A LIGHT FOR REVELATION TO THE GENTILES:

PREACHING THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

By


A DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS

Submitted to the Faculties of the Toronto School of Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

Awarded by Emmanuel College and Victoria University
and The University of Toronto

2001
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0-612-65191-6
Abstract

This is a thesis about the preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada. In the course of this thesis the topic is explored through the researcher’s experience and theology and the theological tradition of the church, both the Christian church generally and The United Church of Canada specifically. A particular research methodology is used in order to explore the experience of a preacher and parishioners in an action in ministry. The resulting data is thoroughly analyzed and then the thesis concludes by drawing all of these things together into some statements about future implications and possibilities.

After a discussion of the title of the thesis, its scriptural structure and the terminology to be used, the thesis begins with the researcher’s experience that the Old Testament is not being preached very regularly in the United Church. What then follows is her own experience, context and theology around why, in her perception, this is a problem for the church. The thesis discusses the history of what the Christian church has said about the Old Testament in order to discover whether this lack of preaching is a problem in the perception of the church. Some very specific work is done around the place of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada, detailing the official documents which are both historical and current in the denomination.

The design and implementation of the action in ministry which is to further explore this topic, is based on the question,

“What is the experience of a suburban United Church preacher and his parishioners when the Old Testament lectionary texts (year A) are preached during Epiphany?”

In terms of the research methodology employed in the process of the action in ministry, qualitative research is the general category with phenomenology chosen as the specific methodology which best suits the context and characteristics of the project. The thesis details the action in ministry, both in terms of what was intended and what actually happened. The data which emerges from the action in ministry is then analyzed in-depth according to five main themes.

Each of the five chapters of the thesis draws some conclusions according to the subject matter of the chapter and the final and concluding chapter brings all of these together in a way which both summarizes what has been said and points to some general and very specific future directions for the preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada.
Autobiographical Statement

The Reverend Karen A. Hamilton B.A., M.Div., Th.M., is the preaching minister of St. James-Bond United Church in Toronto where her responsibilities are for Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care. She is also currently the President of the Toronto Conference of The United Church of Canada and the Chair of the Bearing Faithful Witness national steering group for the United Church’s Inter-Church Inter-Faith Relations Committee. She is a Director of the Christian Jewish Dialogue of Toronto and a long-time member and past chair of the Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee of Toronto Conference.

Karen has been active in the United Church at the congregational, Presbytery, Conference and National levels as well as being a frequent theme speaker, guest preacher and workshop leader. In the process of graduate work at Emmanuel College, Victoria University she was a teaching assistant for the Old Testament, New Testament and Homiletics courses and her areas of specialized interest were Pentateuch, Pre-Exilic Prophets, Wisdom Literature and Feminist Hermeneutics. Her articles have been published in a number of places including the recent United Church of Canada 75th anniversary book, Fire and Grace.

In her life outside though always inter-connected with The United Church of Canada, she is the national Chair of the World Federalists of Canada. That organization is committed to and works toward global governance, subsidiarity, the rule of law, justice and democracy. She is also a council member of the international World Federalist Movement.

Her other interests include training as a classical singer, reading, walking, languages, movies, travel and engaging conversations.

She is married to Lester Keachie and has three children, Heather, 18, Hilary, 14 and Gavin, 10. The household also includes three cats, an indeterminate number of gerbils and an occasional dog.
This Thesis is Dedicated to...

The late Professor Vernon Fawcett who witnessed and encouraged the beginnings of my love of the Old Testament.

Professor William H. Irwin CSB, for his support, integrity, thoughtful critique and lively curiosity about my topic.

Professor Gerald T. Sheppard whose passion for the texts continues to inspire my own passion for them.

And my colleagues and friends K. Jo-Ann Badley and The Reverend Doctor James T. Christie both of whom believed that this thesis would actually get written.
Acknowledgements:

There are many people to thank, without whom this thesis would not be what it is...

- The congregation of St. James-Bond United Church who supported my work.

- My Ministry Base Group: Anne Hines, Doug Finley, Rabbi Ariel Friedlander, Prof. William H. Irwin, Miriam Dryer and Heather Beard, all of whom committed themselves to my work and my learning and gave freely and wisely of their time and energy.

- My Collaborative Learning Group in the Doctor of Ministry Programme, the Toronto School of Theology

- Professors Dorcas Gordon and Ann Anderson of the Doctor of Ministry Programme, the Toronto School of Theology

- The Rev. Bill Lord, Director of Continuing Education, The Toronto School of Theology

- Professor Eric Mendelsohn, The University of Toronto

- The congregation and preacher so willing and committed to participating in the action in ministry.

- Linda, librarian in the Emmanuel College Library, for all her extra-ordinary patience with me as I struggled to adapt to a system that no longer includes card catalogues.

- My friend Lesley Chisholm who dropped by for tea in order to keep me grounded.

- My friend Jill Kemp who was always encouraging.

- My friend Susan Howard who brought over champagne the night after my defense.
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A LIGHT FOR REVELATION TO THE GENTILES:
PREACHING THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

This is a thesis about the preaching of the Old Testament\(^1\) in The United Church of Canada. It explores the preaching of the Old Testament in the United Church through my experience and theology, through the theological tradition of the church, and using a particular research methodology, through the experience of a preacher and his parishioners. The thesis concludes by bringing all of those factors together and drawing some conclusions about future implications and possibilities around the place of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada.

The title I have chosen for this thesis is "A Light for Revelation to the Gentiles: Preaching the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada". The first line of this title is taken from the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 2, verse 32. It is part of the words of Simeon, that man who, according to Luke, was righteous and devout, who was looking forward to the consolation of Israel and upon whom the Holy Spirit rested. The words of Simeon, as he held the infant Jesus in his arms, indicate that Jesus is the salvation of God, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of the people Israel. The relationship of Jesus to Israel, past and

\(^1\) I am well aware of the current debate around the terminology to be used for this part of scripture and have found myself in several positions regarding that debate as may be seen in a comparison of this thesis with my thesis proposal. Further in this chapter I will briefly discuss some of the issues involved and the reasons for my particular and final choice both for this thesis and for my work in general.
present and future, is a complex discussion which is beyond the limits of this thesis though the work of those such as Walter Brueggemann, discussed below, has much to say regarding it. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I focus on the first part of the verse or phrase. Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles and that includes The United Church of Canada. This thesis is focused around what Christians call ‘Old Testament’ scriptures - texts which were important for Jesus in his earthly life and ministry, texts which were important for the faith tradition in which he was nurtured and texts which were important to the early church for whom they witnessed to him. I want to explore the way in which Jesus is a light for revelation to The United Church of Canada through the preaching of the Old Testament.

The Terminology Question – “What’s in a Name?”

The term ‘Old Testament’ in this title and throughout the thesis raises the question of terminology. While it might be possible in other contexts to confine to a footnote a discussion of the terminology used for the particular part of scripture around which this thesis revolves, the issues which are central to the discussion have direct bearing on the experience, theory and data of this thesis and so I will discuss them here. In the recent United Church of Canada document “Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church – Jewish Relations Today” some of the complexities of the terminology are set out. The document states that
"...Christians who want to move away from all appearance or suggestion of supersessionism,² and who want to respect the sensitivities of people who see pejorative valuation in words like ‘old’ and ‘new’ are trying to find another way of referring to what we have traditionally called the ‘Old Testament’.³ The central part of the document’s discussion deals with referring to the Old Testament as ‘Hebrew Scriptures’, stating that the word ‘Hebrew’ would be then understood to refer to the language of composition of that part of scripture. For consistency, the New Testament would then have to be called the ‘Greek Scriptures’, in reference to its language of composition. The advantage of these terms, according to the document, is they cannot be interpreted pejoratively, there is nothing in them that limits the authority, importance and application of the books designated that way.⁴

In the introduction to his book, Wrestling With the Word: Christian Preaching from the Hebrew Bible, Foster R. McCurley takes the position at the end of his discussion on terminology, that he will use the term ‘Hebrew Bible’ and he takes that position for similar reasons to those set out in the “Bearing Faithful Witness”

² The United Church document “Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church – Jewish Relations Today” defines ‘supersessionism’ as the “Christian teaching that the church has replaced or superseded Israel in God’s plan of salvation; after the destruction of the Temple Judaism demonstrates to the world the effects of God’s wrath (God’s grace being demonstrated through the church”). (p. 41, February 1998 draft) This document reflects the most current definition of the term in The United Church of Canada.


⁴ Ibid.
document. However, he also deals in detail with the complexities of that decision. He admits his ambivalence about the terminology, acknowledging both the necessity of maintaining the integrity of the scriptures composed in Hebrew and passed down to Christians in and through the Jewish community and the reality that the structure of those scriptures has been interpretively altered by the church. The Hebrew Bible of Judaism and the Old Testament of Christianity are not identical because of issues of Christian interpretation. The change in order, on the part of the church, indicates the conviction of the church that the prophetic books immediately precede the Gospels in order to demonstrate the explicit relationship of prophecy and fulfillment.5

McCurlcy sees the issue of terminology becoming even more complex when one takes into account the fact that passages from the scriptures – Torah, Prophets and Writings, as used in the New Testament, are often quotations and allusions from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, rather than from the Hebrew texts themselves. He concludes that the question of the terminology to be used by Christians for that part of the Bible traditionally referred to as the ‘Old Testament’ is not a settled question and that one needs to continue

struggling with inconsistencies and ambiguities.\(^6\)

While being in complete agreement with McCurley as to the unsettled nature of the question of terminology and the complexities involved, the position I take in this thesis is that the appropriate terminology for a Christian writer to use when referring to what has traditionally been known as the Old Testament, is still ‘Old Testament’. As McCurley has so clearly pointed out, the order of the books of the Old Testament is different from that of the order of the books of the Hebrew scriptures. That difference in ordering reflects a profound and deliberate re-shaping of theology and a Christological focus. The New Testament uses and appropriates quotations and allusions from the Torah, Prophets and Writings in the service of its Christological interpretation. This speaks to the fact that to use terminology which might be interpreted as implying that the Jewish and Christian readings are similar or even identical, is misleading. As John Sawyer in his book, *The Fifth Gospel*, has in such a rich and detailed fashion demonstrated with the book of the prophet Isaiah, Christian use of Hebrew scriptures has been so particular and thorough from the very beginning of the early church that in spite of the ambiguities and inconsistencies it is the term ‘Old Testament’ which must still be used by Christians.\(^7\)

\(^6\) Ibid.
I also believe that it is in using the term 'Old Testament' that Christians are confronted and challenged by what they do or do not believe the Christian interpretation of those texts to be. To use the term 'Hebrew Scriptures' is to create a distancing effect of the kind which will be discussed below in chapter two’s section on the historical-critical method of biblical scholarship. For all these reasons stated, I have changed my position on this terminology question from the position set out in my thesis proposal. In my proposal, Appendix A of this thesis, I used the term 'Hebrew Scriptures' with much ambivalence. I have subsequently clarified my thinking and theology on the question as this discussion illustrates and so will now use the term 'Old Testament' when referring to those biblical books which begin for us, as Protestant Christians, with the book of Genesis and conclude with the book of the prophet Malachi. 8

The Five Chapters: Chapter One – Introduction

This chapter sets out what my approach is to the topic of the preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada and how I explore it through

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8 There is a feeling, currently quite prevalent in The United Church of Canada, that the term "Hebrew Scriptures" must be used in order to avoid antisemitism. It has been my experience in extensive Christian/Jewish dialogue work on the congregational, regional and national levels that this terminology question is a very minor one in the opinion of the Jewish community. Terminology can, of course, be a very sensitive issue. However, what has been expressed to me is that in terms of combating antisemitism, it is changes in behaviour that are crucial. I believe that as we as a denomination continue to deepen our understanding of the relationship of these texts to our faith this question of terminology will become less of an issue.
the subsequent chapters. It shows that my approach is to begin with my own experience and theology, and then to examine it in the light of the theology of the Christian church and the experience of some United Church people and then to draw some conclusions. This first chapter also details the basic context, configuration and purposes of the chapters to follow. Those chapters taken together comprise what I believe to be a unique way of examining the preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada, a way that combines both theory and experience, theology and data.

Chapter Two – Theory and Theology

The second chapter of this thesis deals with the theories and theology that undergird, sustain and inform the assumptions, the thinking, the questions and the conclusions of my work. In so doing, the chapter begins with my own theology and experience as it pertains to the place and preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada. I begin in that way because it was when I realized the difference between my experience of the Old Testament in my life and faith and the experience of it for many others in The United Church of Canada that I began to intentionally listen in depth to the theology and experience of others around these texts. I then began to formulate an assumption that there was a lack of Old Testament preaching in the United Church. At the same time, the imperative to begin with my own theology and experience of the Old Testament
remains because my theology and experience continues to be informed by the particular context in which I minister and live and move and have my being.

Another reason why I begin this work with my experience is a factor that might be termed background experience to my experience. It was my theology and faith, informed and guided by the revelatory nature of the Old Testament that took me to graduate work in those texts at Emmanuel College, Toronto School of Theology, the University of Toronto. In the fall terms of 1991 and 1992 I was the teaching assistant for an introductory course in Old Testament. One of the informally-stated aims of this course was to get the students going through for ministry in The United Church of Canada to read through the entire Old Testament. The assumption was that they were not necessarily at all familiar with that part of the Bible. I found that assumption to be generally very true. It is a well-known discussion in theological colleges, though not one that I have been privy to hearing in a detailed, intentional and sustained way, that the ministry students of the past few decades arrive with far less knowledge of the Bible than was the case in previous generations. Side by side with this in the life of the United Church, is the general perception that the people in the pew are less knowledgeable about the Bible now than has been the case in previous generations, something that I have also experienced to be very true. In discussing these perceptions with The Rev. Bill Lord, retired Director of Continuing Education and consultant for The Toronto School of Theology, he
commented that one of the things that he remembers from his theological education in the period of the 1960s was the clear message from his professor of Old Testament that the Old Testament was not worth preaching.⁹

Given this background, assumptions and experience, my own and what I was hearing from other United Church folk, clearly what I needed to do was to begin with my experience and then to test it and reflect on it in a number of ways. This thesis does that. Since one of my primary assumptions coming out of my experience and the ways in which that experience engages and is engaged by others in my context, is that there is a lack of preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada, I need to test that assumption and discover if it is so, why it might be so. I need to explore whether it is considered, in places other than my own experience and faith, an important thing for The United Church of Canada to hear Old Testament through preaching and if so why. I do that by looking at the place of the Old Testament in the United Church. I look at the place of those scriptures in the United Church, particularly at the place of the Old Testament in the recent and specific seventy-five year life of this particular denomination. I do all this as a way of testing my perception that there is a lack of Old Testament preaching in my denominational context. The assumption that underlies my perception is the essentialness of the Old Testament and its Christian interpretation to the faithful life of the church. I look to this exploration of

the place of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada to ground or challenge that assumption.

Along with what has been said above, chapter two also explores my assumptions and experience through the topics which are called for by the methodology of the process, a methodology to which I will refer shortly. These topics include the lectionary, the prophet Isaiah and preaching in The United Church of Canada. I look first at the lectionary which is in common use in the United Church. The lectionary's choice of Old Testament texts to be used in the weekly life of the church are not arbitrary as I will show. What the lectionary does, however, as a method of choosing which particular texts to be looked at in this thesis about texts is to limit and test my particular biases as researcher. In fact, it limits and challenges the biases of all those involved in this work. Since the specific texts so determined are drawn from the book of the prophet Isaiah, it is also necessary to discuss some of the ways in which those prophetic passages have been used in the history and faith of the Christian church of which The United Church of Canada is a part.

