also, collaborative preaching groups, as I envision them, must move toward tentative decisions for forms of practice in their own lives and in and for the congregation as a whole. Preaching, then, becomes embedded in the lives and practices of living out the faith that actually exists in a particular local congregation.

Fourth, collaborative preaching acknowledges the influence of social location on biblical interpretation. It makes a difference whether I interpret the crucifixion while sitting in my study or office, or if I do it while sitting with a group of people at the mall, or in someone's home or, perhaps, in a shelter for battered women.

Even moving from the pastor's study to the youth room will make a tremendous difference.

Fifth, collaborative preaching teaches the preacher the humble practice of generosity as the priest's first movement in all relationships with laity. Fundamental to this method is learning how to put generosity before suspicion when engaged in theological and spiritual conversations with laity. Priests must learn to bring all of their learning in seminary in under the fledgling interpretations of laity *first*! Then they will invite the community to critique and discern itself *second*. And only *last* will the priest wade into the waters of didactic communication.

Finally, collaborative preaching symbolizes that leadership in a particular congregation is collaborative in the first instance. Without precluding the need for sovereign and consultative leadership styles in certain circumstances, collaborative preaching symbolizes, from the center of liturgical practice, that participation in leadership in this congregation is welcomed – indeed, expected, and that an ecclesiology of the Church's sacramentality is taken seriously.

Having shared with you tonight what collaborative preaching is, and my convictions about why it is important, theologically and ethically, tomorrow I will walk you through the process of how to get and prepare a collaborative sermon. I hope that you will come back for more!

5. Preaching to the Hungers of the Heart: The Liturgical Homily as "a Necessary Source of Nourishment"

JAMES A. WALLACE, CSSR

Introduction

My reading this summer included Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *The Poisonwood Bible*. It is the story of the Reverend Nathan Price, an evangelical preacher from the south who volunteers to go to the Congo to spend a year at a mission there. He takes his family, which includes his wife Oleanna and their four daughters: Rachel (age 17), Leah and Adah (twins, age 14), and Ruth May (age 5). The year is 1951. The story is mostly told from the perspectives of the four daughters, each with a unique voice.

As the narrative begins, the family arrives at the airport to depart on this venture; they find that they are limited to 44 pounds of luggage per person. This had not entered into their calculations when packing; they are 61 pounds overweight. Rev. Price, of course, walks away and leaves it up to his wife to sort out what needs to be discarded.

All things frivolous (even though necessary to the oldest girl Rachel) are cast aside, but this in no way solves the problem. Then, they remember that the 40 pounds does not apply to what they have on their person. Leah, one of the daughters, tells us, "We struck out for Africa carrying all our excess baggage on our bodies, under our clothes. Also we had clothes under our clothes. My sisters and I left home, wearing six pairs of underdrawers, two half slips and camisoles, several dresses one on top of the other, with pedal pushers underneath and outside of everything an all-weather coat.

The other goods, tools, cake-mix boxes and so forth were tucked out of sight in our pockets and under our waistbands, surrounding us in a clanking armor .... My father, of course, was bringing the Word of God, which fortunately weighs nothing at all."

Leah's comment set me thinking about the word of God, and what it weighs. How does one estimate the weight of the word? Does it "weigh nothing at all"? Another Price daughter, Rachel, provides an answer when she recounts their arrival in Africa and what happens when the family is taken directly to the open-roofed church where the village has prepared a meal for them.

When all is ready, the village chief announces: "Reverend and Mrs. Price and your children. You are welcome to our feast. Today we have killed a goat to celebrate your coming," and the women cooking the meal break into clapping, cheering and a great clamor ensues. Then, Nathan is invited to offer a word of thanks. In doing that, he serves up his own meal, choosing a text from Genesis about "the emissaries of mercy smoting the sinners who come heedless to the sight of God, heedless in their nakedness."

As he is speaking, Nathan points to one woman at the fire, who like all of the women, is bare breasted. He then compares nakedness to the darkness of the soul, and how "God will destroy any place where the clamor of sinners has grown great before the face of the Lord ...." When he stops speaking, no one cheers or claps or sings anymore. Indeed, there is no more loud clamor.

A few women use their wraparound sarongs to cover their breasts. Some leave to go home without any supper. Nathan has served up the Word of God, a weighty word; he has provided his own meal and it is a heavy one, indigestible, in fact. It is something this preacher continues to do throughout the novel.

What, then, is the weight of the word of God? I invite you to imagine it in terms of food, the weight of a meal. God's word weighs in as nourishment that builds up the body of believers, feeding them, responding to their hunger. While it can be both heavy and unappetizing at times, as well as one offering little more than

insubstantial sound bites at others, at its best it can provide substantial sustenance for the human spirit, mind and heart.

It has the capacity to respond to the existential condition captured in the words of a contemporary troubadour, Bruce Springsteen, who has reminded us: "Everybody's got a hungry heart."

The Word of God: Food to be Eaten and Digested

The Word of God as something to be eaten is dramatically imaged in the writings of two of the major prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures and in the final book of the New Testament. John McKenzie reminds us that the word was "the charisma of the prophet, as instruction in the Law was of the priest and counsel of the wise man."

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel are given a scroll to eat. "See, I place my words in your mouth," Jeremiah is told (1:9), and, later in the book, Jeremiah says, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; … ." (Jer 15:16; other translations have "When I found your words, I *devoured* them)."

Similarly, in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, a voice says to the prophet, "O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll and go, speak to the house of Israel." Ezekiel says: "Then I ate it and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey" (Ezk 3:1-3).

And, in the New Testament, the seer John in the book of Revelation is told to go and take a scroll from the angel's hand and "take and eat" (Rev 10:8f). Here the prophet finds it sweet in the mouth, but sour in the stomach. All three prophets spoke at times of great upheaval; each was called to digest the word of God into their very being before they spoke and acted.

When we think about Jesus, two of the activities He is most frequently presented as engaging in are preaching the word of God and eating. And the two are intimately related: His eating with others is itself a proclamation, just as His proclamation is a form of nourishment. Jesus, who came proclaiming the Kingdom of God in the Synoptic tradition, and who is presented as the Word made

flesh in the Fourth Gospel, especially grips our imagination in His connection with food, both as a consumer and as a provider.

Again and again, the gospels remind us how much Jesus loved to eat and to share food with others. The question, "Why does he eat with sinners?" usually draws attention to the company Jesus keeps, but equally significant is the activity: He *eats* with sinners and tax collectors.

There wasn't anyone He wouldn't eat with: from Simon the Pharisee to Martha, Mary and Lazarus, to Matthew and Zaccheus, both tax collectors and collaborators with the Roman authorities, to the Twelve, and to a multitude of five thousand on one occasion and four thousand on another. One of His last actions was to share a meal with His intimates, including the one who would betray Him.

The only miracle found in all four gospels, Nathan Mitchell points out, is one involving food. Jesus fed the hungry multitude. And we hear about it six times, twice in Mark and Matthew, once in Luke and John. In Matthew and Mark, He first feeds a multitude of Jews, then a multitude of Gentiles.

But the significance is more than an abundant meal from scant resources, more even than a gesture of compassion and care for a multitude of tired and hungry strangers. Most often when we think of these occasions, we focus on how He took, blessed, broke and then gave the food to the disciples to distribute (in John, Jesus Himself gives it out). Thus, the link between this event and the Last Supper and then to our own gathering around the table of the Eucharist receives the emphasis.

Or, in this day of great famines throughout the world, we can hear in this narrative the imperative to feed any and all who hunger; Jesus' concern that "the people have no food" challenges us when viewing scenes of starvation in Africa, Latin America, Asia, as well as those who hunger in our own country. His turning to the disciples and saying, "You feed them" speaks straight to our hearts and calls us to action. But there is yet another way to hear this story: Jesus Himself is bread given to and for us.

In the Gospel of Mark, after the second account of feeding the

four thousand (Mk 8:1-8) followed by His refusal to give a sign to the Pharisees, Jesus gets into a boat. Mark says, "Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat" (8:14). What does this statement mean? Isn't it a contradiction? What is this "one loaf" that Mark refers to?

Jesus goes on to speak of the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod, but the disciples do not understand. They think He is upset because they do not have any bread. Jesus grows impatient, questioning them about the fragments left over, how many were there in each instance. Finally, in frustration, asking, "Do you not yet understand?" They do not understand that they do have bread; the one loaf that is in the boat with them, Jesus.

The fourth gospel makes the link even more clearly when it presents Jesus the Word made flesh, the revelation of the Father, as the bread come down from heaven.

In the bread of life discourse: "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal" (6:27). "Very truly, I tell you it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (32-33). "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (35).

Jesus *as Word*, as the revelation of the Father, is our food. We are to eat the bread of Jesus, the Word of God, that we might have eternal life, along with the bread that is the flesh of the Son of Man.

From the early centuries, the nourishing power of God's Word in the Scriptures has been recognized. The tradition of *lectio divina*, the slow deliberate reading of the Word of God, has been rediscovered in our own day by both preachers and listeners as a way of feeding on the word.

The language of *lectio* is the vocabulary of gastronomy: to savor, taste, consume, digest, and even ruminate and belch. Abba Anthony of the desert advised regarding the Word of God that we should be

like camels rather than horses, slowly chewing the food of the word, returning to what has been partially digested for further chewing.

Jerome compared reading the Scriptures with eating the Eucharist when he stated about the Church Fathers: "They consumed the Word like the Eucharistic bread and wine, and the Word offered itself to them with the profundity of Christ." And, again, "I believe that the Gospel is the body of Christ … and the Scriptures, the divine doctrine, are truly the body and blood of Christ."

Not only the preacher feeding on the Scriptures concerns us, but also the community being fed when all gather to celebrate the sacred mysteries. Eating at *two* tables is integral to worship and a reminder of one of the ongoing identifying marks of the community established in Jesus' name.

"The Church is nourished spiritually at the table of God's word and at the table of the Eucharist: from the one it grows in wisdom and from the other in holiness. In the word of God the divine covenant is announced; in the Eucharist, the new and everlasting covenant is renewed. The spoken word of God brings to mind the history of salvation: the Eucharist embodies it in the sacramental signs of the liturgy" (*Introduction to the Lectionary*, #10). Two tables, both necessary sources of sustenance; one act of worship.

Such sustenance includes the homily. *The General Instruction on the Roman Missal* refers to the homily as "a necessary source of nourishment for the Christian life" (41). Thus we are led to consider it as food, and to ask, "What kind of food is it? And what is being fed?"

Since the word *homily* was restored to ordinary Catholic vocabulary by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum concilium*),[1] various understandings of this form of preaching can

1. (True, one finds a reference to "the usual homily" in the 1918 Code of Canon Law #1344, but for Roman Catholics

be found in official and other writings. I would propose that our present understanding of this form of preaching is still a work in progress. I further propose that there have been two phases of understanding the homily thus far and would like to suggest that it is time for a third phase less comprehensive than the first but more expansive than the second. Before considering a possible third phase, let us briefly review the first two.

The first phase of understanding the homily would extend from the time of the Second Vatican Council with its promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy in 1963 until 1982. This initial phase can be seen as one that approached the homily as a form of preaching that served almost all of preaching's purposes.

Let us begin with the paragraph in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy where the word "homily" was first reintroduced to common usage: "… by means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year" (#52).

What is notable here is the close relationship between this statement and the understanding of the preacher's task articulated at the Council of Trent, fifth session, when the Council fathers called on preachers "to provide their people with *wholesome words* in proportion to their own and their peoples' capacity, *by teaching them the things that are necessary for all to know in order to be saved, and by impressing upon them with briefness and plainness of speech the vices that they must avoid and the virtues that they must cultivate, in order to escape eternal punishment and obtain heaven's glory*" (italics mine).

Trent's emphasis on the teaching of things necessary for salvation and encouraging a life of virtue re-echoes Vatican II's expounding of the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life, the notable difference being the explicit role attributed to the

preaching during Mass has been long identified as the sermon.)

"sacred text" as the source of this homily in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

Earlier in this document, however, a new emphasis is introduced when speaking of liturgical preaching, even though this is done while employing the term "sermon"; in this case we hear a kerygmatic emphasis. Para 36, 2 states "the primary source of the sermon … should be scripture and liturgy, for in them is found *the proclamation of God's wonderful works in the history of salvation, the mystery of Christ ever made present and active in us, especially in the celebration of the liturgy*" (35,2).

Thus, in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy we find that liturgical preaching is seen as both proclamation of the kergyma, what God has done throughout salvation history, most notably in the Christ event, and as offering catechesis of saving mysteries and guiding principles. In both cases, the primary source for preaching should be the biblical and liturgical texts.

In the 1975 apostolic exhortation, *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI also emphasizes the role of the homily as "an important and very adaptable instrument of evangelization" (#43). In this document, the Pope gives special emphasis to the impact of a Christian life as a form of witness, observing that the modern person "listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he (sic) does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (#41).

Thus, an additional note of the homily as a form of evangelizing witness "to the extent that it expresses the profound faith of the minister and is impregnated with love" (43) enters the homiletic portrait. Four years later in 1979, John Paul II returns to a catechetical emphasis in his apostolic exhortation, On *Catechesis in Our Time* (*Catechesi tradendae*), when he says: "… one can say that catechetical teaching too finds its source and fulfillment in the Eucharist, within the whole circle of the liturgical year. Preaching, centered upon the Bible texts, must then in its own way make it possible to familiarize the faithful with the whole of the mysteries of the faith and the norms of Christian living" (48).

In this first phase extending from 1963 until 1980, the liturgical homily as a necessary source of nourishment serves to evangelize, to catechize and to witness to God's people. The homily, then, finds its fulfillment in providing the faithful with a substantial meal, offering every form of nourishment to be found in preaching's storeroom.

The second phase began with the publication in 1982 of the USCC-NCCB document, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly* (*FIYH*). From the outset, it must be acknowledged that this document does not have the weight of one put out by a Council or a Synod; it is not an apostolic exhortation of the Pope, nor even a statement put forth by the Congregation of the Faith (with or without a formal interview.) It was produced by the Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry.

And what it does have is the weight of pastoral insight and experience, the result of the collaboration of bishops, homiletics professors, biblical scholars and other interested parties. In the understanding of the homily offered in this document, a more modest goal is established, or one might say, a more restricted diet, less a banquet, more a dinner with a smaller gathering of family in mind, in this case a particular faith community.

The document offers *this* understanding of a homily: "a scriptural interpretation of human existence which enables a community to recognize God's active presence, to respond to that presence in faith through liturgical word and gesture, and beyond the liturgical assembly, through a life lived in conformity with the Gospel" (29).

What is the nature of the homily here? To interpret life, the life of a particular community of believers, and to do this through the biblical texts, employing these texts as a lens on life and offering a faith vision that can unite the community. And the reason for doing this: to enable a community to do two things: to recognize God's active presence in their midst, and then to give thanks and praise in this Eucharist and to live a life in line with the Gospel.

This document explicitly recognizes that the liturgical homily cannot do everything that preaching needs to do: "It may well

include evangelization, catechesis, and exhortation, but its primary purpose is to be found in the fact that it is, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, 'a part of the liturgy itself' (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #52)" (17); further on it adds that "even though the liturgical homily can incorporate instruction and exhortation, it will not be able to carry the whole weight of the church's preaching" (26). Special times and occasions have to be provided for such necessary forms of preaching as pre evangelization, evangelization, and catechesis.

The second part of this document's title also makes it clear that *this* document has restricted itself to reflecting on "the homily in the Sunday assembly." During the Sunday celebrations of the paschal mystery, the homily aims to offer nourishment towards a particular end, addressing "*a people hungry, sometimes desperately so, for meaning in their lives*. For a time, they may find meaning in their jobs, their families and friends, their political or social causes. All these concerns, good and valid as they are, fall short of providing ultimate meaning. Without ultimate meaning, our lives are ultimately unsatisfied. If we are able to hear a word which gives our lives another level of meaning, which interprets them in relation to God, then our response is to turn to this source of meaning in an attitude of praise and thanksgiving."