The final part of the second chapter of this thesis is a discussion of preaching in The United Church of Canada. This is an essential piece of the testing and examining of my own assumptions and perceptions of the Old Testament, since as I state, it is through preaching that the Old Testament is most often
encountered in the United Church. There are other options that I could have chosen as a way of looking at these kinds of texts in the life and worship of people in my denomination but I chose preaching because I thought that the quantity and accessibility of the data would be the most profitable in that area. The Old Testament may also be heard, spoken and experienced in the congregational life of the United Church through such vehicles as bible study and the private reading of scripture. However, there is an Old Testament text suggested for reading and preaching for each week of the church year in a format based on The Revised Common Lectionary. As stated in my thesis proposal, Old Testament texts are also recommended in United Church resources for occasional services such as weddings, funerals and home communions. James D. Smart, in the context of a discussion of scripture and hermeneutics, states that the primary channel of communication, and for most members of the church, the only channel, is the preaching that takes place in Sunday worship. It is for this reason, that preaching is the most common way that people of The United Church of Canada encounter the Old Testament, that I have chosen to use it as a major part of the process of this thesis.

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Chapter Three – Methodology

Chapter three of this thesis begins with a particular question which was designed to explore, using a particular and detailed research methodology, the experience of a variety of folk in the United Church around Old Testament texts.

"What is the experience of a suburban United Church preacher and his parishioners when the Old Testament lectionary texts (year A) are preached during Epiphany?"

Chapter three then turns to the specifics of the methodology which was set up to be in relation with the theory and theology of chapter two and to answer the research question. This chapter begins by detailing the qualitative research methodology in general and specifically, the methodology of phenomenology. There are a number of research methodologies which could have been chosen for the researching of this question. Whatever I chose, however, needed to be under the general umbrella of qualitative research since this is a type of methodological research based on findings which are the subject's interpretations of events. It is the subject's interpretations of events that this question above is trying to determine. Although qualitative research is a recent method in the broader field of social sciences, it has been found to be very helpful in research in the field of ministry since it includes such research terms as 'meaning', 'metaphor', 'symbol' and 'description', all of which resonate with the experiences of pastoral ministry. The primary methodology of this thesis, which is based on a
particular experience set in a pastoral ministry context, is therefore qualitative research. Given the nature of the specifics of the data collection, particularly the questionnaires, I needed to use a little quantitative research methodology as well, but it is in the service of the primary methodology.

Narrowing down the qualitative research methodologies chapter three, indicates that the call was to phenomenology as best suiting my methodological purposes. Phenomenology fits the context of my research, respects the participants and the nature of their data and reduces my bias as researcher as much as possible. This is so because as a research approach it focuses on the lived experience of the participants. It requires accurate description followed by a search for themes which represent significant meanings for the participants. Chapter three of this thesis also details the logistics of the research process, including the use of triangulation. Triangulation involves the combining of several lines of sight in order to obtain a sharper and more verifiable picture of the experience. All the other factors that went into the design of the action in ministry are also detailed in this chapter. All the details that make up the design of the action in ministry, the location, the time of year – about which there was some controversy – the design of the questionnaires, the group process and the verification procedures revolve around several key issues. They are all set up according to my assumption that the Old Testament is essential to The United Church of Canada and that there is a lack of Old Testament preaching in the
United Church, a factor which I believe to be highly problematic to our life in the faith. All of the details of the action in ministry are set up on the premise of these assumptions, but, and this is very important, they are set up in such a way as to reflect the experience of the participants in terms of the Old Testament. They are set up, in relationship with the explorations of chapter two, in such a way as to allow for the very real possibility of showing my assumptions to be wrong.

Chapter Four – Data Analysis

It is in the fourth chapter of the thesis, the data analysis chapter, that the assumptions, explorations and methodology of chapters two and three come together in a detailed analysis of the data which has emerged from the action in ministry. Chapter two of this thesis presents theory, theology and experience, my own, that of the Christian church and that of The United Church of Canada around the essentialness of the Old Testament and its Christian interpretation. It relates those factors to the lack of Old Testament preaching which I perceive in this denomination. Chapter three presents the methodology by which the experience of the Old Testament by the participants of the action in ministry, and in a wider sense, their experience of the above issues, is researched. It is in chapter four that the experience is really confronted and comes together with the material of the other two chapters.
In the coming together of the experiential data of the participants with what has gone before in terms of this thesis, I anticipated certain findings. Many of these findings occurred, while a few did not occur. I will discuss these below, particularly in my concluding chapter. As in any D.Min. research project, there were some logistical problems with the details of the action in ministry and some things which I would change another time, but none of these substantially affect the data. There were also some logistical issues to be resolved, such as deciding in which order to analyze the data, at least initially, knowing that my perspective on the data would necessarily be affected by that decision. Throughout the thesis I give my reasons for resolving these issues in the ways that I did.

As in any research project, deep familiarity with the data is the way to begin analyzing it. What then begins to emerge are five distinct themes. These themes weave their way through the various kinds of data of the preacher, the parishioner/participants and the observer and interact with each other. The deep familiarity with the data and a sensitivity to the words and phrases used in it make the themes fairly easy to identify. It is an expected part of the qualitative research methodology that in the analyzing of the data themes will emerge, though the themes emerge more clearly and obviously than I had anticipated. Some of the five themes emerge more strongly than the others according to the frequency and level of passion by which they are articulated. With all of the five themes the data of the participants clearly shows when and how the Old Testament connects with
their lives lived as people of faith within their particular contexts and when and how it does not connect.

In analyzing the data I organize it into the five themes that I have identified, well aware that some of it does not fit into any one of the themes. I do not consider this a problem, since it is not to be expected that all the data will fit into certain, identifiable themes and that reality serves to highlight the nature and characteristics of the themes. Generally, the words or phrases or longer responses of the data which do not fit into any of the themes are those stated by a small percentage of the participants. However, this is not always the case and I have analyzed those words, phrases and longer responses stated by only a few of the participants, and in one particular instance, those stated by only one participant. I do this when the responses have a very direct and discernible relationship to the theory, theology, experience and assumptions of this thesis.

It is not always easy to determine which pieces of the data fit into which themes. In some instances I make a judgment call, based on my understanding of the rest of the data. In a number of instances, pieces of the data fit very well into several of the themes. In those cases, if the data seems to belong most clearly to one theme I place it there. I use several sections of data more than once in order to illustrate several of the themes, doing this particularly in my conclusions. Two of the themes are often seen to be in relationship in the data of the
congregational participants. I take this combination and the specific characteristics of those two themes into consideration in the formulation of my conclusions. Also noteworthy is the fact that the preacher and the parishioner/participants emphasize the various themes differently in their response to the experience. I expected this since their angles of perspective on the experience are quite different. I also take this into consideration in my conclusions.

This fourth chapter is related to the two that precede it, chapter two being the theory and theology chapter and chapter three being the methodology chapter, in a number of significant ways. As chapter two sets out my experience and theology of the Old Testament and then the experience and theology of the various ages and stages of the Christian church of the Old Testament, chapter four sets out the intentional experience of the Old Testament of a particular group of United Church people. Chapter two also sets out the theory and theology of the various limits of the Old Testament experience within which the experience of the particular group takes place. Those limits are the lectionary, in order to minimize bias, the texts of the prophet Isaiah because those are the texts of the lectionary and preaching because that is the means by which the Old Testament is heard and experienced. In chapter four I see what the lines of continuity and discontinuity are between what has been set out in chapter two and what actually is experienced in the action in ministry. Chapter three then enables the lines of
continuity and discontinuity to be shown in a way that is the experience of the participants of the action in ministry. This experience is reflected upon by me, the researcher, with integrity for the data but it is their experience.

As is the case with any researcher and as I have stated above, I carry assumptions into this project. I intend to be clear, particularly in chapter two, as the most appropriate place, about the specific nature of those assumptions. Chapter three is designed to allow the experience of the participants in the project to be as little affected by my assumptions as possible. It is also important to note in this introductory chapter that there is significant learning to be gained whether my assumptions are shown to be valid or whether they are not. In chapter four I hope to engage the data in a way which allows for either possibility. I believe it to be quite possible that the most fruitful learning for me will come at the points where some of my assumptions which are validated by the data encounter and come into relationship with my assumptions which are not validated by the data. These particular points, along with the ways in which the theory and theology, the methodology and the data analysis come together and point to future directions for the preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada, will be discussed in my concluding chapter.
Chapter Five – Conclusion

The concluding chapter of my thesis summarizes and brings together the material of chapters two, three and four in a way which shows their interconnections and emphasizes the key elements that have been set out. My conclusions then go on to point to a future for the preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada. All of these conclusions, as is the case with all of this thesis, are set in the context of my belief that the most significant constant in the lives of the people of The United Church of Canada is their relationship with God.

The concluding chapter of this thesis reviews my own experience and theology of the Old Testament and then the most significant findings, in the context of the assumptions of this thesis, of my review of the place of the Old Testament in the history of the Christian church. This review includes specifically The United Church of Canada. The concluding chapter then goes on to detailed discussion of the impact of these findings in combination with several other factors pertaining to the preaching of the Old Testament, notably the lectionary, the particular texts prescribed by the lectionary and an important aspect of the current societal context of the church.
Having touched again on the methodology of the action in ministry and the way in which that methodology informs this thesis generally, my concluding chapter then focuses on the five themes that are detailed in chapter four and what I consider to be the most significant findings arising out of them. It is in combining the data around these five themes with the theoretical and theological material of this thesis, including both those of my assumptions which are validated and those which are not, which leads to what is a major part of my concluding chapter. I point to future directions for the preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada. A number of my recommendations around future directions deal with specific action in ministry projects, because I believe their data would add much to the picture which is beginning to be drawn by this thesis. Other recommendations focus in areas of pastoral care, ecumenism, bible study and the general perception of the lack of biblical knowledge in the United Church in comparison with earlier periods in our history. I also note a couple of areas in which archival research would prove very fruitful for our denomination, particularly the areas of the introduction of the lectionary and the practice of preaching.

My last chapter then concludes with what may be a beginning, a very specific recommendation or future direction which I believe could be helpful for the preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada. This very specific recommendation may be said to bring together much that is stated in the
pages of this thesis, much of the multi-faceted reality that is The United Church of Canada and the relationship of its people to God who has created in love, who redeems in the person of Jesus Christ and who sustains by the power and passion of the Holy Spirit. It is my hope that this specific recommendation is faithful to what I have heard and reflected on in the process of creating this thesis. It is my hope that this thesis is faithful to the theory, theology, experience, methodology, data and pastoral realities within its pages. It is my hope, God being my helper, to see a future direction for the preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada. It is my hope that this future direction will further reveal Jesus Christ in relationship to what we call Old Testament.

"I had long found myself troubled by the fact that so few preachers – myself included, I fear – really seemed to know how to proceed with the Old Testament, or were guided in their preaching from it, if they preached from it at all, by any conscious hermeneutical principles."¹¹

Chapter Two

It is appropriate that this second chapter of my thesis begin by discussing the theories and theology that undergird, sustain and inform the thinking, the methodology, the questions and the conclusions of my work and will carry forward this thesis. It is also appropriate that this chapter discuss the specifics of my own theology and experience as they have initiated and continue to be in relationship with the process which has resulted in this thesis. In relating the theories and theology which underlie this chapter, I will begin with my own theology and experience.

The theological assumptions that inform and interact with my pastoral experiences and my thinking are, as described in my thesis proposal,

- my belief that God loves humanity and creation
- my belief that the Bible, read for Christians through the experience of the Risen Christ, is the primary way in which that love is shown
- my belief that the Bible makes God’s love and the ways in which that love issues in justice — visible, concrete and identifiable for the current global context
- my belief that for Christians and for the Christian church as a whole, both the Old and the New Testaments speak vividly about God’s love and justice
- my belief that the early church, searching their scriptures, which have a very close relationship to what Christians call the Old Testament, found them to witness to Jesus Christ in ways which spoke to their experience of his resurrection and enabled them to proclaim that experience

To state these theological assumptions, in a way directly relevant to the question of this thesis and the action in ministry, both of which will be described in further
- I believe that God is revealed in the Old Testament
- I believe that Jesus knew that and lived that reality according to the scriptures as they existed in his human context. I believe that for us as Christians God is revealed in Jesus in the scriptures called the Old and New Testaments.
- I believe that in the light and inspiration of the Holy Spirit the primary witness of the Christian Church has been in accordance with these beliefs.

Having stated some of the central theological beliefs that I bring to this thesis, I now turn to the experience that I bring to this thesis. Prior to my incumbency in my current pastorate, I spent ten years as a guest preacher, Bible study/conference leader and presenter in various United Church contexts. I frequently used Old Testament texts for my sermons and presentations on these occasions because I knew those texts well and loved them. A long-standing part of my own personal experience is the fact that I hear and feel God's presence and revelation through the richness of the narrative, the vividness of the prophecy and the vitality of the characters in these texts. There is something mysterious, challenging and comforting in the knowledge that these statements of faith and divine/human relationship have been important to two major world faith traditions for so many years. Texts whose historical detail and context I find

\[12\] I am aware that Islam also shares with Christianity and Judaism many faith stories. For this research project, however, I limit my work to the two faith traditions about which I have some understanding and which share scriptures in what is to a great extent a verbatim structure.
fascinating, texts whose language and imagery I find aesthetically moving, also speak profoundly to me of God's love and justice.

When I used and spoke and preached on these texts, however, the reaction was startling. Time after time, the more chronologically senior members of whatever context I was working in would tell me how good it was to hear those texts which they had not heard since they were children. Time after time, younger members of whatever context I was working in would tell me how good it was to hear the Old Testament passages because they had never heard them before. I began to deliberately test this learning, continuing to push in the area of Old Testament and listening more intentionally for the responses.

Several other factors in my context combined with my own theological assumptions and presuppositions in the creation of the question of this thesis. The congregation that I currently serve as preaching minister is geographically located beside one of the city of Toronto's largest Jewish communities. My congregation has much contact: both informal day to day neighbourhood contact and formal study and dialogue contact with its Jewish sisters and brothers. A five week dialogue series in 1997 between my congregation and the neighbouring synagogue focused on scripture; both the Old and New Testaments. This particular dialogue series was part of what has been an annual dialogue series for the past six years and planning continues for future events.
On a national United Church level, I have the privilege of chairing the steering group of the “Bearing Faithful Witness” document. This document is sub-titled “United Church: Jewish Relations Today” and deals with both acknowledging past wrongs on the part of The United Church of Canada’s relationship with Jews and repenting, in the theological sense of the word, in a way which will lead to new ways of speaking and acting. While the status of the document, at this time of writing, is not yet finalized and one of its foundational conclusions, that God’s covenant with Israel is irrevocable, is not yet part of the official theology of The United Church of Canada, there is much that is important about this document for the purposes of this thesis. The document has emerged in a context of re-examination of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism and a major part of that re-examination has and does involve scripture. Although often used differently and existing in a different canonical order, Christianity and Judaism share scriptures. Also, Christian churches in general have a history of interpreting both the scriptures that are shared with Judaism and those that are unique to Christianity in ways that have been antisemitic.13

These features of my context therefore point to the fact that major pieces of the theory and theology of this thesis need to be the questions of the Old

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13 “Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church – Jewish Relations Today” defines ‘antisemitism’ as follows, ‘Literally meaning ‘opposed to semites’ (ie. Jews, Arabs and other semitic peoples); usually used to mean hatred of Jews. The term was invented in Germany in the late 19th century to give Jew-hatred a scientific ring in the context of a pseudo-scientific study of the human races.” (1998 draft, p. 37)
Testament's essentialness to The United Church of Canada as a part of the larger Christian church and the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. The theology of this thesis as it has been stated above is that God is revealed for Christians in the Old Testament, that Jesus knew and upheld these scriptures, and that the primary witness of the centuries of the Christian Church has been to these realities. Given the methodology, detailed below, that was called for in the development of the action in ministry, these pieces of the theory and theology of this thesis need to be discussed in four ways. These are the place of the Old Testament in the Christian church, particularly The United Church of Canada, the theology of the Christian year, the book of the prophet Isaiah and preaching in The United Church of Canada. The four pieces of the theology and theory of the thesis are inter-connected with one another to the degree that it may seem somewhat artificial to separate them, important as that is for the purposes of clarity in discussion. It is also an arbitrary, but necessary, decision as to the order in which to discuss them.

The Place of The Old Testament in the Christian Church

In a discussion of the place of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada it is important to remember the relatively short existence of this particular denomination.14 It is necessary therefore, to set the context with some remarks

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14 The United Church of Canada officially came into being on June 10, 1925.
on the place of the Old Testament in the Christian Church in general before moving more specifically to The United Church of Canada. It is also important to approach the discussion from the perspective of this thesis which connects the essentialness of the Old Testament and its Christian interpretation with the concrete level of congregational life.