The preacher, then, is a *mediator of meaning*. The nature and task of the homily in this document has a restricted focus: to feed the human hunger for meaning by offering a scriptural interpretation of human existence. Such preaching enables celebration of Eucharist.

The combined impact of the *General Instruction*'s referring to the homily as "a necessary source of nourishment" and *FIYH*'s vision of the homily as "feeding the hunger for meaning" has raised several questions in relation to the worship of the community in other settings, such as the great feasts of the Lord, the feasts of the saints and Mary, and the ritual celebrations of sacraments other than the Eucharist, including the funeral rites.

Do these have the same end in mind? Is the hunger for meaning the only hunger to be addressed? I would propose that there are at

least three hungers to which the liturgical homily can respond, and offer some reflection on each.

Part II: Liturgical Preaching and the Hungers of the Heart

a. The hunger for wholeness and the great feasts of the Lord

The hunger for wholeness is the most basic hunger of the human person, arising out of an awareness rooted in the core of our being that we are unfinished, imperfect, broken, fragmented, and on those occasions of blinding honesty, still sinful after all these years.

The noted sociologist Robert Bellah has written of "incomplete persons" and "porous institutions," the former in constant search for what will fulfill them and bring inner peace, the latter – represented by marriage, work and religion – institutions that no longer appear able to contain and support members of society in any lasting manner. The contemporary experience speaks more of a failure to find the perfect in any form.

Even so, we have Jesus' command, "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). Essayist and poet Kathleen Norris comments that Jesus' call, "Be perfect …," contains good news despite that scary word "perfect." It is more a scary translation, for at the heart of the call to perfection is a prophetic word that promises we can be whole, complete, achieve a condition of fullness.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for holiness (another word for wholeness), they *shall* have their fill" (Matt 5: 6), promises Jesus. This is a goal for all according to both the witness of Scripture and our liturgical prayer. "May the God of peace make you *perfect* in holiness. May you be preserved *whole* and *entire*, spirit, soul, and body, irreproachable at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," writes Paul to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:23).

We pray during Advent, "Lord, free us from our sins and make us *whole* …" (Mon, 2nd Week of Advent). And, again, as we begin Lent, "Lord, may everything we do begin with your inspiration, continue with your help, and reach *perfection* under your guidance (Thursday after Ash Wednesday). Pious piffle or practical prayers?

How is this hunger for wholeness to be engaged in preaching?

Charles Rice, professor of homiletics at Drew University, in *Preaching the Story* (1980), has written: "Most people try to connect their smaller stories with a larger one. It is the same in the church. At our baptism, we enter into a story, a very large one; call it The Story …. Our stories merge with The Story …."

It is this story that offers even now some degree of fullness, as it is absorbed into the skin, feelings and brain cells of our being, and as it is lived out in ritual and the routine of our days. This awareness was captured more obliquely by the spontaneous remark of the 10-year-old daughter of a friend, mother and daughter both Jewish, when daughter came into a Roman Catholic retreat center in upstate New York, and saw the very large crucifix located in the center of our first floor corridor. It was the first time she had ever seen one, and her response was: "What an interesting sculpture! I bet that has a story behind it."

Through the preaching on the great feasts, what we call the solemnities of the Lord – most notably, Christmas and Easter – believers are brought again and again to the story that makes them whole. On the great feasts, the central events of The Story are set before the community in narrative and image, proclamation and instruction, hymn and acclamation, symbol and ritual, to be entered, engaged, enfolded into the community consciousness, and given external expression in celebration.

Liturgical scholar Robert Taft asks, "what are we doing when we celebrate a Christian feast?" What is the relationship between a past unrepeatable act, like the birth of Jesus, His suffering, death, and resurrection, the ascension and subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit, and the present celebration that takes place among us two millennia later?

Taft responds that the liturgical celebration allows us to overcome the separation in time and space from that once-and-for all event, so that "the salvation manifested in the past lives on now as an active force in our lives, *if* we encounter it anew and respond to it in faith." Liturgy is the place where the community remembers and, in remembering the reality initiated by this past event, that

very reality of salvation becomes present now. Salvation, the fullness of life, is present in our midst.

Preaching is pivotal in this transaction. The preacher's task is to both announce and draw the community into the salvific event made present through word and symbol, enabling the community to enter into a particular moment of *the Story* of our salvation in Christ that is the focus of this liturgical celebration – Holy Thursday, Easter Sunday, Pentecost, Christmas, Epiphany.

First announced by the scripture readings and given further articulation and amplification in the liturgical prayers, it is through preaching that these events can be imaginatively re-presented, re-viewed, and then re-appropriated by the community.

Mark Searle has written: "The texts of Scripture and images of liturgy are not didactic messages wrapped up in some decorative covering which can be thrown away when the content is extracted. They are images and sets of images to be toyed with, befriended, rubbed over and over again, until gradually and sporadically, they yield flashes of insight and encounter with the 'Reality' of which they sing. Their purpose is not to give rise to thought, (at least not immediately), but to mediate encounter."

When such an encounter has occurred between the community and the Mystery being celebrated, the individual and communal response from engaged minds and hearts will lead the community from liturgy to life, from fragmentation to fullness, and from a condition of separation to a celebration of wholeness.

Theologian Robert Barron speaks of the priest as a mystagogue, a bearer of Mystery; this is also most appropriate when considering the preacher's goal on the great feasts: "The primary function of the bearer of Mystery is to hold up to the people of God the great images, stories and pictures of salvation that lie at the heart of the Christian tradition …. The mystagogical artist, in image, symbol, and story, presents the truth that is God's love in Christ and draws the worshipping community to share in it." The movement is into the truth of the Mystery, a truth that makes us both free and whole.

This first and most basic hunger for wholeness is both stimulated

and, to some degree, partially satisfied on these great feasts. The flood of people who continue to come on these occasions hints at something important that is being met or at least aroused. When the celebration has realized some of its potential, it brings a community to a state of fullness, of satisfaction – of enough-ness, at least for the moment.

Perhaps similar to the response the poet Jessica Powers gives witness to in her poem, "At Evening with a Child":

> We walk along a road
> At the day's end, a little child and I,
> And she points out a bird, a tree, a toad,
> A stretch of colored sky.
> She knows no single word,
> But "Ah" (with which all poems must commence,
> At least in the heart's heart), and I am stirred
> By her glad eloquence.

When the preaching within our celebrations helps bring us to a state of Ah – as in Ah-doration, a state of readiness to give thanks and praise, a state of awareness of our nearness to Mystery, then we have provided a taste of the wholeness for which we hunger.

b. The hunger for meaning and the sacramental rites

This second hunger, already named in *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, can be extended to the other ritual celebrations. The hunger for meaning arises out of the human desire for life to make sense, the yearning to understand the significance of what has happened.

Holocaust witness Elie Wiesel acknowledged the important role this hunger has had in his life. In an interview he recalled how during WWII, when he was a child, he was always asking himself about the meaning of events, always asking. "What is happening here? The flames, what is the meaning of the flames?" He then said, "That is actually a Talmudic question. In the Talmud, it is called *mai ka mashma lan*: 'What does it mean?' You hear a text, you read a text, and you must ask, 'What does it mean to us?' From my childhood on I was asking this question."

Meaning often does not come easily. Sometimes it eludes us

completely. T.S. Eliot wrote, "We had the experience but missed the meaning?" Still, something in us continues to seek it. *FIYH* affirms this when it says, "Without ultimate meaning, we are ultimately unsatisfied." And, so, the preacher seeks to provide some satisfaction of this hunger for meaning, when the community gathers for Sunday Eucharist.

While Sunday preaching allows for a broad focus on human existence, the other sacraments look to particular occasions in our lives, events that carry great weight for the individuals directly concerned, but also for the community to which they belong and who gathers to support them in faith. I like the novelist Andre Dubus' statement: "A sacrament is physical and within it is God's love."