From its very beginnings Christianity had a scripture and that scripture, although not entirely fixed at the time, was shared with the Judaism in which Christianity had its beginnings. Although the scripture was shared, the divergent understandings of it, the faith reality of Christianity’s claim that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified by the power and authority of the Roman Empire, was the Messiah, while Judaism did not accept that claim, forced Christians to interpret texts anew in order to show how they pointed to Jesus as the Messiah.¹⁵ This interpreting of texts anew was not a new reality for a people whose faith emerged in the context of Judaism. Throughout their history, “...the people of Israel were constantly faced with the need to interpret the events of their history and the writings that spoke of them…”¹⁶ Just as the prophet’s interpretations of the Exodus came to be included in the scriptures of the Jews, so the interpretation of the ministry, life and death of Jesus in the light of those scriptures came to form


¹⁶ Ibid. and see also Donald Akenson, Surpassing Wonder: The Invention of the Bible and the Talmuds (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998) 244.
part of the Christian Bible. For the early Christian preachers, the Old Testament was foundational to their proclamation of the gospel and the same was true for the gospel writers. The genealogies in Matthew and Luke, for example, are only comprehensible with some knowledge of both Old Testament history and messianic prophecies. Jesus, himself, as we have his life and teachings recorded for us in the Gospels, made frequent references to Old Testament figures and stories.

In the history of the Christian Church therefore, that the Old Testament has a place in its scriptures has been the object of general consensus, though often discussed. The Church has believed that that part of scripture provides important truths about God, the world and the Church itself and that to limit itself to the New Testament would be to miss much of God’s revelation. The most significant exception was the Marcionite controversy in which Marcion held the view that the Old Testament was not authoritative because the one revealed in it was not the

17 John Polkinghome in Searching for Truth: Lenten Meditations on Science and Faith (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996) 88-9 puts it this way, “The earliest Christian confession seems to have been ‘Jesus is Lord’ (see I Corinthians 12:3). In first-century Palestine that was a more highly charged confession than we may at first sight realize today. Pious Jews never uttered aloud the name of God (Yahewh), but said instead ‘Lord’. Therefore, Jesus was being given a title with strong divine overtones. Yet he was being given it by Jews, whose central belief was that ‘the Lord our God is one Lord’ (Deuteronomy 6:4). How then could Jesus be Lord too? In their struggle to make sense of this paradox, forced on them by experience, the first Christians searched their scriptures, the Old Testament, for clues.”


19 Ibid.
supreme, loving God of the gospel. This, however, was a view which did not carry
the day in the interpretation of scripture promulgated by the mainstreams of
Christianity. Marcion was an extreme exception and throughout the centuries of
the early church fathers, the medieval church and the reformers, the Old
Testament was seen as vitally important to the Christian Church.\textsuperscript{20}

The Rise of Historical Criticism:

The rise of historical criticism brought with it a new and significant shift in the
understanding of scripture in the Christian church, a shift which has proven to be
one of the most significant elements in the theological questions with which this
thesis deals. To state the shift rather baldly, with the rise of historical criticism
much of the church’s understanding of scripture that allowed for and indeed,
expected that the Old Testament was an integral part of the canon, was swept
away. Prior to the rise of historical criticism, there were a variety of methods used
for the interpretation of scripture. Typology, analogy and allegory for example,\textsuperscript{21}
were all possible ways to work with biblical texts though different people and

\textsuperscript{20} For a recent survey of this history, particularly as it relates to the preaching of the Old
Testament and how the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament connects on a concrete
level with congregational life, see the article by Gonzales, already cited.

\textsuperscript{21} These methods of biblical interpretation, all of which have definite weaknesses when viewed
from the perspective of 20thc biblical scholarship, can be variously described as finding allusions
to Christ and his work in Old Testament texts, allusions that were not in the original writer’s mind
or as believing that scripture has levels of meaning. John Bright discusses these methods in The
different time periods might favour one or the other. With the rise of historical criticism, however, such interpretations were rejected by many in favour of the historical meaning of the text as the author intended it and this has remained the dominant attitude among many of biblical scholars working in the reform context in which the United Church lives and moves and has its being.\footnote{Ibid., 83-4.}

A particular and very influential example of this is the work of Rudolph Bultmann.\footnote{It was conversation with two biblical theologians, The Rev. Dr. Andrew Stirling and K. Jo-Ann Badley that led me to consider the effect of Bultmann on the question of this thesis. It is part of the anecdotal data of this thesis, that the Rev. Dr. Andrew Stirling (Fall 1998) upon hearing of the subject matter of my work, immediately asked if I thought that Bultmann could be the cause of the lack of Old Testament preaching in The United Church of Canada.} Bultmann deals with what he calls the theological problem of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, concerning himself specifically with the question of whether the Old Testament has a meaning still for the faith which sees the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Bultmann sees the Old Testament as essential to the Christian faith in the way that it is the presupposition of the New. Christians must stand under the Old Testament if they want to understand the New Testament. What is of use to Christians in particularity of the Old Testament is whatever readies them for the reception of the Gospel.\footnote{Rudolph Bultmann, “The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith”, \textit{The Old Testament and Christian Faith} ed. B.W. Anderson, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1964) 8-17.} Many of the biblical scholars and theologians of the church, would agree with Bultmann to this point in his argument. However, in what he goes on
to say about what the interpretation of the Old Testament must be in the Christian church, he is representative of the understanding of the Old Testament which has brought us to its current situation, at least in some contexts, of neglect.

Although, completely correct in his elaboration of the particularity of the Old Testament, Bultmann takes it to the extreme of comparing the history of the people of Israel with the history of ancient Greece and Rome, saying that all are of equal value for the Christian faith. He relegates the Old Testament to the status of history and history alone, saying that it cannot be understood except by its original sense, a sense which can only be established by historical research. And even when it is understood in this way, all that can be found is what is already known in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The effect of Bultmann therefore, on the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament is two-fold. It is to relegate those texts to the realm of the scholar who has the tools and the time to research the original historical sense. This relegation is based on the assumption, which would be challenged by those such as John Sawyer, who is discussed below, that the original historical sense is the primary one. The effect is also to sweep away methods of the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament which had been in use in the church through prior ages, without proposing any alternatives for the faith communities. The bottom line effect, through a crude and

25 Ibid., 18-35.
simplistic analysis of Bultmann, is that the Old Testament is thought to be both too hard and not relevant to the life of the church.  

There were those who protested this domination of historical criticism in the mainline, western churches, but by and large their protest has not had much impact in a way that would positively affect the preaching of the Old Testament. Karl Barth initiated a revolt against what he saw as theological liberalism and arid historicism in biblical interpretation, maintaining an interpretation of scripture that was strongly Christological and went far beyond a grammatico-historical exegesis of the text. He was determined to see the relevance and meaning of the Old Testament to the church and to resist any distancing of scripture from the life and faith of its people. However, his contribution to the preaching of the Old Testament is, in my judgement, an ambivalent one. In a time and place of rampant antisemitism, he believed that an antisemitic church loses both its faith and the objective of its faith. But Barth also spoke often about the obdurate people of Israel, as a people who oppose their own election and prove unworthy of it. He thus gave permission, in a sense, for some of his contemporaries and

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26 Although not speaking about the Bible specifically, Akenson, p.120, makes a similar point about Bultmann. He tells his readers that Bultmann’s view of Christianity is as a Greek form, a view which as it has been articulated by Bultmann both runs the serious risk of antisemitism and of inflicting damage on Christianity in its denial that it is constructed primarily on Jewish premises.
subsequent readers to disregard the Old Testament as the scripture of an
unworthy people.27

A quote from John Bright, details some of the implications of what has been,
until very recently, the dominance of historical criticism in biblical studies with the
resultant impact on such related areas as the theology of the place of the Old
Testament.

But can the church rest content with interpreting the Old Testament merely
in its historical meaning? If she does so, will not the Old Testament again
be seen in its utter strangeness as the expression of an ancient religion
not the same as our own? Will not much of it seem irrelevant, or at best of
purely historical interest, to the Christian? And what, then, is to prevent the
church from falling into the arms of Marcion? After all, the allegorists did
recognize both the strangeness of the Old Testament in its literal sense
and the fact that it is indispensable; and they did save it for the church. And
if we reject their methods, must we not still find in the Old Testament a
Christian meaning over and above its plain, historical meaning if the
church is to retain it as a part of her canon of Scripture? 28

There are those such as Bright who have seen the implications of an uncritical
approach to, and acceptance of, historical criticism and more recently, there are
those such as Walter Brueggemann who are not only recognizing the problem,
but are proposing a beginning in terms of a way to overcome it. In his Theology of

27 Bultmann, 85-86.
28 Bright, 84
the Old Testament, Brueggemann sums up the current situation in a way that sounds to be in a direct line from Bright.

In principle, the metanarrative of modernity, with its vigilance against authority, made the Old Testament theology as a normative enterprise impossible. The emancipation of the Bible from dogmatic authority, which received its major impetus in the Reformation, was lost in a practice of reductionist criticism. It is fair to say that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Old Testament had ceased to be a part of Scripture with any authoritative claim for the church.²⁹

Brueggemann, in trying to restore the understanding of the Old Testament as essential scripture with an authoritative claim for the church, makes the point that there is increasing agreement among those who pursue these kinds of questions that the Old Testament in its final form is a product of and a response to the Babylonian exile. His purpose in saying this is not to raise what some might consider an obscure point and therefore limit the discussion of such matters to scholars and to academia, in fact, his purpose is the opposite. It is his contention that in-depth discussion about scripture has been thus limited for far too long, to the detriment of the church. His purpose is to remind both academia and the church that the Old Testament has vital importance to the life of the church in the realities of its current time and place. The point that the Old Testament in its final form is a product of and a response to the Babylonian exile is of vital importance to a church that may be, to state the case simplistically, regarded as being in exile.

in the obscurity of its role in current secular society compared with its past position of empowerment.\textsuperscript{30}

In his \textit{Old Testament Theology}, Brueggemann has specific comments which point to a beginning of a movement beyond historical criticism's role in negating the essentialness of the Old Testament to the church.\textsuperscript{31} He uses the term "double reading" to refer to the capacity of the biblical text to reuse older materials in imaginative ways. The Old Testament texts must be read as they are presented. For example, the material of the wilderness sojourn must be read as the experience of early Israel under the leadership of Moses. At the same time, however, it must be read according to the way the materials are reused with "wilderness" seen as "exile". As the church reads the material, both perspectives

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\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 74-76. I am also influenced in these statements by Brueggemann's remarks in a series of sessions, as yet unpublished, of the Society of Biblical Literature, Boston, November 1999.

\textsuperscript{31} A helpful addition to this discussion, from a different perspective and using different terminology is R. Kendall Soulen's concept of 'canonical narrative'. He writes in \textit{The God of Israel and Christian Theology} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) "A canonical narrative is an interpretive instrument that provides a framework for reading the Christian Bible as a theological and narrative unity." P. 13. Another helpful addition is found in the article by John T. Pawlikowski, "Accomplishments and Challenges in the Contemporary Jewish-Christian Encounter" in \textit{Removing Anti-Judaism from the Pulpit} Howard Clark Kee and Irvin J. Borowsky (eds.) (Philadelphia: American Interfaith Institute, 1996). On page 30 Pawlikowski attributes some of the contemporary encounter between Jews and Christians to a new approach to the study of scripture which began prior to W.W. II but has not achieved a firm foot hold until recent years and is just beginning to be felt in other dimensions of church life.
\end{flushright}
must be maintained. In a point extremely important to the context of this thesis, and as stated earlier in this chapter, Brueggemann is clear that it is the insistence on double reading that precludes any straightforward supersessionism.32

Further on in this particular book, Brueggemann makes a point to which the conclusions of this thesis will be directly related. Looking back on the history of interpretation in the Christian church, it was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that Christian theological scholarship was cut off from, or cut itself off from, the Jewish colleagues with whom it had been in dialogue in previous centuries. Old Testament scholarship was therefore forced in one of two directions. One was to adhere to Christian doctrine alone, with Old Testament interpreters taking their reference only from Christian ecclesial communities and ignoring any Jewish interpretive possibilities. The other was to built a system of historical criticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that was not only exclusively a gentile, Protestant system but was also inherently biased against Jewishness in its Wellhausian characterization of Second Temple Judaism.33

There are the clear implications in Brueggemann's statements for the place of the Old Testament in the context of The United Church of Canada. He says that the text is polyphonic, elusive and insists on imaginative construal and "...that the

32 Ibid. Also, Polkinghome, pgs. 88-90.
33 Ibid., 107-8.
early church, mesmerized by the person of Jesus, found it inescapable that it would draw this elusive, polyphonic text to its own circumstance, close to its experience, its memory, and its continuing sense of the transformative presence of Jesus.  

The United Church of Canada:

Having discussed in a more general way the place of the Old Testament, it is now necessary to turn to that theological issue as it is expressed in The United Church of Canada. In reference to Brueggemann, The United Church of Canada, like the early church, has tried to articulate its yearning to draw the text that reveals Jesus close to its experience and its continuing sense of his transformative presence. Even within the relatively short life span of the United Church, however, there have been differences in the place of the Old Testament and its meaning for the life of the denomination. The founding theological document, the Basis of Union, officially defined scripture for the denomination as "...the primary source and ultimate standard of Christian faith and life." What The Basis of Union did not do was to officially differentiate between the role of the Old and New Testaments in the life of the denomination. Both were considered to be "...given by inspiration of God, as containing the only infallible rule of faith and

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34 Ibid. 731-2.

life, a faithful record of God’s gracious revelations, and as the sure witness of Christ.”

However, over the course of the subsequent seventy-five year life of The United Church of Canada, what has taken place is a kind of transposition which can be simplistically stated as a change from scripture defining the Church to the Church defining scripture. From being defined as “...the primary source and ultimate standard of the Christian faith and life”, scripture has come to be seen as in the service of the Church and the Church's ministry. This transposition happens gradually but it can be traced in the official documents of the United Church. It can be seen for example, in a comparison of the two above quotes with one from the 1944 Catechism. “To equip her for her task God has given to the Church the Ministry, the Bible and the Sacraments; and by these means the Holy Spirit enables us to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.” In this quote, the Bible is, in a sense, seen as a servant of the Church, helpful in the life to which it is called but of secondary importance to the Ministry of the Church. Scripture is beginning to be seen more as a tool for the sake of the Church than “…a faithful record of God’s gracious revelations, and as the sure witness of Christ.”

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36 Ibid., 14.

37 Catechism (Toronto: The Board of Evangelism and Social Service, The United Church of Canada, 1944) 7.
What also began to emerge in the life of The United Church of Canada was a tendency to believe and then to explicitly state that the Bible was too difficult, too obscure for the average person to understand without help from the leadership of the Church. "The New Curriculum" was of major importance in the 1960s and 1970s. It was officially promoted as Sunday School curriculum and a vast number of United Church people came into contact with it as clergy, Sunday School teachers or Sunday School attendees. It was written and edited by a large number of The United Church leadership of the 1960s, many of whom had been active scholars and members in previous decades and some of whom have continued to be active up into the 1990s. The following is a quote justifying the publication of "The New Curriculum":

The church felt that a new curriculum was needed to bring to all our people an understanding of the truth of the faith of the Bible and its relevance to today's world. Many people, discouraged by the Bible's alien language and thought forms, had given up hope of coming to grips with the word of God in the Bible. But when they were helped to understand what kind of a book it is and how it can become the living word of God to us, a great many experienced a deepening and strengthening of their faith.38

For the purposes of this thesis, it is also essential to state that "The New Curriculum" sometimes spoke in subtly deprecating terms about the Old Testament as well as implying that without the help of the leadership of the church, scripture and its relevance were too difficult for the membership to understand.

One of the great words of God found in the Old Testament is the word 'covenant'. It means God's promise to abide by his call to his people, and it involves the promise of the people to abide by God's call to them. But it became clear in the Old Testament that Israel, as Jeremiah said (31:31-34), broke the old covenant which God had made with Moses for the people. Hence a new covenant became necessary. Jeremiah saw that it would be different from the old covenant, for it would not mean an outward law which Israel had to obey, but an inward law which the people would gladly accept. It would mean that men would know God because he forgave their sin. This new covenant Jesus established by his death. Thus the Old Testament and the New Testament really mean the Old Covenant, made through Moses, and the New Covenant, made by Jesus.³⁹

This way of perceiving and describing the relationship of the Old and New Testaments has been a part of the history of the church, as was seen above with Marcion, and is in fact still common at this time of writing. However, to speak in depreciating and supersessionist terms of one part of scripture has the potential effect of minimizing the role of the whole of scripture in the life and practice of the church. If one part of the Bible can be perceived of or spoken of as having a lesser value than another part, then human judgement becomes the norm for what is authoritative.

In spite of the prominent place given to scripture in The United Church's 1978 document, The Lordship of Jesus, and the perspective of the 1992 document, The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture, that the Bible has clear authority, the tendency for this denomination to view scripture as in its service has
continued. The 1992 document also tended to an elitist view of the interpretation of the Bible similar to that found in "The New Curriculum". On page v of The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture, the General Council of The United Church of Canada is to encourage ministerial leadership to take the 'risk' of making the resources of biblical scholarship available to congregations. It is quite possible to see this as a belief that biblical interpretation, or rather, correct biblical interpretation, is not possible without the results of recent historical-critical work.  

The three most current documents with some official status in The United Church of Canada are "Mending the World", "Reconciling and Making New: Who is Jesus for the World Today?" and "Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church – Jewish Relations Today". All three documents deal with scripture quite extensively, but in a variety of ways. "Mending the World" puts scripture into relationship with tradition and current context. It also presents an understanding of the Bible as something complex and difficult with multiple possibilities of interpretation. "Reconciling and Making New" does such things as noting that it is important to read Biblical passages in context, though it does not define what context means. As a Christological document, it heavily emphasizes Biblical texts which it and Christian tradition believe to be speaking about Jesus. The third

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40 The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1992) v.
document, "Bearing Faithful Witness" is also heavily weighted with scriptural material. Scripture is seen as the most important vehicle for the discussion and repentance of the United Church’s past history of antisemitism and anti-Judaism. It is assumed in the document that Biblical knowledge and interpretation are not strong characteristics of The United Church. Although it does not deal with the topic in any depth and although it is based on historical-critical methodology, "Bearing Faithful Witness" briefly comments that scriptural interpretation is not completely dependent on the scholars and leaders of the United Church, but is and should be also in the hands and faith of individual believers. This document does deal in great depth with the necessity of maintaining the integrity and witness of the Old Testament.

In conclusion, what has been presented in this section on the place of the Old Testament in this theory and theology chapter, is the setting of what is perceived as a contemporary theological problem in the context of the history of the place of the Old Testament in the Christian Church, specifically for the United Church. The articulation of the contemporary theological problem and the resultant Doctor of Ministry question, comes out of my own experience, theology and context. The history of the place of the Old Testament in the Christian Church has been followed through the work of some of the few theologians, homileticians and church historians. This section, which will conclude with a discussion of preaching as it affects The United Church of Canada, has taken as its foundation the belief
that the Old Testament provides important truths about God, our world and ourselves and that for the church to limit itself to the New Testament would be to miss much of God’s revelation.

In terms of the contemporary theological problem engaged by this thesis, the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament as it affects preaching in The United Church of Canada, what has emerged as of extreme importance is the rise of historical criticism. This is important because of historical criticism’s tendency to relegate the Old Testament to the category of history. The resultant distancing that is sometimes felt from the Old Testament texts emerges clearly in the data of the Action in Ministry to be detailed below. It emerges in both the data of the preacher and in some of the data of the participant/parishioners. It is the work of those such as Brueggemann, with his desire to restore to the church an understanding of the Old Testament as essential scripture and his methodology of ‘double reading’ for doing so, that is so important to the theory and theology of this thesis. More will be made of such a possible direction, in the concluding chapter when I discuss the implications and possible directions for The United Church of Canada resulting from my work.
The Theology of the Christian Year

Another important part of the theoretical base of this thesis is what may be termed the theology of the Christian year. This needs to be discussed in the context of the understanding of this thesis that the Old Testament and the Christian interpretation of it play an essential role in the Christian church. It also needs to be discussed under the two specific topics of the liturgical season of Epiphany and the lectionary, topics which are integrally inter-related to each other as the lectionary reflects the liturgical season of the church. In talking about the specific liturgical season of Epiphany, I need to begin with some general comments about the liturgical year of the Christian church. The liturgical year of the Christian church, and this includes The United Church of Canada, follows a pattern which begins with Advent, looking forward to the birth of Jesus, and continuing through the celebration of his birth at Christmas. Then Epiphany Sunday follows and what can be termed 'the Sunday of the Baptism of the Lord', both of which establish Jesus' messianic identity. What the United Church of Canada hymnbook names as the season of Epiphany, following historic tradition, continues as a designation until the first Sunday in Lent. The timeline of the life of Jesus, as it is given to us, with variations, in the Gospels is most obviously picked up again as the church remembers and commemorates the events of Holy Week and Easter. This liturgical pattern occurs along with, and in relationship to, the frequent use of a biblical lectionary which over the course of the calendar year
reads through the Gospel of either Matthew, Mark or Luke. Readings from the Gospel of John and the rest of the New Testament are present in the lectionary according to a complex set of criteria which are not necessary to discuss in the context of this particular thesis. Old Testament and Epistle readings are often selected to reflect the theme of the Gospel, though some of the Old Testament narratives are followed through for several weeks, alongside the Gospel readings.

A few more comments are necessary about the way that Old Testament texts are chosen since it is that part of scripture which is the primary focus of my work. These comments are not specific in terms of exactly which Old Testament texts have been chosen to accompany exactly which New Testament texts. Rather, I want to deal with the more general theories and implications of the methodology by which they are chosen. I write this fully aware that there has over recent years been much revision in the way that these texts are chosen for inclusion in the lectionary, but nonetheless Old Testament scriptures are often selected for the way in which they are perceived to back up or support the New Testament texts. While the New Testament texts are to a large extent followed canonically by the lectionary, the Old Testament texts are selected in pieces which are considered to either prophesy to or fulfill the New Testament texts.\footnote{A major assumption is being made by the lectionary that the writers of the New Testament who knew much of the Old Testament as we know it, though certainly with many of the books in a different order, are following a completely different narrative pattern than that presented by the Old Testament. What would a lectionary look like if we thought that the writers of the New Testament were trying to model the format of their gospels on the scripture that they had, knew}
Since the action in ministry part of this thesis occurred during the liturgical season of Epiphany, for reasons which will be discussed in depth below, some specific comments need to be made about the season of Epiphany. Laurence Stookey in his book, Calendar: Christ’s Time for the Church, declares that part of being a Christian is knowing and acting according to the knowledge that the whole of humanity always dwells at the intersection of time and eternity. The grounding for this most basic and central of Christian affirmations is that the eternal Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. While, as Christians, we ought to be continuously aware that we live at the intersection of time and eternity, often we are not because the pressures and demands of human time take our attention from the presence of God in our midst. For this reason, Christians have found it necessary to keep track of time in special ways that call us to the remembrance of God’s work among us, special ways to remind ourselves that our biblical faith proclaims that the past, present and future are all bound up together. These special ways include a weekly day of worship and annual observances to remind us of God’s acts in our midst.  

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so well, and believed to proclaim the Risen Christ? The question that could be looked at is what the implications are if the gospels follow a pattern similar to the Torah and yet the lectionary breaks up the Torah, which the gospels may be implicitly following, into selective bits.

One of these special times is Epiphany. In the Greek-Roman world which was part of the context of the writing of the Gospels, the term 'Epiphaneia', or manifestation, designated an official state visit of a king or emperor to some city of his realm and especially the occasions on which he publically showed himself to the people. Very early in the life of the Christian church, this term was applied to Christ.  

The celebration of Epiphany is one of the oldest celebrations in the Christian church, at least half a century older than either Advent or Christmas, and the scripture readings associated with it have been a part of the lectionary from its very beginnings. Epiphany has commonly been thought to be about the coming of the Magi, and this is certainly true in The United Church of Canada. However, what it and particularly the Sunday after it, the Sunday of the Baptism of the Lord, are primarily about is the establishing of the messianic identity of the child of Bethlehem. The purpose of Epiphany is to take Christians through the newborn infancy of Jesus into the deep meaning of the incarnation. The whole season of Epiphany, as it is designated in the hymnbook of the United Church, currently the most official liturgical guide of the United Church, is focused on the great exchange of divinity and humanity that is the person of Jesus Christ.

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45 Stookey, 158.
The intention of both the Roman and the Revised Common Lectionary was to give the Christian church a sense of the large design of God's activity through history, and yet narrative portions of the Old Testament make up only 32 percent of the Roman lectionary. Readings from the prophets, which are particularly seen as predicting the coming of Christ, make up 48 percent. Speaking from pastoral experience, there is great frustration that the lectionary does not often follow through many of the long, detailed and very intentionally constructed narratives of the Bible and perhaps this is why there is such an homiletic emphasis recently on 'narrative preaching'. On the occasions when the lectionary does follow through an Old Testament narrative, it is usually during the summer months when many congregants are not present in worship, at least not in my context. Ironically, this frustration is juxtaposed with the fact that the overall trend in church attendance, at least in my context, is one in which there is a great lack of weekly consistency. Theologically though, the question still remains as to what the effect is of following the New Testament but not the Old Testament through more or less canonically. Part of the answer has been shown in the experience that initiated this thesis and appears in some of the data of the action in ministry. The Old Testament is currently not well known, not well understood nor considered to be essential to the life of the church. The lectionary is not the only contributing factor to this situation, but it is certainly a significant one. What is also being shown is

that there are theological and pastoral implications to whatever choices are conciously or unconciously made about the use of scripture in worship.

Although the use of a lectionary to determine the scripture passages around which to build sermons and/or liturgy was a long-standing tradition in such denominations as the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican confessions, it has a much shorter history in many Protestant denominations. In the United Church of Canada, the use of the lectionary has now, however, become common practice and most worship publications, liturgy resources and Sunday School materials are based on the assumption that it is being used in the congregations. There is, I believe, a growing realization that there are theological implications of this complete reliance on the lectionary that are not all positive, either theologically or pastorally. The new United Church Sunday School curriculum which is to be released in the fall of 2000, "BibleQuest", is an ecumenically-produced, biblical curriculum. It is not lectionary based and yet has been widely advertised as a "biblical" curriculum, somewhat in opposition to the previous United Church curriculum "Whole People of God" which has been heavily advertised as "lectionary-based curriculum". However tentative this growing realization of the theological and pastoral implications of the lectionary may be, what is being modelled in the new curriculum is that something can be biblical and not lectionary–based. I will pursue some of the future implications of this for the church in my concluding chaper.
The new United Church hymnbook, *Voices United*, includes a section which details all of the readings for the three-year cycle of the lectionary, based on the Revised Common Lectionary. It also includes in that section hymn-listings which it believes complement the readings of the cycle. A search of the library of the largest United Church theological college, Emmanuel College in Toronto, did not turn up any in-depth justification or discussion of the move to a heavy emphasis on the use of lectionary in the worship and Sunday School curriculae of this denomination. Such a search does not preclude the existence of such a justification or discussion, however, it does certainly point to its not being easily accessible.

David Buttrick, writing in the *New Interpreter’s Bible*, reviews some of the history of lectionary use in Protestant denominations in the current era. He says that before the 1960’s many preachers and homiletical textbooks leaned in the direction of basing sermons on particular topics with short scriptural texts as a kind of a justification. It was in the sixties that a wave of liturgical renewal produced new worship resources including a modified version of the Vatican II Catholic lectionary revision. This emphasis on the use of a lectionary for preaching was picked up by various Protestant bodies and reinforced by a rise in Barthian “Word of God” theology. *Barth and the Biblical Theology Movement*  

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insisted that preachers preach the Bible and nothing more. The result of this was a rise in the demand for and use of lectionaries in the Protestant tradition, while at the same time, preaching lessened in significance as many ministers came to regard ministry as maintaining people through counseling and churches through management. Although Buttrick’s explanation of the relationship between these two features of the Protestant church in this time period is neither detailed nor supported, nor does he document the reasons for the change in the understanding of ministry, his comments are in accord with the anecdotal experience with which this thesis begins.\(^48\)

In a related discussion, Shelley Cochran writing in *The Pastor’s Underground Guide to the Revised Common Lectionary*, helpfully reflects on the theology explicit and implicit in the relationship among the Old Testament, the lectionary and the cycle of the church year. Under a section entitled “The Influence of the Church Year” she talks about the fact that the lectionary is constructed according to an ancient hermeneutic. This ancient hermeneutic grew out of two major concerns which have a direct relationship to how the lectionary

uses Old Testament texts. The early church was trying to make sense of the death and resurrection of Jesus within the context of the Scriptures it already possessed, that is to say, what Christians now call the Old Testament. It was also trying to deal with the growing tension between it and the synagogue. What developed out of these concerns was what Cochrane calls a 'hermeneutic of proclamation' in which the church tried to prove that Jesus was the Messiah according to its Scriptures. This interpretation was founded on a number of interpretive methodologies including typology, prophecy/fulfillment and realized eschatology.

Cochrane defines typology as "...the identifying of certain events and persons of the Hebrew Scriptures as prefiguring events and personages in the Christian Scriptures..." and believes it to be one of the oldest exegetical models in the traditions of Judaism and Christianity. It was used first in the scriptures of Israel and then appropriated by the early Christian church. The prophecy/fulfillment type of exegesis is also an ancient one, in its case, going back to the earliest Christian writings when the church perceived the need to establish its unique claims in its...

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49 Bright makes a similar point, which I discussed in the previous section of this chapter. The fact Bright and Cochrane use different categories to talk about the ancient interpretive hermeneutic of the church, does not diminish the strength of their statements. For the purposes of this thesis, it is not important for me to chose between one or the other set of categories.


51 Ibid., 26.
Jewish context. It understands events and persons in what Christians came to call the Old Testament as having prophesied the events and persons in the life of Jesus. The third interpretive methodology can be related to the early church's growing conflict with the synagogue. "Realized eschatology is the conviction that in Christ everything God intended for the creation was accomplished, and that the church now lives in the age of fulfillment."53

Cochrane maintains that any discussion about the lectionary must be conscious of the fact that in the midst of a scholarly context which is just beginning to see an alternative to the abstract historicizing of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, the lectionary is also still governed by choices made on the basis of these three more ancient methodologies. This affects particularly the Old Testament texts which have been included. There is much potential for the misunderstanding of those Old Testament texts since the ancient interpretive methodologies, still to a great extent governing the choices of texts, are not longer necessarily widely understood and may be in tension with the current emphasis on the historical-critical methodology. The Old Testament is also subject to the possibility of a high level of misunderstanding as the perception of its very nature is altered by such things as the fact that the lectionary includes a

52 Ibid., 27.
53 Ibid., 28.
much higher percentage of prophetic texts, because these can be more easily seen to point to Jesus, than the Old Testament as a whole contains.54

In addition to this problematic dynamic of tension between ancient and more recent methodologies, there is a new and more recent problem which has substantially affected the preaching of the Old Testament in the United Church part of the Protestant tradition. This turn of the twenty-first century is a context in which the Old Testament is often interpreted as scripture of secondary importance to the church. This interpretation is inherent in the lectionary which is based on the context of the early church’s struggle for survival and unique identity. This is also a context which has witnessed a horrific attempt, with much success, to exterminate the Jewish people for whom what Christians call the Old Testament is complete sacred text, not requiring an additional testament. There is a growing acknowledgement, in the churches and in society generally, both that secular society did very little to protest the Shoah and that there are biblical methods of interpretation in Christianity which in fact encouraged it.55 How this affects the preaching of the Old Testament is in a growing uncertainty about how to interpret those texts in relation to Jesus Christ. Preachers are caught in the midst of the

54 Ibid., 29-30.
55 There is currently much material available documenting the role of the churches, both theologically and logistically, in the Holocaust. One of the particularly helpful items in The United Church of Canada context is the book co-authored by Alan Davies and Marilyn Nefsky, How Silent Were the Churches: Canadian Protestantism and the Jewish Plight during the Nazi Era. (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997)
legacy of historical criticism which historicized the texts to a point where their relevance to the church was difficult to see and in the midst of the recognition of the potential antisemitic ramifications of misinterpretations. It is with those such as Brueggemann, discussed above, that a way forward is being offered as an alternative to an incapacitation in preaching from the Old Testament.