Sacraments and their rites are physical; they are about bodies – the human body, first of all, with a particular need. In the rites the body is washed, fed, anointed; the body is joined with another so two become one, it is prayed over for healing, and it is laid to rest. In the rites the body is touched, hands are sometimes imposed on the body – all done with reverence and love and honor and respect.

Sacraments are also about the body of creation, dealing with such simple stuff as water and oil, bread and wine, white garments and bands of gold, created matter that itself becomes touched by the power of the dying and rising of Christ, and the creative breath of the Spirit; and this *stuff* becomes part of the body of a new creation mediating the love of a gracious God. "A sacrament is physical and within it is God's love."

In presiding and performing these sacramental rites, a word is needed to offer meaning, a way of seeing and understanding what we are about, what we are doing to the human body with the matter of creation. In this endeavor, the preacher enters into the sphere of the artist. In his recent article "The Apologetics of Beauty," Andrew Greeley argues that beauty is the most powerful appeal of Catholicism, both to its own members and to others.

And it is the artists who "see more clearly than the rest of us. They penetrate into the illumination of being more intimately than do the

rest of us. They want us to see what they see so that we can share in their illumination. They are driven to duplicate that beauty in their work …. *The artist is a sacrament maker*, a creator of emphasized, clarified beauty designed to make us see. Artists invite us into the world they see so that we can go forth from that world enchanted by the luminosity of their work and with enhanced awareness of the possibilities of life." (11)

The preacher participates in the work of being a "sacrament maker," constructing a homily as a bridge of meaning for the community that allows the Mystery of God in Christ to cross over and penetrate their being at a particular moment in life. Words announce and effect transformative encounters with Christ. It is Christ who feeds the community's hunger for meaning when it is facing events of profound joy and deep grief, moments of gain and loss, and experiences of dying and rising.

It is words, the words of Christ and words about Christ, that provide a way of understanding in faith the key experiences of life: committing oneself in love, bringing new life into the world, sinning against God and others and being forgiven, falling sick, and having death snatch a loved one from us.

And so we turn to the images and stories of the Scriptures, holding up what happened *then* to understand what is happening *now*: this day Jesus picks up a child, blesses and claims it for the reign of God, embracing the child and handing it back to our care; this day Jesus once again lays hands on someone sick, or on someone imprisoned by evil, and raises them up in faith, strengthened, freed; this day Jesus feeds the multitude so they will not falter on the journey; this day Jesus again attends a wedding and begins the transformation of the ordinary water of human love into the aged wine of the human love interpenetrated by the divine; and this day Jesus calls us to resurrection faith and eschatological hope: "I am the resurrection and the life, do you believe this … I am going to prepare a place for you, that where I am you too shall be."

On the great feasts of the liturgical calendar, our words bring the community into the key moments of Jesus' story, allowing the

salvific power these events inaugurated to become present once again; during the celebrations of the sacraments, our words bring the Jesus story to the key moments of our personal lives, allowing these human events to be transformed by this same salvific power of the Paschal Mystery.

"What does this mean?" the community asks. This birth, this wedding, this sickness, this downward pull into the abyss of sin, this dying – what does it mean? And we struggle to speak a word that announces all meaning is located in the person of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, and finally, preaching on these occasions can expand the sacramental imagination of the community so that everyone begins to see all of creation as symbol of the creating, redeeming and sanctifying Triune God. Denise Levertov left us a poem that captured one such moment of sacramental awareness occurring at the end of the day:

Midnight Gladness

"Peace be upon each thing my eye takes in
Upon each thing my mouth takes in."
—Carmina Gadelica

The pleated lampshade, slightly askew,
dust a silverish muting of the lamp's fake brass.
My sock-monkey on the pillow, tail and limbs asprawl,
weary after a day of watching sunlight
prowl the house like a wolf.
Gleams of water in my bedside glass.
Miraculous water, so peacefully
waiting to be consumed.
The day's crowding arrived
at this abundant stillness. Each thing
given to the eye before sleep, and water
at my lips before darkness. Gift after gift.

The gift of meaning that the preacher offers ultimately comes down to this awareness: that all is gift, all is grace, all is given for the good of all in and through Jesus Christ. Sacramental awareness leads to this life-giving recognition that all is sacrament, all holy, all

sacred. No wonder we have such hunger when we do not recognize this and pass by the bread so often present on so many tables within our reach.

c. The hunger for belonging and the celebration of the sanctoral feasts

When the 1964 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) spoke of the saints, it declared that "it is most fitting that we love those friends and co-heirs of Jesus Christ who are also our sisters and brothers and outstanding benefactors, and that we give due thanks to God for them" (#50).

A few years later, however, in 1971, Karl Rahner compared the response of contemporary Catholics to this call to honor the saints to a young man listening to a mother sing the praises of her daughter, hoping her words will move the young man to consider the daughter a worthy candidate for marriage. Rahner commented that while the young man "hears the message and does not dispute its accuracy, yet no love is aroused in him. The fact that the girl is worthy of love does not mean that there is any corresponding ability to love on the part of the young man."

Almost 20 years later, in 1990, David Power wrote in a similar vein that "in the Catholic Church at present, devotion to the saints seems to be at a point where people are asking what is it all about … there seems to be considerable uncertainty about the meaning of devotion to the saints and about the place which their commemoration ought to have on the liturgical calendar."

The inability of Catholics to relate to the saints during that time span could be traced to a number of factors: the tradition of hagiography that made these men and women seem unreal, at too great a distance from the struggles of contemporary believers, people from another world if not another planet; then there is the preponderance of males over females, Europeans over all other members of the world community, bishops, priests, and religious – all celibates – to those in the married and single state. Finally, there seemed to be a general disinterest to any form of devotions that

inserted unnecessary middle men or women between the believer and Jesus.

But recently, there seems to have been a change, perhaps even a revival of interest. Butler's 12-volume *Lives of the Saints* has been revised and reissued; works like Robert Ellsburg's *All Saints* with its choice of 365 men and women chosen from all faith traditions (and a few from none), Joan Chittister's *A Passion for Life* offering saints as "fragments of the face of God," Paul Elie's *A Tremor of Bliss* with contemporary writers offering reflections on a favorite saint, Sr. Wendy Beckett's *The Mystery of Love* providing commentary on the saints as portrayed in art through the centuries, and John Fink's *Married Saints* – all have appeared in the last few years, with some showing up at the local Crown Books and Brentano's.

The saints are back, are "in," even controversial – consider the response to the recent beatification of Pio NoNo. They have returned, but with a difference.

Elizabeth Johnson retrieves the symbol of the communion of the saints, presenting them as "friends of God and prophets"; they are our partners in a community of disciples marked by mutual regard, embodiments of God's wisdom which is ever active in the world, passing into holy souls and making them God's friends and our companions. Rather than approaching them as patrons, necessary intermediaries for obtaining the ear and favors of a distant divinity, they serve as companions on the journey to God, former participants and present supporters in our building up the kingdom of God on earth, co-celebrants in our ongoing worship of God through Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

Johnson writes: "The creedal symbol of the communion of saints expresses the understanding that a community of faithful God-seekers exists around the earth and across time itself, through the life-giving communion of Spirit-Sophia who forever weaves links of kinship throughout the world."

Given the shift in appreciation, what does this have to do with feeding the hungers of the heart, particularly the hunger for belonging? Not too long ago, an article in the *Washington Post* by

Patricia Dalton, a clinical psychologist, noted that, "The disease of our day is loneliness." People feel disconnected, not only from others at work but even in the intimacy of the home. There is no easy solution to this, of course, but one of the tasks of the preacher is to facilitate a growth in community, to deepen the bonds between believers. This is especially appropriate during the celebration of the Eucharist.

The feasts of the saints are opportune occasions that allow for a deepening sense of community and connectedness. When we think of our role as preachers on the feast days, theologian Michael Himes suggested we think of ourselves as hosts at a cocktail party, welcoming people and making introductions. Today, the community can meet Abbot Anthony of the desert, a few months from now, Perpetua and Felicity, later in the year Teresa of Avila, Isaac Jogues and his company, Andrew Kim, Lorenzo Ruiz, Angela Merici, Katherine Drexel, Kateri Tekawitha.