It might be thought that the fact that the lectionary almost always includes a weekly Old Testament reading would encourage the frequency of preaching the Old Testament, but in fact I am arguing that the opposite is true. The point is strongly stated by a United Church minister by the name of Neil MacQueen, “After 30 years, all it [the lectionary] has given us is biblically illiterate congregations.”

The rise in the use of the lectionary in The United Church of Canada has occurred during a period when historical criticism has emphasized the historical understanding of the Old Testament and when older methods of biblical interpretation such as typology, promise/fulfillment and eschatology which tried to bring the Old Testament into the contemporary life of the church are used with much less frequency than was once the case. The result has been confusion and

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56 Donna Sinclair and Christopher White, Jacob's Blessing, (Wood Lake Books, 1999) 94. There is also some irony in the fact that one of the few seasons in the lectionary which does not include a weekly Old Testament reading is the Easter season when texts from the book of Acts take the place of the Old Testament. It was a reality of the early church that not only was its scripture made up of those texts which are not included in the post-Resurrection, birth of the early church stories of the lectionary, but also that it spent much time searching those texts in order to make sense of the Resurrection.
uncertainty regarding the interpretation of the Old Testament and the result of that confusion and uncertainty has been what might be termed a paralysis in the ability of The United Church of Canada to preach from the Old Testament. The lectionary has also come into frequent use in the Protestant churches in a time when preachers and congregations are struggling, either consciously or unconsciously, with the fact that there was a major attempt to destroy the people for whom what Christians call the Old Testament is scripture without any need of addition revelation of the same nature.  

Having discussed the theology of the church year under the two, related categories of lectionary and Epiphany, I turn now to the point where the two completely converge which is in the texts of the prophet Isaiah, set out in the lectionary to be the Old Testament texts for Epiphany.

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57 I speak here, using Jewish terminology, of the Torah, Prophets and Writings. I do not include such other important books as the Talmud, Gemara or Misnah in this discussion.
The Book of the Prophet Isaiah

The fact that the action in ministry of this thesis intentionally took place in Epiphany and intentionally used the lectionary for determining which Old Testament texts would be preached meant that the texts preached and responded to were taken from the book of the prophet Isaiah. It is thus necessary to make some theoretical and theological comments about the book of the prophet Isaiah in order to set the resultant data in context. This context is important to the drawing of conclusions because it will enable me to determine whether some of the data emerges as it does as a reaction to the prophet specifically or to the Old Testament more generally. I will also focus in this section on some of the theological issues around the Christian interpretation of Old Testament texts and I will begin with the Bible.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 56

56 Luke 4:16-21, NRSV
This passage from the Gospel of Luke marks the beginning of Jesus' official ministry and it is in the use of a passage from Isaiah 61 that his ministry is defined. John Sawyer, in his book detailing some of the ways that Isaiah has been popularly defined throughout the history of the Christian Church, The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity, says that the book of the Prophet Isaiah is more often quoted or alluded to in the New Testament than any other part of scripture, with the possible exception of the Psalms. Not only are there possibly 250 such quotes and allusions but several of the Isaiah quotations, such as those dealing with a mission to the gentiles and a suffering messiah, seem to have played a determinate part in the formulation and theology of early Christianity. The earliest Christian writers found a relevant quotation from the

\[\text{56} \text{ Given the above discussion about the lectionary, it is of note that this text reads as if Jesus had no choice in the passage he read. The Gospel writer may have wanted to emphasize, using a promise/fulfillment method of interpretation, the nature of Jesus' ministry being in accord with the scriptures of the tradition in which both Jesus and the first disciples stood. What may also be indicated in this passage is the reality that the synagogue used a lectionary and Jesus was handed the prescribed passage for the day. A characteristic of the lectionary of Israel, as it is continued in Judaism today, is that the passages of the Torah are read consecutively. The same cannot be said, however, for the prophetic texts which are chosen to illuminate and resonate with the texts from the Torah.}

\[\text{57} \text{ I am fully aware of the nature and methodology of the historical-critical arguments around what might or might not be original words of Jesus and what might or might not be additions by the early church in the light of their resurrection experience of the Risen Christ. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I view the text as something to be worked with and understood in the form in which we have received it.} \]
prophet Isaiah for a wide range of contexts and subjects and he is also frequently mentioned by name, a fact which distinguishes him from other 'writing prophets' and puts him in the company of the biblical figures Moses, Elijah and David.62

I am in agreement with Sawyer that the prominence of Isaiah in the New Testament could be attributed in some ways to Jesus, reflecting his words and/or his familiarity with what would have been scripture for him. Sawyer then points to the early interpretation of Isaiah in Christianity in the following statements.

...many of the Isaiah passages which are so familiar in the Christian context acquired their importance and popularity, not directly from the Book of Isaiah itself, but from the use made of them by Jesus himself or the first Christian writers and preachers...many of the most familiar themes and quotations from the 'Fifth Gospel' owe that familiarity to their appearance already in early Christian scripture as much as to the Church's use of the original Book of Isaiah. They had already received their Christian meaning, in other words, almost before the Church came into existence."63

What is most important in this quote is that it brings to our attention the fact that it was in the very early days and stages of the Christian church, as it strove to understand the meaning of the Risen Christ for its life, that the Christian interpretation of Isaiah began. And the Christian church continued to interpret the

61 The term 'writing prophets' is used to refer to Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Not only are the prophetic books attached to their names of greater length than those of the other prophets, but there are internal indications in those three books of the prophets' contribution to the writing process.
63 Ibid., 23-5, 29.
book of the Prophet Isaiah throughout its history, varying the major themes of that interpretation according to its development and context.

In his survey of the history of the Christian interpretation of Isaiah, Sawyer points out that the earliest Christian interpreters used the prophet to authorize their mission to the gentiles. What this meant was that they selected and emphasized passages which they saw to be universal in tone. Later interpreters working in a different stage and context of the church rooted the details of the life, death and resurrection of Christ in Isaiah, especially focussing on his person and his claim to be the Messiah.  

The doctrine of the Trinity has been supported through the use of Isaiah, as has Christ's pre-existence. References have been found in Isaiah to the sacraments of baptism and eucharist and the cult of the Virgin Mary has been substantially supported by texts from the book of the Prophet Isaiah. Christian interpretation has also seen the book to have much to say about suffering in a way that could be easily appropriated to refer to Jesus. The tree of Jesse, the wooden wine press and the tree of Isaiah's martyrdom have all been interpreted as images of the Cross in a book that has been of central importance to the Christian faith from the time of the very beginnings of the church down to the present.

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64 Ibid., 32-3.
65 Ibid., 42-82.
66 Ibid., 99.
What is clear from the above remarks is the long and varied history of the Christian interpretation of the book of the Prophet Isaiah, a history which illustrates why passages from Isaiah would be chosen by the lectionary for the Sundays of Epiphany. Christ was seen to be manifest in Isaiah, the parameters and characteristics of his life, ministry and death spelled out in a way that is prophetic of their reality according to the Christian community. Isaiah has been seen to be essential for the Church in the past, not so much for its original, historic meaning, as Bultmann might define it, but for its Christian interpretation. The current era of emphasis on the historical, original meaning of Old Testament texts can result in a distancing from the texts, an uncertainty or resistance to their relevance for The United Church of Canada today. The data of the action in ministry, discussed below, shows both past and present emphases in the use of Old Testament texts in the Church to be operative. In the theme of 'hope' that emerges from the data, and will be discussed in substantial detail, the application and appropriation of the Old Testament texts to the details and realities of the lives of the parishioner/participants can be seen. In the theme of the desire for 'knowledge', also to be discussed below, this longing for relevance is combined with a longing for knowledge that is satisfying in and of itself. This indicates, as will be clear below, that there is in The United Church of Canada at this time a belief that faith is enhanced by the acquiring of understanding about the original meaning and contexts of Old Testament texts. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that the nature of the participants was, by their own voluntary
admission, one which highly values the acquiring of knowledge. It also needs to be borne in mind, that the theme of ‘hope’, that is the need to experience in a relevant way the sustaining presences of God in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, was the primary theme to emerge from the data.

The passages of the Prophet Isaiah were heard and experienced in the action in ministry, through the medium of preaching and so it is now to preaching that I specifically turn in this chapter of theory and theology.

Preaching in The United Church of Canada

This is a thesis about the preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada. This theory chapter must necessarily then contain, some remarks specifically about preaching. It is important, however, to keep them in the context of the focus of this thesis. As was stated earlier, the action in ministry was set up to discover what the experience of those involved was when the Old Testament was preached on the particular Sunday of Epiphany and the three subsequent Sundays. Preaching was chosen as the vehicle for the experience of the Old Testament because, although bible study would also have worked according to the goals of the project, preaching is the most frequent means by which people in The United Church of Canada encounter the Old Testament. Preaching is, therefore, a methodological part of this work. Nevertheless, some
theoretical remarks need to be made about the preaching of the book of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah in The United Church of Canada. This discussion will not be comprehensive, the history and methodology and practice of preaching being a large topic in and of itself, but the comments made will be relevant to the theological issues as I have presented them.

Although not typical of books about preaching, it was not completely unexpected to me to find that there exists a book entitled *Preaching from the Whole Bible*. This book can be found in the library of Emmanuel College, Toronto School of Theology, The University of Toronto. What is noteworthy about this book, for the purposes of this discussion, is that out of a total of fifty-seven topics offered for preachers to help them get to the core of the scripture as they do their sermon preparation, all fifty-seven topics are based on New Testament texts. Certainly the Christian church as a whole can and must interpret scripture and then base its preaching on the reality of the Risen Christ, experienced and interpreted through the New Testament and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Certainly this particular book does list a few Old Testament cross-references for some of its fifty-seven topics. However, the fact that there are very few Old Testament references, even under the topic entitled "commandments", and the fact that this book could claim in its title to encompass the whole Bible is disturbing in the library of a college related to a church that at its creation in 1925 affirmed belief in both testaments as the primary source and ultimate standard of
Christian faith and life. This particular book is not connected with the
denomination of The United Church of Canada in any direct way, though its
publishing house is in the Protestant church tradition as is the United Church, nor
am I in any way suggesting anything like censorship. What is of note, however, is
the date of the book’s publication.\textsuperscript{67} The date of 1967 is in some accord with the
comment of Bill Lord, stated in the introduction to this thesis, about what he was
told as a student regarding the preaching of the Old Testament. It is also in some
accord with the statement of David Buttrick below that the 1970s marked a shift
in the nature and understanding of preaching to a greater emphais on
ecclesiology.

Clark M. Williamson speaks about the purpose of preaching in his book, \textit{A
Guest in the House of Israel}. He defines preaching as announcement or
proclamation, as the means by which we can come to understand ourselves in
relationship to God and to our neighbour. It is the opportunity, he says, to hear
the word that we frequently need to hear. It is a reminder to return to God and to
remember who we are commanded to be. It is a means by which we can
understand who God is, who we are, and what the meaning of Jesus Christ is for
our lives.\textsuperscript{68}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[67] Bo Giertz, \textit{Preaching From the Whole Bible} (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967) 82.
\end{footnotes}
The task of preaching is to enable each generation to hear that the word of God is a living and pertinent word, to interpret the events and insights, problems and dilemmas, of that generation in the light of the tradition and to reinterpret prior Christian tradition in the light of the contemporary situation...insofar as preaching does its job, proclamation is itself a living word of God, necessary to the life of the church.69

The methodology by which each generation undertakes that task of preaching has varied throughout the history of the Christian church and there are excellent resources available on the subject. One resource, for example, is Paul Scott Wilson’s A Concise History of Preaching.70 For the purposes of this thesis, however, the comments which are particularly pertinent are those made by David G. Buttrick in his article “The Use of the Bible in Preaching” in the New Interpreter’s Bible. Buttrick refers to developments in homiletics that were occurring at approximately the same time as the rise in lectionary use in western Protestant churches and it is worth quoting him in full at this point because of the concise way in which he details those changes.

At the same time, homiletic theory was up for grabs. In the 1950s, preaching methods split into three options: (1) Sermons could distill topics from brief snatches of Scripture, making points in order to “apply” biblical ideas to daily life; (2) in the style of Harry Emerson Fosdick, sermons could begin with diagnosed human problems and bring Scripture in as an available resource; or (3) they could proceed verse by verse through scriptural passages, drawing out a series of often disconnected meanings for late-night radio listeners. After the mid-fifties, significant homiletic texts seemed almost to disappear. Around 1970, however, we began to see ventures in homiletic theory, some prompted by the so-called “new hermeneutic” or by a renewed interest in ecclesiology, others reflecting a cultural “triumph of the therapeutic”. So in the 1990s, we have homiletic

69 Ibid.
70 Paul Scott Wilson, A Concise History of Preaching (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992)
theory moving in very different directions. In a variety of narrative approaches, Scripture is regarded as a story to tell that provides insight or identity to God's people. Inductive homiletic approaches seem to begin in human self-understanding, with which Scripture converses powerfully. In addition, there have been other proposals: structuralist, phenomenological, psychological, etc. What these homiletic positions share is a rejection of an older, rationalist preaching that distilled objective "truths" and made points about them.71

What I see as significant in Buttrick's comments is his statement that after the 1950s significant homiletic texts seemed to have disappeared. What he means by that exactly is not detailed, but I would conclude given his other comments, that one of the things it means is that in that time period fewer sermons than before centred on scripture. Then, around the 1960s and 70s, there are homiletic approaches focussing on ecclesiology and therapeutic priorities, approaches seeming to begin in human self-understanding and rejecting an older, rationalist style of preaching. While Buttrick also says that in these approaches there is a powerful conversation with scripture, I cannot help but conclude, given the work of this chapter, the data of the action in ministry detailed below and my own experience, that the combination of this transition with the rise of the use of the lectionary has been a cause in the current reticence towards the preaching of Old Testament texts, time and priority in sermons has been given to things other than scripture. Also, the format and authority of the lectionary may be resulting in an understanding that the biblical work is somehow done already for the preacher.

71 Buttrick, 198.
The Old Testament texts are always being heard and assumed in worship while at the same time exegetical methods of the past have fallen into disfavour. The only major interpretive option taught to preachers in recent decades has been the historical-critical approach which relegates the Old Testament to the realm of past history. What work has been done in the area of the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament has not had a strong impact on the church.

In conclusion, as the theoretical, theological base for the thesis, this chapter has dealt with the place of the Old Testament in the Christian church, specifically in The United Church of Canada, the theology of the church year, the book of the prophet Isaiah and preaching in the context of The United Church of Canada. I have discussed in some detail the essentialness of the Old Testament to the United Church based on the understandings that God is revealed in it for the church, that Jesus was grounded in it as the scripture that he knew and on which he based his earthly ministry and that while the Christian church has always struggled with its Christian interpretation of these texts, it has witnessed to their essentialness for its life. In the relationship that is beginning to emerge between the theory/theology and my experience of a lack of preaching of the Old Testament in the United Church, one of the important factors has been shown to be the rise of historical criticism. This is not to say, and I need to be very clear about this, that there are not many benefits to the preaching of the church acquired through the methodologies and practices of the historical-critical
method. It is the biblical methodology under which I gained my fascination for and passion for Old Testament texts. However, it would seem that the combination of the dominance of the historical-critical method of biblical scholarship, and in particular its moving on from earlier methods of the Christian interpretation of Old Testament texts without thoroughly constructing other methods, with the rise of the use of the lectionary in Protestant churches like the United Church has resulted in a vacuum in the preaching of Old Testament texts. There are definitely other factors, such as the societal post-Holocaust context and a change in homiletical methodology involved in this situation as well. All of these things now lead this thesis to the experiential exploration of the subject through the action in ministry, the methodology of which will be set out in the next chapter and the question of which is,

"What is the experience of a suburban United Church preacher and his parishioners when the Old Testament lectionary texts (year A) are preached during Epiphany?"

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This methodology chapter of this thesis sets out the procedures and processes considered to be essential for an action in ministry which is faithful to my theology, experience and context and it sets them out according to the methodology of qualitative research. Qualitative research is an umbrella term which encompasses such methodologies as phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory and is therefore a category of research methodologies and techniques. It is distinct from the older and more established kind of research known as quantitative research which can be generally said to involve findings based on the researcher's interpretations of observed phenomena. Qualitative research, in its various manifestations, is based on findings which are the subject's interpretations of events. \(^{72}\) Morse and Field define qualitative research in this way,

\[\ldots\text{the qualitative approach to understanding, explaining, and developing theory is inductive. This means that hypotheses and theories emerge from the data set while the data collection is in progress and after the data analysis has commenced. The researcher examines the data for descriptions, patterns, and hypothesized relationships between phenomena, then returns to the setting to collect data to test the hypotheses. Thus, the research is a process that builds theory inductively over a period of time, step by step. The theory fits the research setting and is relevant for that point in time only.}\] \(^{73}\)

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\(^{73}\) Ibid., 10-1.
In discussing and defining the characteristics of qualitative research, Bogdan and Biklen point out that not all qualitative studies will exhibit all five of the following characteristics in equal amounts, but nonetheless they say that,

1. Qualitative research is descriptive. The data collected is in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. Qualitative research often contains quotations and tries to describe what a particular situation or view of the world is like in narrative form. This approach also demands that the world be approached with the assumption that everything has the potential of being a clue which might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied.

2. Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products. They ask questions about how people negotiate meaning.

3. Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. They do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together. They do not assume that enough is known to recognize important concerns before undertaking the research.

4. “Meaning” is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. Qualitative researchers are concerned with the perspectives of the participants. 74

In his description of qualitative research, Bruce Berg says, “Quality refers to the what, how, when, and where of a thing - its essence and ambience.

Qualitative research thus refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things.” 75

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Berg, in his description of qualitative research, does not refer specifically to its use in pastoral ministry-based projects, such qualitative research terms as meaning, metaphor, symbol and description all resonate with the experiences of pastoral ministry. VandeCreek, Bender and Jordan, however, explicitly point out the natural relationship between ministry and the methods of qualitative research, using as their basis for that relationship, the thinking and writing of Martin Buber.

Qualitative research invites us to call upon those empathic listening skills of an I-Thou relationship in order to listen to the lived experience of those whom we ask to participate with us as co-researchers in a qualitative research venture. In human science research with the new paradigm of varied qualitative methods, we seek to learn from the voices of the ones who are the research participants so that we may understand the nature of the directly experienced reality of those persons... qualitative research seeks to transfer the hermeneutical principles from scriptural studies to the understanding and the interpretation of the experiences of the living human document. Out of the information-rich experiences of the participants in qualitative research, the investigator seeks to discover the meanings and to make the interpretations that are congruent with the perceptions of the co-researchers. In numerous ways, the utilization of qualitative research methodology provides the pastoral caregiver with a natural bridge from the practice of ministry to the understanding and meanings of that ministry to persons.66

In this particular ministry project, the broad umbrella that is qualitative research, applicable as that research methodology is to a project in the practice of ministry, was narrowed down to the specific methodology of phenomenology. In a definition of terms used in qualitative research, Morse defines phenomenology as follows.

66 Larry VandeCreek, Hilary Bender and Merle R. Jordan Research in Pastoral Care and Counseling (Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, Inc., 1994) 71-2.
Phenomenology is a philosophy and a research approach that focuses on the meaning of the "lived experience." The intention is to examine and describe phenomena as they appear in the lived experience of the individual. Thus, human experience is inductively derived and described with the purpose of discovering the essence of meaning.\(^\text{77}\)

In a longer description of this research philosophy and methodology, Morse says that its objective "...is to describe the essence of behaviour, based on meditative thought, with the purpose of promoting human understanding."\(^\text{78}\) It is also noted that a requisite of phenomenology is that

...no preconceived notions, expectations, or frameworks be present to guide the researchers as they gather and analyze the data. The life-worlds of the individuals being studied are the primary source of data, but literature, poetry or art may also be used to gain an understanding of the essence of the phenomena...the goal in the phenomenological method is to provide an accurate description of the phenomena being studied.\(^\text{79}\)

Another author, Sherman Stanage, describes phenomenology as an exploration of the vast reaches of the conscious lives of persons and then goes on to say that in this particular form of qualitative research, "...our experiences and feelings as persons are also shown forth toward further understanding."\(^\text{80}\) Loren

\(^{77}\) Morse, 243.

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 22.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 22.

Barritt, having said that "Phenomenology tries to understand the everyday world of experience by using the language of this everyday world"\textsuperscript{61}, details some of the specifics by which this happens. He talks about accurate description as the first task in a phenomenological study, followed by a search for themes which represent the significant meanings for the subjects. He goes on to say that in this kind of "...research the important information lies in the situation itself and not behind in a set of internal rules...[It is] in the description of experiences that human consciousness can be revealed. Consciousness is a process which is directed away from the person who possesses it and towards the world."\textsuperscript{62}

Moving from the philosophy of research methodology to the details of the process, it is extremely important to note that the methodological issue of triangulation was a significant part of the design of the action in ministry of this project. Berg sets up the context of triangulation by reminding researchers that whatever research method is used in qualitative research, that method will impose certain perspectives on reality.

Every method is a different line of sight directed toward the same point, observing social and symbolic reality. By combining several lines of sight, researchers obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts; and a means of

\textsuperscript{61} Loren Barritt. \textit{A Handbook for Phenomenological Research in Education} (The University of Michigan, 1983) 66.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 66.
verifying many of these elements. The use of multiple lines of sight is frequently called triangulation.\(^3\)

Crabtree says that the term refers to both the use of multiple data sources and the use of various records and sees it as an essential check for the researcher. \(^4\)

Therefore, having determined that phenomenology is the most appropriate qualitative research methodology for my question, "What is the experience of a suburban United Church preacher and his parishioners when the Hebrew Scriptures lectionary texts (year A) are preached during Epiphany?", the design for the action in ministry then proceeded on that basis, using triangulation as a verification method. The specifics of the triangulation methodology, as will be detailed below, included questionnaires, sermons and a journal, a verification session and its data, the data of an observer and the researcher's own experience.

The initial part of the design was to find a congregation in which the action in ministry was to take place. Given that one of my assumptions was that the Old Testament was not being preached often\(^5\) in The United Church of Canada, it

\(^3\) Berg, 4-5.

\(^4\) Crabtree, 87.

\(^5\) I define 'not...often' as...much less frequently than the New Testament given that the lectionary used in The United Church of Canada lists for each Sunday service two New
was important to find a congregation in which the Old Testament was not often preached. This would allow the responses to the research question to emerge more clearly and obviously or as more of a contrast to the regular practice. Theoretically, the project would also work in a congregation such as the researcher’s own in which the Old Testament is read and also preached on almost a weekly basis, but the data from a congregation in which this is not the case would be simpler to analyze. The same can be said about the preacher in such a ministry project. The data from a preacher preaching Old Testament texts when he does not often do so, would be strengthened and potentially more startling and vibrant, the contrast with usual practice heightening the data’s visibility. The other factor considered in the choice of the location for the action in ministry was the willingness of both the preacher and the congregation to participate in the project. Obviously, without a certain degree of willingness it would be impossible to proceed, but this particular congregation and its preacher have a history of wanting to try new things, an openness to learning and growing in faith and practice which also made data collection easier than in another kind of context.

After establishing the preacher and congregation participating in this action in ministry, the next task was to establish the timing of it and this proved to be the

Testament passages and two Old Testament passages. There is the added canonical reality that approximately two-thirds of the Bible is Old Testament.
most difficult part of the project. In thinking about and planning for the study, I as the researcher was operating under the assumption that in comparison with the New Testament, the Old Testament is not being preached well or often in The United Church of Canada, the theological problem being the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. What seemed appropriate then was to have the action in ministry take place in a liturgical time of year in which preachers and congregations were particularly focused on, or expecting to hear about the New Testament and the person of Jesus Christ. This would most deeply and thoroughly test what the experience of preacher and participants was when Old Testament texts were heard and preached. It might also reveal something of the preacher's and/or participants' experience of the relationship between the two parts of scripture.

However, in the collaborative context that is a Doctor of Ministry programme, it soon became apparent that my conviction about the timing of the action in ministry was not shared by all of those involved. There were those who were completely convinced that the time of year I had originally chosen, Advent, was ideal and there were those that thought it was a completely unsuitable time of year. It was primarily the colleagues who are involved in Christian/Jewish dialogue in some way or other or were a part of my ministry base group who thought Advent was the time of the church year to do a project involving the preaching of the Old Testament. Advent is the time of expectation and
anticipation of the birth of the Christ child and so is, in the opinion of many colleagues, a good time to test the experience of preaching a part of scripture that does not explicitly refer to Jesus and yet in the Christian belief, reveals him.  

There were also colleagues who thought that Advent was a completely unsuitable time of year for an action in ministry revolving around the hearing and preaching of the Old Testament, and that included my Doctor of Ministry class and the preacher involved in the project. Their thinking was that there was so much religious and cultural “baggage” surrounding the Christmas season that the results of the project would be cluttered in a way that would obscure them. Although my own feelings and beliefs still pointed towards doing the study in Advent, the unwillingness of the preacher to do it then, combined with the other resistance to that timing, resulted in the moving of the action in ministry to the Epiphany season of 1999. It therefore took place on the Sundays of Epiphany, the Baptism of Jesus and Epiphany 2 and 3, according to the revised common lectionary as it is set out in The United Church of Canada hymn book Voices United. A four week period was chosen as equivalent to the four weeks of Advent and as an appropriate amount of data for a qualitative research project. These

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86 A conversation with Prof. Eric Mendelsohn, January 21, 1999. Prof. Mendelsohn is a professor of Mathematics at the University of Toronto and a former president of Darchae Noam synagogue in Toronto. He is extremely active in Christian/Jewish dialogue and has participated in another Doctor of Ministry process as a member of both a Ministry Base Group and a Thesis Committee.

87 A conversation with the preacher, November 13, 1997.
are the first four weeks of the eleven week Epiphany season, according to the revised common lectionary. The rational was that this was also a time of year when many congregants and preachers would be expecting to hear and preach primarily from New Testament texts. Epiphany, following the Advent and Christmas seasons, continues in the lectionary texts chosen from the Bible to focus on the narratives of the early life and ministry of Jesus. The story of the birth of Jesus is therefore followed by those of the visit of the Magi, the Baptism by John in the Jordan, further encounter with John and the call of the disciples. In the life of the United Church of Canada these are well-known and well-beloved stories. They have always been, in my memory, preached on in the Epiphany season.

An important part of the design was also the choice of the texts to used in the action in ministry. As has been referred to above, it was the lectionary texts for the applicable four weeks of Epiphany that were incorporated into the design of the four weeks of the project. This was a deliberate and intentional choice in order to minimize my bias as the researcher as much as possible. It also added to the richness of the data being collected in the project. It is, as already discussed, an assumption on my part that Old Testament texts are not often being preached in many places in The United Church of Canada. The use of lectionary texts in this project highlights the fact that the lectionary which has some kind of official status in the United Church includes, on a weekly basis, a text from the Old
Testament. Therefore, in this project, that assumption and that fact are put into relationship with each other. There is another factor in my experience of the use or non-use of Old Testament texts in The United Church of Canada. In the current context, when Old Testament texts are used, my anecdotal experience is that it is most often narrative texts that are preached on or used in Bible study. The lectionary texts for the time-frame of this action in ministry are entirely prophetic texts, all four coming from the book of the prophet Isaiah. This fact too was expected to add to the richness of the data because both preacher and parishioners would be hearing and preaching biblical texts which might be less familiar to them than others.

The next part of the design was to determine the specifics of the triangulation methodology in the context of phenomenology. The primary piece of data collection would be questionnaires. This methodological decision was made on the basis of the belief that it was important to collect the data, as soon as possible after hearing and experiencing the reading and preaching of the Old Testament texts, in order to capture words and details as well as impressions and feelings. The further in time that reporting gets from the data, the more likely it is that things will subsequently be added or deleted. Questionnaires were the vehicle for doing that as the parishioner/participants were asked to fill them out within twenty-four hours of each worship service. The questionnaires were deliberately limited to a single page in order to encourage the
participant/parishioners to fill them out completely each week. I judged it to be important that the questionnaires be filled out as completely as possible each time in order to record as fully as possible the experience.

In the construction of the questionnaire, such methodological issues as Berg and Marshall raise about interviews were taken into consideration not just because resources around the format of interviews are much more available than resources around the format of questionnaires, but because Berg and Marshall's question construction was very helpful given the characteristics of this particular project. In terms of the collection of data, either interviews or questionnaires would have been appropriate but the logistics of the action in ministry, including the location of the congregation in which the project was taking place, made questionnaires the necessary choice. Berg, in his discussion of the wording of questions, quotes Denzin as saying,

Questions should accurately convey meaning to the respondent; they should motivate him to become involved and to communicate clearly his attitudes and opinions; they should be clear enough so that the interviewer can easily convey meaning to the respondent; they should be precise enough to exactly convey what is expected of the respondent ...; any specific question should have as a goal the discerning of a response pattern that clearly fits the broad contents of the investigation ....

For the purposes of this discussion, Marshall then takes the methodological issues around this type of data collection further by saying,

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88 Berg, 39.
Questionnaires typically entail several questions that have structured response categories and may include some that are open-ended. The questions are examined (sometimes quite vigorously) for bias, sequence, clarity, and face validity. Questionnaires usually are tested through administration to small groups to determine their usefulness and, perhaps, reliability.  

Both Marshall's points about the type of questions that make up a questionnaire were taken into consideration in the design of the questionnaire component of the triangulation format of the action in ministry.

The questionnaire was made up of a number of different types of questions, moving from questions asking for smaller and more concrete types of data, to questions encouraging the parishioner/participants to reflect more deeply. These first two questions were not exactly what Berg describes as "throw-away questions" but they were designed to both develop rapport between researcher and parishioner/participants and to allow for an easy entry into the questionnaire. All of the questions addressed the individual experience of the parishioner/participant. The overall type of the questions is in line with some of Berg's definition of the semistandardized interview,

This type of interview involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and / or special topics. These questions are typically asked of the interviewee in a systematic and consistent order...Questions used in a semistandardized interview can reflect an

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99 Marshall, 96.
90 Berg, 38.
awareness that individuals understand the world in varying ways. 
Researchers thus approach the world from the subject’s perspective. 91

In the design of this particular questionnaire, it was also extremely important that 
the questions, beyond the first introductory one, could not be answered with 
simply a word or two. They required the parishioner/participant to reflect on their 
individual experience so that the researcher could approach the experience from 
the subject’s perspective. The questions made the general assumption that the 
reading and preaching of texts in the experience of worship, should be of 
relevance to the day to day life of the hearers and that I would then analyze the 
data to see how the parishioner/participants responded to questions based on 
that assumption.

Berg’s definition of the semistandardized interview also includes the statement 
that questions are typically asked in a consistent and systematic order. This was 
accounted for in the design of the questionnaire. It was my ministry base group 
that determined that the questionnaires over the four weeks of the action in 
ministry must be the same for each week. (Feb. 12, 1998) This was to provide a 
framework for the analysis of the data. The ministry base group was of the 
opinion it would be impossible to see whatever cumulative effect there might be 
to the experience, or to be able to analyze the data in any systematic way unless

91 Berg, 33.
the questionnaires were the same each week. Another important piece of this primary data-collection method was the pre-testing of the questionnaires. This was done over a three week period in my congregation. Then, to simulate the action in ministry group, I asked my congregants to fill in and return the questionnaires within twenty-four hours of hearing the reading and the preaching of the Old Testament texts of the particular worship service. The data of these responses was analysed for its perspective on the clarity and composition of the questionnaire, which was refigured accordingly.