I would modify Himes' image of a host slightly, changing the venue from a cocktail party to an ongoing family reunion, introducing members of the local clan to those family members that had moved away, been lost track of, or with whom we never really seemed to have much in common – consider Rose of Lima! Or that scourge of the desert, Jerome. Can a link be forged? A contact made?

The vision of the Letter to the Ephesians is helpful here. The Episcopalian preacher Barbara Brown Taylor says this letter can be imagined as a four-tiered fountain: the top tier containing the glory of God spills over into the glory of Christ, the glory of Christ flows down into the glory of the Church, and the glory of the Church splashes over all creation.

This awesome vision embraces God, Christ, the saints of the church – all who have and presently live in Christ, and all creation. Such a vision might help to answer Robert Bellah's recent complaint: "Just when we are in many ways moving to an ever greater validation of the sacredness of the individual person, our capacity to imagine a social fabric that would hold individuals together is vanishing."

Preaching on the feasts of the saints allows us to image such

a broader communal and social tapestry: the communion of the saints, embracing all present and all who have gone before, connecting us with that cloud of witnesses that stands with us both in prayerful support and loving solidarity.

They do not speak to us only of themselves and their achievements but exist for us as what Herman Wegmann has called, "*le continue biographie du Christ.*" In the saints we see the continuing story of Jesus Christ, and their voices encourage us to look to Christ as they did in their day. They also challenge us to be as innovative in our time as they were in theirs.

Robert Ellsberg reminds us that these men and women were "originals," were often bold experimenters in their own time, reformers, on the cutting edge in a way that challenged both society and the Church. Athanasius stood alone in opposition to virtually all his fellow bishops on the question of Arianism; Augustine went up against all the trendy philosophical and theological currents of his day – Manicheeism, Donatism and Pelagianism; Thomas Aquinas' work was comprehensive and looked on with suspicion; Joan of Arc – well, no need to talk about where Joan's involvement in politics got her; Catherine of Siena confronted the pope, calling him to leave the comforts of Avignon and return to Rome; Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross were investigated by the Inquisition – as were Ignatius of Loyola, Philip Neri; Alphonsus De Liguori was accused of laxity in his approach to moral theology.

A recent work, *Woman Saints*, by Kathleen Jones proposes a new category of saint represented by such women as Mary Ward in the 17th century and Bl. Mary MacKillop in the 18th: both could be classified as slow martyrs at the hands of Church authority.

Introducing the saints already included in the sanctoral cycle of the liturgical calendar is not enough. Ellsberg brings out how rich the past has been with so many saints that were never canonized. Leonardo Boff has spoken of the need for "political saints." For him the history of the saints presents "few or almost no saints who achieved the synthesis between the mystical and the political as they are understood today. St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bernardine of

Siena, St. Vincent (de Paul) and a few others had an attitude which in our judgment was more one of offering help than of liberating …. The great challenge of our times: to create militants with a truly political holiness."

Can we find them in such contemporary martyrs as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hans Jagerstatter, Oscar Romero, Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, Jean Donovan, the Jesuits of the University of El Salvador, the housekeeper Rosa and her daughter? Can we hear them speaking to us in such prophetic voices as those belonging to Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, William Stringfellow, Thomas Merton, Catherine de Hueck Doherty, Mother Teresa, to name a few? Can we even discover some Doctors of the Church from our own age, among whom could be considered Karl Rahner, Pierre De Chardin, Henri Nouwen and …?

The Greeks looked on the mythical figure of Hermes as the god of the journey, of the intersection where roads cross; he was the friendliest of all gods, meeting people as they wandered, walking with them as a good companion. This role is not to be surrendered to myth alone, but it is amply filled by these men and women of our faith tradition who walk with us on the way and stand with us when we celebrate Eucharist.

John Shea envisions the saints in their present role in our lives in his poem, "Friends in High Places." He begins by offering some familiar stained-glass representations: the pious nun deep in prayer, the devout young man holding a lily, the lofty queen doling out bread to a hungry beggar, the courageous slayer of dragons; but then he calls us to look more closely:

> When did we notice —
> The feet of the candle-like nun danced on the earth
> while the flame danced on her head
> There was a vein bulging in the neck of the young man
> and his steeple fingers choked the stem of the lily,
> The fear-bitten lip of the knight who realized the dragon was devouring his lance,
> The queen was as angry to give as the beggar was to receive,

The monk's eyes were wide with wonder and the pen trembled in his hand?
When did their faces, too long made pretty by piety, begin to wrinkle and twitch?
When did their voices, too long psalm-toned, begin to laugh and rant?
When did we know they were brothers to our burdens and sisters to our strivings
and could no longer parade as patrons of our fears, intercessors to our interests?
When did they climb down from their stain-glassed glory, scramble through the pews, lift the processional cross and make for the door
—pausing only long enough to smile and wave at us to join them?

The mention of the saints must also include one above all others who occupies a place at the heart of the Church's life: she who knew most intimately the dwelling of the Holy Spirit within her and carried the Word to full term in her body and gave Him to the world: Mary, mother of Jesus, mother of the Lord, mother of God. Again we find a renewed interest in her that I shall comment on more specifically tomorrow.

I have presented three hungers of the human heart and three opportunities to respond to them in the various liturgical contexts we enter throughout the church year. To feed these hungers, a preacher must also have a hunger.

In *Redemptoris Missio* (#40.3), Pope John Paul wrote, "all who believe in Christ should feel as an integral part of their faith, an apostolic concern to pass on to others its light and joy. This concern must become, as it were, a hunger and thirst to make the Lord known …." Again, in his letter to priests, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (#28), he also wrote, "It is undeniable that the priest's life is fully taken up by the hunger for the Gospel and for faith, hope and love for God and his mystery, a hunger which is more or less consciously present in the people of God entrusted to him."

The preacher must have "a hunger to make the Lord known" and live a life that "is fully taken up by the hunger for the Gospel." It is not that this hunger is ever satisfied – not on this side of the grave, neither for us nor for our people. The Episcopalian preacher Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us that this is beyond our ability when she writes:

> Our duty is not to end the human hunger and thirst for God's word but to intensify it, until the whole world bangs its forks for God's food. That is what the famine is for, according to scripture. That is why God has hidden God's face: to increase our sense of loss until we are so hungry and lonely for God that we do something about it – not only one by one but also as a people who are once again ready to leave our fleshpots in search of real food. Whatever preachers serve on Sunday, it must not blunt the appetite for this food. If people go away from us full, then we have done them a disservice. What we serve is not supposed to satisfy. It is food for the journey. It is meant to tantalize, to send people out our doors with a taste for what they cannot find in our kitchens. When they find it, they understand why we did not say more about it than we did. It was not that we didn't. It was that we couldn't.

The hungers of the heart are life-long. Occasionally met. Seldom more than partially satisfied. But perhaps that is as it should be, or must be. Some nourishment needs to be given on the journey, lest the people falter, wander off, lose their way, and lose heart.

And so we preachers struggle to speak, in season and out season; we strive to set the table of the word, to offer nourishment, substantial or meager. But, at the very least, to offer something. And on those occasions when something savory is set forth, we get a taste of that day to come when we shall all gather at the table in the kingdom, to sit, sup and be satisfied forever.

6. Preaching in a Different Key: Preaching the Gospel According to Paul

FRANK MATERA

Some years ago, I decided to recycle my old homilies. After all, I had been preaching from the Lectionary – primarily from the Gospels – for more than 30 years, and I had written out and kept most of my homilies. And so, instead of writing new homilies, I began to revise old ones. My homily preparation became easier and, in most instances, the homilies were better for the revision. But as time passed, I began to feel uncomfortable about recycling old material. Consequently, I ended the experiment and began to compose new homilies once more.

On one particular Sunday, after preaching what I thought was a rather insightful homily, I decided to compare it with what I had said in earlier years. To my amazement and embarrassment, the homily I had written was essentially the same homily I had given three years earlier! It began with the same example that I thought was so original. It developed the same theological theme that I thought was so insightful. And it made the same hermeneutical leap from text to life that I thought was so exciting.