The preacher’s journal, in relationship with the sermons, constitutes the data of the preacher’s experience of the action in ministry. It was decided not to structure the journal, other than requesting an entry for each week, in order to let the resultant data be as open-ended as possible. One assumption behind this methodological decision was that the preacher would be more likely than the parishioner/participants to be self-directed in his part of the data because he was the only one contributing that type of data. Another assumption was that a variety of methodological formats would add to the richness and depth of the data. Berg speaks to this particular kind of structure in his comments on “the unstandarized interview” in which he says,

In contrast to the rigidity of standardized interviews, unstandarized interviews do not utilize schedules of questions. Naturally, unstandardized interviews operate from a different set of assumptions. First, interviewers begin with the assumption that they do not know in advance what all the necessary questions are. Consequently, they cannot predetermine fully a
list of questions to ask. They also assume that not all subjects will necessarily find equal meaning in like-worded questions...

Having now discussed the methodological theory, assumptions and procedures as they were set in place for the action in ministry, I turn now to what actually happened.

The Action in Ministry:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1 - Epiphany</th>
<th>Week 2 – Baptism of Jesus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 60:1-6</td>
<td>Isaiah 42:1-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps 72:1-7, 10-14</td>
<td>Ps 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eph 3:1-12</td>
<td>Acts 10:34-43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mt 2:1-12</td>
<td>Mt 3:13-17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 3 - Epiphany</th>
<th>Week 4 - Epiphany 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 49:1-7</td>
<td>Isaiah 9:1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps 40:1-11</td>
<td>Ps 27:1, 4-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 1:1-9</td>
<td>1 Cor 1:10-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jn 1:29-42</td>
<td>Mt 4:12-23</td>
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</table>

The action in ministry took place at a suburban United Church congregation on the outskirts of Toronto. The congregation was formed in 1958 and consists of approximately 250 family units. Along with the Sunday morning worship, the foci of the ministry of the congregation include: programmes for children and youth, outreach ministry, economic development ministry and parish nursing. The preacher of the congregation is a 42 year old male. He has been ordained since

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92 Berg, 32.
1987 and served a congregation in Alberta before serving in this congregation for the past six years. His ministry experience prior to being ordained included internships in Alberta and Africa. In ways and contexts related to his pastoral ministry, he is also a broadcaster, writer and journalist. The preacher was asked to participate in this Doctor of Ministry programme because he did not have a lot of experience in preaching Old Testament texts but had an openness and willingness to try something different. The former was particularly important because one of the assumptions involved in the setting up of the action in ministry, coming out of the researcher's anecdotal but substantive experience, was that the Old Testament is not being preached very often in many parts of The United Church of Canada. In my opinion, therefore, it was important to conduct this action in ministry with a preacher who did not often preach from the Old Testament. The action in ministry would therefore be quite different then from the preacher's normal practice which was to base the sermon, almost every week, on a New Testament text. The data would then highlight the nature and depth of the experience. Similarly, the congregation did not have a lot of experience in hearing Old Testament texts preached but was enthusiastic about being a part of a Doctor of Ministry study generally and this Doctor of Ministry study particularly.

In terms of the specific participants for the study, the preacher suggested that the congregational Bible study group already in existence would be
appropriate. The Genesis group met all of the requirements of the focus group, set out on page 7 of the Thesis Proposal. There were eleven members in all, representative of the whole congregation in age, gender, length of time in The United Church of Canada and length of time in that particular congregation. They range in age from their early 30's to approximately 75 years of age, with several members in each age decade. Their socio-economic status is middle-class and they cover a wide range of occupations including a nurse, a retired beautician, a writer, a retired electrical engineer, a real estate agent, a supply teacher, several computer technologists, a caterer, a church secretary and a hydro employee. The group has been meeting on a weekly basis, three times a year for sessions of 6-7 weeks each, for over two years. The preacher approached the group and they enthusiastically agreed to be a part of the action in ministry; to attend all the worship services for the period of the study, to fill out the response questionnaires under the criteria set out in the Thesis Proposal, Appendix A, and to meet with me for the validation session.

The group was initiated by a person in the congregation who came from the Baptist tradition and who was used to and wanted to study the Bible. Each of the members is able to clearly express their reasons for participating, and while there is variety, the reasons can also be grouped into a number of themes. Members want to learn more about the Bible, they want the opportunity to ask questions and say what they think, they need to have another experience of church mid-
week, in order to get them through the week and they want the opportunity to
dialogue which they feel that a regular Sunday church experience does not
provide.

I met with the group on December 16, 1998 for the purpose of clarifying the
process, introducing myself to them and focusing the action in ministry on my
research question rather than on their minister and preacher. All three purposes
of that meeting were well fulfilled. All eleven members of the group except one
were able to follow the process completely, and in the case of that one, there was
some small confusion around the coding of his questionnaire. For the most part,
the responses on both the questionnaires and in the course of the verification
evening did not focus on the preacher, but rather on the experience of the people
in the group as they heard the Old Testament texts preached. When the
comments and reflections did include the preacher, the respondents were able to
see the larger issues and themes involved as well as the ways in which both they
and the preacher interacted with the texts.

Between this meeting of December 16, 1998 and the beginning of the
preaching and questionnaire part of the action in ministry, I also had several
conversations and met with the preacher in order to ensure that he too was clear
on the process. That part of the action in ministry did not work as well and the
preacher started his intentional preaching of the Old Testament lectionary
passages on the wrong week. (journal, Week 1) The Thesis Proposal stated that the preaching of the Old Testament lectionary passages was to begin on Epiphany Sunday. When Epiphany falls right in the middle of a week as it did in 1999, the Sunday on which Epiphany is proclaimed can be variable in the practice of The United Church of Canada. The realities of pastoral ministry also mean that ministers/preachers are very tired in Epiphany because of the pressures of the Christmas season. For pastoral reasons, the preacher changed the date on which the congregation was celebrating Epiphany, but did not check with me or the Thesis Proposal as to the implications that would have for the action in ministry. The preacher realised the mistake a few days before the study was to begin and after several phonecalls, we resolved that he would preach the Epiphany Old Testament passage again on the appropriate day which was the next Sunday. That would put the action in ministry on track again with the Thesis Proposal. Pastorally, the implications of this were minimal even though the congregation prints the scripture passages in the weekly bulletin. The first Sunday on which the Epiphany Old Testament texts were preached there was a major snowstorm which reduced church attendance. For those who were in attendance, the repetition was noticed and in fact commented on in the verification session, but it did not seem to affect the data in any substantive way.

Once the action in ministry was underway, it proceeded smoothly and the questionnaires came in as requested. This was in spite of a last-minute hike in
the postal rates which meant that the self-addressed, stamped envelopes were each one cent short on postage. Out of the expected 44 questionnaires (11 participants, 4 weeks) 39 or 89.5% were returned to me. Eleven were returned for the first week, ten for each of weeks two and three and only eight questionnaires were received from week four. The fact that the fewest number were returned for the fourth week, may be a result of the insufficient postage, some of the questionnaires that came in the fourth week were marked as having insufficient postage, or it may have been the result of the fact that some of the group became tired of the repetition of the questionnaire. As can be seen in my thesis proposal, it had been decided by my ministry base group that it was essential for the questionnaire to be exactly the same each week, in order for the data to be analysed. Without any prompting on the researcher’s part, the participating group commented on this at the verification session, and while understanding well the reasons for the repetition in the questionnaire, suggested that there should have been one different question each week, even if it was not used in the data analysis, in order to keep the respondents more engaged.

With the questionnaires contributing a significant part of the triangulation methodology necessary for the action in ministry, another part of the process was the advance design of the verification evening. The primary step in that design was the initial analysis of the data from the questionnaires. It is important to note, that several intentional decisions were taken on the part of the researcher in
terms of the data analysis. Although in the functioning of the action in ministry, the sermons and the journal of the preacher were actually the first pieces of data to be created, the questionnaires were the first pieces of data to be received by the researcher. A decision had to be made regarding the order in which the data would be analysed, knowing that the reading of whatever data was chosen first would, given my human nature, to some extent affect the reading of the rest of the data. The arbitrary decision was made to look at the data in the order in which I received it. Therefore, in the design of the verification session the parishioner/participants were being asked to further explore their experience of the hearing and preaching of the four weeks of Old Testament texts for which the researcher had not yet received the sermons and journal entries. The advantage of this particular chronology, especially when combined with the fact that I deliberately did not preach from, or even look at the Old Testament lectionary texts during the process of the action in ministry, was to enable me to come to the data with fewer assumptions and pre-conceived conclusions than might otherwise have been the case.

In the initial analysis of the questionnaires, which was the primary step in the design of the verification session, they were read and re-read in order to discover the prominent themes and emphases. I then took my perception of what these themes and emphases were to the verification session and asked the participants to verify if what I was “hearing” was what they were saying.
In that final stage of the action in ministry, which was the verification session of February 7, 1999, I met with the group for a two and a quarter hour session. In that session I interpreted the responses to the experience of hearing Old Testament texts which had been received via their questionnaires. I asked them if my interpretations were accurate and if they had anything to add to what was being heard from them. The group was initially a little nervous upon gathering in the living room of one of the member's home but relaxed quickly and responded freely and thoroughly to my questions and statements. There was full attendance of all eleven members at this session and everyone participated, though some more than others. The discussion was insightful as the group took the task at hand seriously and they were not hesitant to disagree with each other or to point out how the project could have been improved. The mood of the participants varied from nervous at the beginning, to a certain urgency to get their perspective across, to thoughtfulness, to passion. After two and a quarter hours, it was clear that the content of the action in ministry had been thoroughly explored and that everyone was tired. While there was a certain homogeneity to some of the responses of the group, and the group was very aware of it, there was enough difference, dissent and contradiction to validate the responses as authentic.

In accordance with the thesis proposal, the verification session was audio-taped. There was also an observer present to record impressions around the
discussion and the subtleties of expression and body language. The audio-taping worked well and was not obtrusive, not seeming to inhibit the responses of the participants. Kirby and McKenna discuss the theory of that particular research methodology under the heading of "Unobtrusive Measures". "This method involves virtually all ways of recording in which the observer remains totally separate and non-interactive with those being investigated."93 While much of the literature dealing with qualitative research discusses the kind of observation known as 'participant observation' which entails a more active role in the research process, in this project the observer was separate and non-interactive. The purpose of the role was more of a verification, confirmation or alternative interpretation one than one involving the active collection of primary data. Kirby and McKenna also raise the issue of the potential for this method to be unethical94, but in this project, while the observer was unobtrusive for the purpose of allowing the conversation of the verification session to flow in as natural a manner as possible, the participants had full knowledge of her presence and agreed to it in their signing of the covenant forms.

In terms of the observer's role in the particular action in ministry, it was less fruitful than some of the other data collection methods, partially because the set-

93 Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna, Methods From the Margins (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1989) 84.
94 Ibid.
up and space limitations of the room meant that the observer had limited visual
contact with the members of the group.

In terms of actually observing the group physically, in terms of body
language, and facial expressions, this was difficult because the
arrangement of the group in a circle and the position of the observer
outside the circle sitting in a corner at the table in order not to be too
obtrusive. I don’t quite know how we might have changed this in the limited
space. (observer document, pages 1-2)

What can also be seen in the document of the observer is a tendency to focus
primarily on the themes of the data as the researcher had defined them and was
presenting them to the group for verification. This had the effect of re-inforcing my
perception of the important themes in the total picture of the data. The advantage
of this was to verify that the themes determined to be so were indeed major
themes of the data and the disadvantage of this was a lack of challenge to my
primary analysis of the data. Another feature of the observer’s data was its
tendency to pick up and focus on what the she knew of the researcher’s
assumptions, with similar advantages and disadvantages.

Upon the receipt of the preacher’s sermons and journal by both email and
snail mail, it was possible to be begin the complete data analysis.

The complete data analysis involved beginning again with the reading and re-
reading of the questionnaires in order to see the emergent themes in the light of
the verification session, the observer’s notes, the journal and the sermons. It also
involved listening to the verification tape several times and transcribing the parts of that session that seemed, in conjunction with the observer's notes, the journal and the sermons to speak particularly strongly and clearly to the emergent themes. The observer's notes were read and re-read as were the journal entries and sermons of the preacher. The next step in the analysis of the data was to compile a written version of the content of the questionnaires. This written document was too long to include in this thesis, but was an aid to the researcher in becoming thoroughly familiar with the questionnaire data. This written document was chronologically-structured in a progressive week by week format as an initial organizing procedure. That particular structure was also designed in order to allow me to see what the week by week effect of the hearing and preaching of the Old Testament was on the parishioner/participants. The question in my mind was whether the week by week hearing of the reading and preaching of the particular texts would have any kind of chronologically-traceable effect on the parishioner/participants which could be seen in the data. Would the parishioner/participants, for example, acquire a deeper appreciation of the texts as the weeks passed or would they tire of them? The fact that neither of these possibilities emerged strongly in the data was seen in this written piece of analysis. What emerged, as they had in the reading of the data, were the five themes which wove themselves through the weekly questionnaires in a motion which was much more a back and forth weaving than any kind of chronological progression.
The next step in the data analysis was to organize the data according to
the five themes, in a manner which illustrated the ways in which the content of the
questionnaires, verification tape, journal and sermons interacted with each
other. The primary movement to the data, looked at in this way, was the back and
forth weaving mentioned above, but it also must be noted that there was some
forward progression and some backwards reaction as the preacher reacted to
pastoral events in the life of the congregation, including the reaction to his
sermons, and subsequent sermons reflected those reactions. The five themes
to be analysed were obvious in the data because of the frequency and passion
with which they arose, but it was also important to analyse them with themes or
bits of data which arose with less frequency or seemed to be of import in only a
small portion of the data. In this way, a complete picture of the experience of the
preacher and parishioner/participants could be arrived at.
Chapter Four Data Analysis

This thesis chapter is an exploration and weaving together, with a few statistics, of the data of the action in ministry experience. It will conclude in a way that enables me in my last chapter to set out some new directions for The United Church in its relationship with the Old Testament. I begin by re-stating both the question and the timing of the action in ministry the combination of which resulted in the data.

“What is the experience of a suburban United Church preacher and his parishioners when the Old Testament lectionary texts (year A) are preached during Epiphany?”

- Week 1 – Epiphany – Isaiah 60:1-6
- Week 2 – Baptism of Jesus – Isaiah 42:1-9
- Week 3 – Epiphany 2 – Isaiah 49:1-7
- Week 4 – Epiphany 3 – Isaiah 9:1-4

In analysing the data from the action in ministry a number of themes clearly emerge. These themes weave their way through the data of the parishioners, the preacher and the observer and interact with each other. It is the purpose of this part of the thesis to analyse the emergent themes and the ways in which they appear in each form of the data. I will also analyse the ways in which the themes
are made manifest in the relationships between the forms of the data and the ways in which these themes interact with each other. As the researcher, I will pick up the themes that seem to me to be the most prominent in terms of the frequency and passion with which they appear in the data. I will also, however, relate them to the themes which appear with less frequency or seem to be of import in only a small portion of the total data. In this way I will arrive at a complete picture of the experience of the preacher and parishioners which I will then relate to the assumptions, theory and methodology of this thesis. I will thus be able to reach some conclusions about future implications.

The major themes which emerge from the data can be identified as: hope, images, knowledge, the integration of the scripture with the worship service as a whole and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

**Theme One – Hope** (“Half empty or half full”?)

In analysing the data, the first theme to emerge is that of 'hope'. This theme emerges very strongly in the data of the questionnaires and the verification session, which were the first pieces of data to be received at the conclusion of the action in ministry. The word 'hope' appears frequently in these pieces of data, as do several synonyms for hope, but it is important to the analysis to note that the word does not actually appear in any of the lectionary scripture passages.
Regardless of this fact, 'hope' is used by 7 out of 11 of the respondents and occurs in the first five out of the six questions of the questionnaire, being evenly spread throughout those questions. In discussing this theme, the analysis will use primarily the data from Weeks 1 and 4 of the action in ministry as that is the data in which the greatest number of references to 'hope' appear.