I immediately realized that having preached for more than 30 years, I had fallen into a pattern when preaching from the Gospels. I was focusing on the same themes, using the same examples, applying the text in the same way. It was then that I decided to make myself preach on a regular basis from the Pauline epistles, whether I wanted to or not.

At first I found this to be a more difficult task than I anticipated, even though I had been teaching the Pauline letters for several years. The problem, as I soon discovered, was that the pattern I

developed for preaching from the Gospels did not fit the Pauline epistles. Try as I might, I couldn't pour new wine into old wine skins. I had to preach in a new way, in a different tone, in another key. I had to preach the Gospel according to Paul rather than the Gospel according to Mark, or Matthew, or Luke, or John.

Some months later, when I finally returned to preaching from the Synoptic Gospels, I still found myself preaching in a Pauline key. Phrases and concepts from Paul's letters now entered my preaching more freely and more often, and I was now interpreting the Gospels in light of Paul's Gospel. Not that there is another Gospel, as Paul reminds us in Galatians. But as I hope to show you this evening, the Gospel can and should be preached in a different key, at least from time to time.

Two Kinds of Preaching

Preaching from Paul reminded me that the Gospels are narratives suited to a particular kind of preaching that is narrative in its mode. For example, on a given Sunday, the congregation hears a portion of the Gospel narrative – a parable, a miracle, a controversy story – and, in most instances, the preacher *retells* that story in a way that draws out its contemporary significance and spiritual meaning for the congregation. The result is a narrative or story-based preaching that is appropriate to the Gospels and focuses on certain themes such as the kingdom of God, the power and the authority of Christ, the need to imitate the example of Jesus.

But when I turned to Paul, I was quickly reminded of what I already knew: that Paul's writings are not narratives but letters. And because they are letters, they represent a lively conversation between Paul and his converts in which the Apostle addresses problems and questions posed by his congregation.

For example, will the dead share in the Lord's Parousia if they die before He comes? Has the Parousia already taken place? Can we eat food sold in the marketplace which has been sacrificed to idols? What is the most important spiritual gift? Will there be a resurrection of the dead? With what kind of body will the dead

be raised? Must Gentiles be circumcised and do the works of the Mosaic law to share in the benefits of Israel's Messiah?

Because Paul's writings are letters, preachers must approach them in a different way than they approach the Gospels. Most importantly, they must pay careful attention to the manner in which Paul applies the Gospel of Christ's saving death and life-giving resurrection to the particular circumstances of his congregations. Then they can and must do something similar for their own parishioners, even when the problems Paul addresses seem foreign and strange to them. For the way in which Paul arrives at his conclusions is as important as the answers he provides.

For example, Paul always begins by reflecting on what he sees as the central event of the Gospel – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – in order to draw out the implications of that event for the life of the Christian community. He does not simply order his converts to avoid immorality. Rather, he reminds them that the event of Christ's saving death and life-giving resurrection has made them members of a sanctified community.

Consequently, it would be incongruous for them to engage in any immorality since their bodies now belong to Christ. Put another way, instead of simply telling his converts what to do, Paul reminds them *who* they have become in Christ so that they will act according to their new status in Christ.

Preaching the Gospel according to Paul, then, is different from preaching the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. On the one hand, it requires a more explicitly theological approach that is modeled after Paul's own preaching, whereby the Apostle applies the Gospel of Christ's death and resurrection to the particular circumstances of the Christian life.

Such an approach necessarily deals with questions of sin and salvation, reconciliation and redemption, the destiny of the individual and, yes, the future of the world. On the other hand, preaching from Paul is eminently pastoral, provided that the preacher is guided by Paul's singular question: *What does the Gospel of Christ's death and resurrection require in this particular instance*

if the Church is to remain faithful to its election? What must the Christian do in this particular instance in order to witness to the Gospel of Christ? What does it mean in this particular instance to live the Gospel of Christ's saving death and life-giving resurrection?

Preaching the Gospel according to Paul, then, is preaching in a different key: a key that is more explicitly theological and conceptual than narrative, a key that gives tonality to the great issues of the Christian faith. In the remainder of this talk, I will consider four of these issues and offer some suggestions as to how they can inform our preaching today, even when we are not preaching from a Pauline text.

The issues are (1) the human condition apart from Christ; (2) the new situation inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection; (3) the shape of the Christian life under the guidance of the Spirit; (4) the hope of the Christian life in light of Christ's resurrection.

The Human Condition Apart from Christ

Paul believes in the goodness of God's creation (1 Cor. 10:25-26), but he has no allusions about the human situation apart from the power of God's grace. Paul is firmly convinced that there is something awry in the world. Something has gone wrong. In light of what God has done in Christ, Paul has come to the firm conviction that all have sinned. All have gone astray, and therefore all are in need of redemption.

Put another way, Paul believes that, apart from Christ, humanity finds itself in a predicament of its own making from which it cannot extricate itself. Apart from Christ, humanity is under the domination of a power and force that frustrates every human attempt to do God's will – even by those to whom the law of God has been revealed. Paul calls this power "sin."

In the opening chapters of Romans, Paul describes the human predicament apart from Christ. He begins with a description of the Gentile world, and he notes that even though the Gentiles knew something of the glory of God from the created world, they preferred to worship the creature rather than the Creator. This

refusal to acknowledge God as God – idolatry – is at the root of all other sins. If you wish, it is the original sin.

Turning to the Jewish world, Paul notes that even though the Jewish people had the advantage of the Mosaic Law, which allowed them to know God's will, and even though they possessed the sign of circumcision which identified them as the people of the covenant, they were no better off. And so, toward the end of chapter three, Paul concludes with this dismal assessment:

> There is no one who is righteous,
> not even one;
> there is no one who has understanding,
> there is no one who seeks God.
> All have turned aside, together they have become worthless;
> there is no one who shows kindness,
> there is not even one (Rom. 3:10-12).

Later, in chapter five, Paul provides a further analysis of the human condition, contrasting the disobedience of the first human being, Adam, with the obedience of the new human being, the Christ. Paul affirms that Adam's transgression introduced the powers of Sin and Death into the world so that one transgression brought many to death.

In effect, Adam's transgression inaugurated a history of sin and death that succeeding generations affirmed and ratified by their transgressions. Consequently, humanity finds itself under the domination of Sin and Death, which Paul presents as powers and forces that ultimately frustrate the ability of humanity to do God's will, even when it knows God's will.

It is not that humanity does not know what God requires. Paul is quite insistent that "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (7:12). But apart from the power of God's Spirit, human beings belong to the realm of what is mortal and corruptible, what Paul calls the realm of the flesh. And so, speaking in the voice of unredeemed humanity, he says, "I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Rom. 7:15-16).

According to Paul's analysis of the human condition, humanity is in a predicament of its own making, from which it cannot escape. It is enslaved to the powers of Sin and Death, which Adam introduced into the world by disobeying God and by giving glory to the creature rather than to the Creator. Humanity, apart from Christ, finds itself in the situation that later theology would call "original sin." Put another way, human beings cannot save, justify or acquit themselves before God. They cannot reconcile themselves to God.

Paul comes to this conclusion about the human condition on the basis of what God has done in Christ, reasoning in this fashion. If there was nothing wrong with the human condition, then why did God send his Son into the world? The fact that "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. 4:4) shows that humanity was in a predicament from which only God could free it.

To put it in Paul's words, "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing" (Gal. 2:21). For Paul, God's act of salvation in Christ is the light that reveals the darkness of the human predicament. In that light, Paul looks back at his former righteousness under the law, and he proclaims "whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ" (Phil. 3:7). In other words, it is in light of what God has done in Christ that Paul understands his former life and the human predicament.

Paul's analysis of the human condition plays a central role in the Gospel he proclaims, and in the Gospel we should preach. He is firmly convinced that Christ "gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). In Ephesians he (or an author writing in his name) writes:

> So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, … were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:11-13).

In Colossians, Paul proclaims that God "has rescued us from the

power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). He reminds his audience that once they were "estranged and hostile in mind" toward God, "doing evil deeds," but now they have been reconciled to God (Col. 1:21-22).

In a word, Paul views the human condition apart from Christ in terms of sin and alienation. Apart from Christ, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Apart from Christ, humanity lives in a realm of darkness of which it is not even aware (Eph. 5:8). Apart from Christ, humanity is destined for judgment and wrath (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 1 Thess. 1:10).

If contemporary preachers are to proclaim the Gospel according to Paul, they must make a similar analysis of the human condition for their own day, first for themselves and then for their congregations. If contemporary preachers do not understand the power which Sin and Death exert upon their own lives and the lives of their congregations, they will not be able to preach the Gospel according to Paul.

If contemporary preachers do not believe that humanity, apart from Christ, is in radical need of God's saving grace, they will not be able to preach the Gospel according to Paul. If contemporary preachers cannot see that there is something amiss in the world apart from Christ, they will not be able to preach the Gospel according to Paul.

Preaching the Gospel according to Paul means beginning with, and analyzing, the human condition in light of what God has done in Christ. In light of the Gospel, the preacher must then ask: what is the situation of humanity when it stands apart from the grace of God? How do the powers of Sin and Death exert their control over humanity today?

What must the congregation know about its own situation so that it will not fall back into the realm of the old Adam, the realm of Sin and Death, the realm of the flesh? In a word, one who preaches the Gospel according to Paul must be a shrewd interpreter of the human condition.

God's New Creation in Christ

Since Paul's analysis of the human situation is intimately related to his understanding of what God has done in Christ, it is important to be clear about what God accomplished in Christ. What is *new* about the human condition now that Christ has appeared? What has changed?

Paul employs a number of concepts to explain the significance of the Christ event. For example, he speaks of justification, salvation, reconciliation, expiation, redemption, freedom, sanctification, transformation, a new creation and glorification. I, however, will only speak of justification, reconciliation and salvation.

Justification: By justification, Paul means that God acquits us so that we now stand in the correct and proper covenant relationship to God. A legal term, the verb "to justify" means to declare that the defendant in a court of law is innocent of the crime of which he has been accused. The defendant is justified because the judge proclaims that the defendant stands in the correct relationship to the law.

When transferred to the realm of our covenant relationship with God, the concept of justification means that God acquits or justifies us, declaring that we are innocent and that we now stand in the proper covenant relationship to God.

But what is the basis for this justification? Why do we now stand in the correct and proper relationship to God? Paul's answer can be summarized in this way: Since we are incapable of justifying or acquitting ourselves before God, God has freely and graciously acquitted us through the saving death and the life-giving resurrection of His Son.

Our response to this gracious act of justification, says Paul, is "the obedience of faith." Rather than try to assert ourselves before God, we are to entrust ourselves to God through faith in Christ. This faith is an act of obedience, a total surrender of our lives to God.

Paul affirms that all is grace. Therefore, we are justified on the basis of trusting faith in Christ rather than on the basis of doing the legal prescriptions of the law. And so he writes in Galatians:

> … we know that a person is justified *not* by the works of the

> law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and *not* by doing the works of the law, because *no one* will be justified by the works of the law (Gal. 2:16).

Reconciliation: When God justifies or acquits us, God reconciles us to Himself. That is to say, we are now at peace with God because God has re-established the covenant relationship we ruptured. God, of course, does not need to be reconciled with humanity since God always remains faithful to His covenant promises.

Rather, it is humanity that needs to be reconciled to God. Humanity, however, cannot reconcile itself to God. It cannot decide that it will repair the covenant relationship it has ruptured. This is why God freely and graciously does what we cannot do. God graciously reconciles us to Himself.

Paul explains this theology of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians when he writes:

> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. … For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

The final phrase – "he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" – points to the divine interchange God has effected in Christ. The phrase does not mean that Christ became a sinner or that Christ was sinful. Rather, it is Paul's way of saying that Christ stood in our place so that we might stand in His place before God. Whereas formerly we were at enmity with God, we now stand before God with a righteousness and holiness that comes from God.

The present situation of the Christian, then, can be summarized in this way. We are *already* justified, we are *already* reconciled to

God, not on the basis of anything we have done but solely on the basis of what God has done for us in Christ. Because we have already been reconciled and justified by God, we now belong to God's new creation in Christ.

We live in the sphere of Christ, the New Human Being, the New Adam, the one who lived in perfect obedience to God. And so Paul writes, "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:18). Because Christians have been baptized into Christ, they are part of this new humanity that Christ inaugurated by His obedient death on the cross.

Consequently, whereas the old humanity found itself incapable of carrying out God's will, because it was under the domination of Sin and Death, the new humanity fulfills the just requirement of God's law – not by its own power – but by the power of God's Spirit.

Salvation: According to Paul, the present situation of believers assures them that they will be saved. And so he writes in Romans: "Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:9-10).

In these verses, Paul makes an important distinction between justification and reconciliation, on the one hand, and salvation on the other. We are *already* justified and reconciled, but we are *not yet* saved. However, because we are *already* justified and reconciled, we can be confident that we *will be saved*.

Christians then live between what has already occurred and what has not yet happened: they are *already* justified but *not yet* saved; *already* reconciled but *not yet* saved. The fullness of salvation, then, is a future reality that will only be accomplished at the Parousia and the general resurrection of the dead.

I have already said that those who preach the Gospel according to Paul need to understand the human condition apart from Christ. Now I must add another element. Those who preach the Gospel

according to Paul must have a profound appreciation for God's grace in their lives and in the life of the world. They must proclaim that they do not and cannot justify and reconcile themselves before God.

They must communicate that they are incapable of saving and redeeming themselves by what they do, be it their good works, their career or their life's accomplishments. To preach the Gospel according to Paul is to have a profound sense that all is grace, and apart from God's grace there is only Sin and Death. To preach the Gospel according to Paul is to summon people to faith and reliance upon God, and upon God alone.

This Gospel clashes with many of the values of contemporary society, which judges people on the basis of what they do and accomplish in their life. For example, society deems that the most successful person is the most productive person. It judges people on the basis of what they do, rather than on the basis of who they are.

Now Paul could have produced a rather impressive *curriculum vitae*. After all, he established Christian congregations in a good part of the Mediterranean world. But his call and conversion on the Damascus road taught him that "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; … what is weak in the world to shame the strong …." (1 Cor. 1:27). Consequently, he affirms that Christ is our wisdom, our righteousnss, our sanctification and our redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). To preach the Gospel according to Paul, then, is to proclaim that we are justified by God's grace through trusting faith in Jesus Christ, that God has reconciled us to Himself, thereby assuring us of future salvation.

The Shape of the Christian Life

Just as Paul's analysis of the human situation apart from Christ is closely related to his understanding of what God has done in Christ, so his proclamation of this good news is intimately associated with his understanding of the moral life. The shape of the Christian life is determined by what God has done for us in Christ. Because we are a new creation in Christ, we can and must live in a way that

corresponds with our status as a sanctified people who have been elected by, justified by and reconciled to God.

Unfortunately, Paul's teaching on justification by faith has often been distorted and misunderstood, as if the Apostle were unconcerned about the moral life. But this is hardly the case. Although Paul affirms that no one will be justified in God's sight by doing the deeds prescribed by the law (Rom. 3:20), he is quite insistent that those who have been justified and reconciled must live a moral life.

For example, in Romans, after explaining what he means by justification by faith, Paul begins his moral exhortation in this way:

> I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:1-2).

In a similar vein, after defending his law-free Gospel to the Galatians, he exhorts them:

> For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another (Gal. 5:13).

In both instances, Paul expects those who have been justified to live a life that corresponds to their new status. What, then, is the relationship between Paul's moral exhortation, on the one hand, and his insistence that a person is justified by faith, rather than by doing the works of the law, on the other?

For Paul, there is an intimate relationship between *who* we are and *what* we do. If we belong to the old humanity of Adam, the realm of the flesh, then we will inevitably do the works of the flesh. But if we have been incorporated into the new humanity inaugurated by Christ – the realm of the Spirit – then we will be led and guided by the Spirit, and the Spirit will produce its singular fruit in us.

Notice I did not say that we will produce the fruit of the Spirit. Rather *the Spirit* will produce its singular fruit within us, which Paul describes as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). In other words, the moral life is a gift of God's grace and an act of worship.

Those who have been justified and reconciled to God are no longer condemned to being conformed to this age because they are no longer under the rule of Sin. Because they have been transformed by Christ, they can discern God's will and do what is pleasing to God through the power of the Spirit at work in their lives.

This is why Paul tells the Thessalonians that God's will for them is their holiness (1 Thess. 4:3). This is why he exhorts the Philippians to be blameless and innocent in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15). This is why he begins his moral exhortation in Colossians, "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

This is why he says to the Ephesians, "be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1-2). For Paul, the moral life is a vocation that flows from the new creation God has effected in Christ. The justified fulfill what the law requires – not through their own power – but through the power of God's Spirit at work in them.

An essential aspect of preaching is to exhort people to live a moral life. There is a difference, however, between a moral exhortation which is rooted in the Gospel of justification by faith and a moral exhortation that is merely moralism. Moralism tells people what to do. It presents them with rules and laws and little else. Moral exhortation rooted in the Gospel first reminds believers of their status and dignity in Christ. Only then does it summon them to become what they are in Christ.

To preach the Gospel according to Paul is to remind people of the power of the Spirit already at work in their lives. To preach the Gospel according to Paul is to trust in the presence of the Spirit

and summon people to live in accordance with the new humanity established in Christ. To preach the Gospel according to Paul is to root the moral life in Christ's redemptive work.

This is a different kind of preaching than most congregations hear today, but it is central to Paul's Gospel. For if there is no relationship between the moral life and Christ's work of salvation, there is no reason to preach the Gospel of Christ's saving death and resurrection.

The Hope of the Christian Life

Thus far, I have spoken of the past (the human situation apart from Christ and Christ's redemptive work) and of the present (how the Christian ought to live in light of Christ's redemptive work). It is now time to say something about the future: the hope of the Christian life, the destiny of the Christian, the future of the world.

Paul has a great deal to say about the future, not in the sense of predicting what will happen, but in the sense of providing believers with something to hope for and trust in: God's final victory over Sin and Death. Paul is firmly convinced of something that we proclaim every time we celebrate the Eucharist: Christ has died; Christ is risen; C*hrist will come again.*

Although most of us readily believe in the first two parts of this acclamation (Christ has died, Christ is risen), I suspect we are not so sure about the third part: Christ will come again. After all, if Christ has not come after 2,000 years, how can we continue to hope that He will come again?

Paul could never think in this way. For him, there is an intimate connection between the resurrection of Christ and the general resurrection of the dead that will occur at the end of the ages, at the Lord's Parousia (his second coming). Consequently, Paul argues in this way. Since one human being has been raised from the dead – the Christ – then the general resurrection of the dead has already begun. And if the general resurrection of the dead has begun, then Christians are already living in the new age. Consequently, the Parousia can occur at any moment.

Put another way, the resurrection of Christ was not an isolated event that only affected Christ. It was the beginning of the general resurrection of the dead that will be completed when Christ returns at the end of the ages. Understood in this way, Christ's resurrection has inaugurated the new age, the final age, the age in which God will effect his final victory over Sin and Death through Christ.

From one point of view, Paul was mistaken. The Parousia did not occur in his lifetime as he hoped. But even though he was mistaken, Paul was not wrong. What he says about the relationship between the resurrection of Christ, the Parousia and the general resurrection of the dead remains true. The resurrection of Christ signaled the beginning of the end, the inauguration of the new age.

What Paul says about the Parousia and the general resurrection of the dead, then, is a profound act of faith and hope that God's work of salvation is not finished. To be sure, the decisive victory was won on the cross. To be sure, our sins were forgiven by Christ's death. To be sure, we have been reconciled and justified in Christ. To be sure, we are a new creation in Christ. To be sure, we already experience the gift of the Spirit and the life of the new age. *But we are not yet finally saved.*

We are not yet saved, because we have not been raised from the dead. We are not yet saved, because the powers of Sin and Death, have not been destroyed once and for all. We are not yet saved because the Lord has not returned. But when Christ comes again, the dead will be raised and Death will be destroyed.

When Christ comes again, He will hand the kingdom over to His Father, and God will be all in all. When Christ comes again, the dead will be raised incorruptible, Death will be swallowed up in victory, and we will taunt Death, "O Death, where is your victory, O death where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55).

Compared to Paul's vision of the end time, the eschatological vision of many contemporary preachers is trite, banal and anemic. Such preachers speak *as if* salvation has already been achieved, *as if* there is no further need for a final and definitive victory over evil. They rarely speak of the general resurrection of the dead, and

less often of the Lord's Parousia. They have nothing to say about the future of the world, and they don't seem to realize that there is a final act of salvation that has not yet been played out. Such preaching reduces the dramatic events of the end time to getting into heaven.

Do not misunderstand me. I too hope to "get into heaven." But Paul's eschatological vision is broader and richer than entering heaven. In his magnificent view of the end time, the whole of creation is waiting with eager longing for the revelation of the children of God (Rom. 8:19). Creation itself groans for that moment of the general resurrection of the dead when Sin and Death will be destroyed, and creation will be restored to its original harmony with God.

Paul is a realist. He understands that even though Christ died to rescue us from the present evil age, the powers of this age are still at work in our lives and in the life of the world. He understands that Sin and Death will not be definitively destroyed until Christ comes again.

Paul's teaching on the Parousia, then, is a way of affirming that there is a final act in the drama of salvation that is still to unfold. It is Paul's way of proclaiming that the last word and the final victory belong to God. There is no place, then, for pessimism in the Christian life. For if God is for us, then who can be against us (Rom. 8:21)? If the victory belongs to God's Christ, then who can overcome us? Paul is supremely confident that nothing can separate us from God's love because the final victory belongs to God, and we will share in that victory if we remain in Christ.

To preach the Gospel according to Paul is to have a vision of God's future as rich and as broad as Paul's understanding of the Parousia. To preach the Gospel according to Paul is to acknowledge that God's work of salvation is not finished. To preach the Gospel according to Paul is to proclaim that the powers of Sin and Death will not ultimately triumph, no matter how hopeless the present situation may seem.

To preach the Gospel according to Paul, then, is to take his

teaching on the general resurrection of the dead and the Parousia seriously. To be sure, this is not an easy task. Nor is it simply a matter of repeating what Paul has said. It means interpreting Paul for a new day. It requires delving into the deepest mystery of what it means to say, "Christ will come again," in order to provide the Christian community with a firm basis for its hope.

Conclusion

A few words of conclusion are in order. Throughout this talk, I have urged you, often in homiletic style, to preach the Gospel in a different key, to preach the Gospel according to Paul. This is not to say that there is another Gospel different from the Gospel we proclaim when we preach the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And Paul's Gospel surely does not contradict what we find in those Gospels.

For example, what Paul writes about the human condition apart from God is what Jesus says about a world that is no longer obedient to God's rule, a world that no longer submits to the kingdom of God. What Paul writes about justification and reconciliation is what Jesus says in the parable of the Prodigal Son about the Father's lavish forgiveness.

When Paul exhorts Christians to live their lives under the guidance of the Sprit, he echoes what Jesus says about living in light of the in-breaking kingdom of God. And what Paul preaches about the Parousia and the general resurrection of the dead recalls what Jesus said about the return of the Son of Man at the end of the ages when the kingdom of God will come in glory.

But Paul says all of this in a different key. He provides us with new ways to preach about sin, redemption, the moral life and the future of the world. He shows us how to apply the Gospel of Christ's saving death and life-giving resurrection to the problems of this world. To preach the Gospel according to Paul, we must apply the same Gospel to the events of our day. Then we will truly proclaim the Gospel according to Paul.