What is clear from the responses which use the word or one of its synonyms like 'inspiration' or 'upbeat', and the fact that the word does not explicitly appear in the scripture passages, is that its frequency of use is directly related to the connections made between scripture, sermon and the lives of the respondents. This can be seen in the response to the question "What will this passage mean to your day to day life over the course of the next week?" One participant wrote,

The message to me is one of forgiveness, one of the gentleness of the spirit to wash over one's life and give a feeling of newness, of hope, of love. Over the course of the next week, it will deepen my understanding of compassion, which is ultimately Jesus' message, in my opinion. (S 0363, Week 1 questionnaire)

Another participant, in responding to the same question wrote,

This is a beautiful poetic passage and to me the poetry alone is an inspiration for the beginning of the week. Seeing light and hope in a time of darkness is meaningful to my family at this moment. I plan to use this passage as a reading a couple of times this week at our daily dinnertime grace. (We say grace or do a reading.) (My children are 13 and 16). (S star, Week 1 questionnaire)

In answering the question "Would you want to hear this passage preached

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95 The decision about which words constitute synonyms is a judgement call on my part as the researcher, based on both the particular words and the context in which they are used.
again? Why or why not? the first participant said,

Yes. The passage, as interpreted by C. [the preacher], was in the context of today’s society. We are in exile, we are lost and searching, but the spirit of hope is always present and we are given life thru change and challenge. (S 0363, Week 1 questionnaire)

The importance of the inter-connection of ‘hope’ and/or its synonyms with the scripture, sermon and the lives of the participants is also clearly seen in the negative responses. Some of the data of the participants reveals that they were very aware when the inter-connection did not happen. In responding to the written question “Would you want to hear this passage preached again? Why or why not?” one parishioner said, “I would have to say not. I’m indifferent however I found that it did not inspire me” (S 0729, Week 3 questionnaire) and another wrote, “Not really. It doesn’t bring me inspiration or challenge my beliefs.” (S Corwin, Week 1 questionnaire) What can be seen in this preliminary analysis is that there seems to be a need for hope on the part of the parishioner/participants. There is an openness and responsiveness to the word and its synonyms, and the meaning they convey, which is either found or not found in the scripture and sermon, and to some extent depends on the individual characteristics of the participants and their life contexts.

This finding can be confirmed by the tape-recorded verification session which occurred at the conclusion of the action in ministry. In the course of this verification session, one of the first questions I asked was for the purpose of
eliciting more in-depth responses to this preliminary finding. After setting the context of the fact that the number and passion of responses which used either the word 'hope' or a synonym was so high that it was the first thing that stood out in the data of the participant/parishioners, I also noted that the word does not explicitly show up in any of the scripture passages. Then the group was asked, "Help me understand why 'hope' is so important?" The responses talked about the societal context of insecurity, saying that this generation, broadly meant to include all those who are of employment age, has a lack of hope. There is a fear of the unknown and an uncertainty about the economic realities of life, both of which therefore create a need for hope. One of the synonyms for hope, accepted by this thesis, is 'inspiration' and that was talked about as a 'peek at an ideal.' "Sometimes texts were inspired, and sometimes not, in the sense of 'Yes, I could be better'." Inspiration was also equated with example or realisation. (verification tape, Feb. 7/99)

Given that the need for 'hope', 'inspiration' and related concepts emerged as such a strong and prominent theme in the questionnaire and verification data, although the word 'hope' was not explicitly present in the scripture passages, an analysis of the scripture and the sermons is necessary. It is also important to note the fact that, proportionally, the largest number of references to 'hope' or a synonym, whether as word, phrase or concept, occur in the questionnaires of the first week. In the data of that week, there are 20 references, in the second week
there are 7 references, in the third 4 references and in the fourth week 11 references. What is also significant about this is that the largest number of questionnaires were returned for the first week (11) and the smallest number for the fourth week (8), the week which contains the second greatest number of references. This numerical data then turns the analysis to the content of the scripture and the sermons.

As mentioned above, none of the scripture passages for the four weeks of the action in ministry, explicitly contain the word 'hope'. Neither do they contain the synonyms like 'inspiration' and 'uplifting' which also emerged in the data. However, they contain phrases, contexts and themes, which especially when picked up and elaborated on by the preacher, convey a message to the parishioner/participants. This message received by the parishioners/participants in the context of their lives, translates into the words and phrases of the data. In the scripture reading for the first week, for example, the passage begins “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” It continues, “Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice,...” (Isaiah 60:1,5a NRSV) In the sermon for the first week of the action in ministry, the preacher begins by relating what he calls “a rather unique experience” in the life of the congregation. He uses that experience of the number of faithful who gathered for church inspite of a mammoth snowfall, as a stepping stone of hope for the rest of the sermon. After introducing the process and
context of the action in ministry to the congregation, he then continues to set the historical and literary context of the passage in detail, returning to a theme full of hopeful images which are drawn for the most part from the text.

For 2nd Isaiah, Jerusalem is the point of light in the world. A light that will attract the nations. And light in the Old Testament symbolises the very presence of God and of God’s salvation. God’s light will outshine the sun and the moon. 2nd Isaiah proclaims a great future for the sons and daughters returning from exile – images of gold and frankincense – images filled with prosperity, that would have been heard as words of wonder to a people living in a world of great poverty. Isaiah proclaims that God is sovereign over all the nations, that Babylon has fallen and that even great empires cannot stand against the living God. God’s light outshines all the efforts of humankind. (Week 1 sermon)

The sermon also deals with what the preacher calls “the church in exile”, what can simplistically be defined as the drop in attendance and commitment in many United Churches. In doing so, he makes connections between the reality of many congregations today and the historical context of the scripture passage.

concluding,

So let us not mourn our past. The people of Isaiah’s time, while they were in exile, wrote the Bible. So perhaps it is time for the church in exile to ask itself. What can we do in our time and our place that is as significant as that? What new stories of God will we give birth to? What new stories of God will we create? What new stories of God will we share? The light of God is with us and there is nothing we cannot do, filled with God’s light. (Week 1 sermon)

It is the combination of the words and images of the text with the words and images of the sermon and the sermon’s interconnections with the lives of the parishioner/participants which enables the people to experience the hope that they need and that their data expresses. The sermon gives its hearers the
permission and skills to make connections with their own lives, beyond those made by the sermon, in words different than, but related to, those of the scripture and the sermon.

The message to me is one of forgiveness, one of the gentleness of spirit to wash over one's life and give a feeling of newness, of hope, of love. Over the course of the next week, it will deepen my understanding of compassion, which is ultimately Jesus' message in my opinion. (S 0363, Week 1 questionnaire)

What is also clear when another piece of data is added to the analysis is that this can happen; hope can be preached and heard, even if the preacher is feeling less than hopeful himself. The effect of text and sermon goes beyond the individual reality of the preacher.

Without having any access to the data of the parishioner/participants, the preacher begins his journal entry for Week 1 of the action in ministry with some of the same words and phrases. He uses them, however, in the opposite sense.

This is a pain. You see I have this problem. I love new ideas, whenever I get a chance to try something new I leap at it with the enthusiasm of a teenager for his first car. But it's January, right after Christmas and I'm tired, uninspired and just want to coast for the next few weeks. But not me, I leapt at the chance to be part of this Old Testament study. It seemed like a good idea at the time...but today? Just give me the boring old lectionary with Christian texts. (Week 1, journal)

What stands out in this part of the entry is not only the use of the word "uninspired" but also the general mood of the preacher as one which is lacking in inspiration. This has implications for the earlier discussion in this thesis on the controversy and difference of opinion raised by the debate over the timing of this
action in ministry and the resultant theological and pastoral issues. In the earlier
discussion, the question of the timing revolved around whether the religious and
cultural baggage surrounding the Christmas season would clutter the data of the
project in a way that would obscure the results. Here the preacher's journal points
to a different and simpler, though not unrelated reality. In terms of the pastoral life
of a preacher in a congregation, January is a time of year when, coming off the
demands and expectations of the Advent season, preachers are tired.

What also seems very significant, in the overall context of this thesis, is the
preacher's reference to "the boring old lectionary with Christian texts". Clearly,
preaching from the Old Testament, even though the texts are actually lectionary
ones, is something new. By implication, it is something exciting but also
something difficult. When the preacher is feeling tired and uninspired it is very
difficult to motivate himself to preach from texts that seem more difficult and
unknown, even when he had an initial, and quite passionate desire to learn
something new. The pastoral realities impinge on his aspirations. What can also
be seen implicitly here and more explicitly in other parts of the preacher's data, is
that theoretically and theologically he believes in using Old Testament texts for
preaching but does not always feel that he has the tools or the inspiration to do
so. It may be correct and appropriate to preach from the Old Testament but it is
not an imperative and the preacher's own pastoral realities can take precedence.
The data from Week 4 of the action in ministry reinforces these statements about the importance of the theme of hope and the way it emerges, or does not emerge, from the inter-connections of the themes of scripture and sermon. In response to the first question on the questionnaire, “What words or phrases first occur to you when you think of today’s Old Testament passage? (choose at least three)” one participant wrote, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. To the second question, “Which of these words and phrases is the most important to you and why?”, the response was “The phrase (above) is a very hope-filled one.” In answering question 3.b. “What mood, theme or message stands out for you?”, they said, “Hope”. (S star Week 4 questionnaire) Likewise, another participant answered question 4 “What will this passage mean to your day to day life over the course of the next week?” by saying “Since I am personally in a physical predicament which may prove permanent, I can only hope there is some purpose and God will take care of me so that I am able to become a useful person again.” (S Pices, Week 4 questionnaire)

In terms of the scripture passage for this week, the theme of ‘hope’ seems to be primarily found in the lines, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.” (Isaiah 9:2 NRSV) The sermon for the week which elicited the second highest number of references to ‘hope’ or one of its synonyms, begins with details of a particular pastoral struggle and its effects on the preacher. It then reminds
the congregation that it is the last week of the action in ministry and the preacher relates the ways in which it has been frustrating for him due to a lack of Old Testament preaching resources. He affirms the importance of preaching from Old Testament texts and details the images of God which can be found there. After some historical context he concludes,

Just after this conflict the passage from Isaiah was written. Its images are filled with light and dark. Darkness was a metaphor for depression and death, and light for life and joy. The passage is a celebration: a festival of joy and a harvest of faith. This passage is most familiar to us at Christmas time, for the church has interpreted the later verses to suggest that Isaiah was forecasting the birth of Jesus. But Isaiah was rooted in his historical context. Isaiah’s wonderful gift came from his ability to proclaim great faith in the midst of great trouble. So too for us. For God is in our lives, in our families. God is as personal for us as God was for the people of the Old Testament.

The message of the Old Testament is that the God of love is not simply to be found in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament as well. The Old Testament shows us a God who acts simply out of love. He doesn’t love the people of Israel because they are mighty or powerful. God simply loves them as God simply loves us. The Bible is a love story. The story of God being in love with us – calling us, waiting for us. God asking simply that we love in return. It is time for us to show that love. For the past year and a half, we have been concerned of necessity with our internal issues. The time has come for us to proclaim boldly beyond our walls, to love the world passionately, as God loves us. That is our future.” (Week 4 sermon)

The sermon picks up some of the images of the scripture, primarily the ones from verse 2, which the questionnaires picked up, thus showing a link between what is preached and what is heard. It then goes on to set the context of those images as being as much in the lives of his hearers, as they were in the lives of those of Isaiah’s historical context. It is this ability of the sermon to tie itself to the
scripture, but not too tightly; this ability of the sermon to capture a theme in its original context and then transpose it to the current context of its hearers, that enables them and encourages them to respond to that theme. They respond to it in a way that is integrated with their own personal and social lives. However, this is not always the case as is shown by the following quotes. In response to question 5 of the questionnaire “Would you want to hear this passage preached again? Why or why not?, one participant said “No. I think the geography described is of little importance to me and just gets in the way of any possible understanding of living a fruitful life.” (S circle, Week 4 questionnaire) Another response was “I did not find these passages to be inspirational, or to speak to me personally.” (S 0729, Week 4 questionnaire) There is a convergence here with a comment made in the course of the verification session. It was said there that a sermon is a "hit at the moment or miss the moment" event. (verification tape, Feb. 7/99) It seems that there is no universal response to these scriptures and sermons even in the relatively small sampling of a qualitative action in ministry. And the responses can be quite disparate, ranging all the way from finding scripture and sermon to be very helpful and hopeful, to in this case, a minority opinion that they were not inspirational or personally relevant. For one parishioner/participant, and this was a constant theme in the responses of that person, the historical and geographical detail were an obstacle to the appropriation of scripture and resultant sermon.
In this week of the action in ministry, the journal of the preacher, which reveals his own experience of the project, is in accord with the sermon. Like the sermon, it expresses the theme of hope, though that theme is inter-related with several of the other themes of the action in ministry which will be discussed below.

I loved Yanceys' image of the bible as a love story. God calling to the people and the people not always listening. The more things change the more they stay the same. So out of this I truly hope can begin a process of balance. Of the church and its writers producing resources to lift up OT preaching. To give the OT it's [sic] place [as] a scripture. Not the old superseded word of God, but the living word of a living God that calls to us with truth, justice and hope. And if all I have learned is that, then it's a good beginning. (Week 4 journal)

The cumulative effect of this data regarding the theme of 'hope' therefore shows that when a preacher combines scripture and sermon into a theme which is needed by the hearers it can be picked up by them in a significant way even if the words of the theme are not explicitly present in the scripture. It can also be picked up and appropriated by them when the experience of the preacher is running somewhat contrary to the theme but he chooses not to reflect his experience in the sermon. I have spent a substantive amount of time on the analysis of the data of this theme of hope, partially because it is the most substantive theme in the data, but also as a way of setting up the path I will take through data of the other four major themes.

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96 Philip Yancey is the author of *The Book that Jesus Read* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999). During the last week of the action in ministry, the preacher came across an article about this book, which was not out at that time, in the periodical "Christianity Today".
Theme Two - Images (“The medium is the message.”)

Another theme that clearly emerged from the data, in ways which are not unrelated to the theme of ‘hope’, was the importance of images. Certain words and phrases are picked up and out of the poetic passages of the prophet Isaiah and both responded to and found to be engaging in terms of the lives of the respondents. The questionnaire does lead those filling it in to do just that by beginning with asking them, “What words or phrases first occur to you when you think of today’s Old Testament passage? (choose at least three)” but the responses go far beyond the original intent of the question which was to simply begin the questionnaire in a straight-forward and non-threatening manner.

Responding to the second question of the questionnaire, “Which of these words or phrases is the most important to you and why?” one person says, “‘Arise, shine, for your light has come’ Because it is a predominant theme in ‘Oh Thou That Tellest Good Tidings to Zion’, one [of] the pieces from the Messiah that touches me most.” (S Garrett, Week 1 questionnaire) Another response to the same question states, “I love the word ‘glory’. To me it is full of holiness and encompasses a depth of person and of the natural world.” (S star, Week 1 questionnaire)

In responding to the same question another week, the same person wrote, “I
like the metaphor of the ‘polished arrow’. Being a polished arrow — being a beautiful instrument, ready to strike at an opportune moment for a righteous cause is a goal to work toward.” (S star, Week 3 questionnaire) In response to the question, “What will this passage mean to your day to day life over the course of the next week?”, the answer was, “I hope the ‘polished arrow’ metaphor will stick with me, but for the most part Sunday sermons or readings tend not to remain in conscious thought past Sunday.” (S star, Week 3 questionnaire)

The question was then asked in the verification session, a question very similar to that asked about the predominance of the word ‘hope’ in the data, “Why are images so important to you in this experience?”. The answers had definite points of connection with the answers to the question about ‘hope’, but were not as clear or focused. There was repetition of the feeling that they hear so much bad news that when they go to church they need to hear good news, they need to hear that they are cherished and that provides the hope to try again. ‘Light’ was defined as something good to which to look forward. The comment was made that every once in a while some ‘magic’ happens and you know it is the Spirit and it is so important to be looking for it, to be open to recognising it. The reference to Handel’s Messiah was repeated, thus emphasising the importance of the interconnection of images with the realities of people’s lives. This discussion of the importance of images also inspired the comment that the power of God was something that was felt in one’s bones. (verification tape, Feb.7/99)
This importance of images in the data was a very clear convergence point in the data of the preacher and the parishioner/participants even though it was, for at least the latter, harder to specifically define. Although the preacher did not refer explicitly to images until the fourth of his four sermons, all of the sermons enabled or facilitated the ability of the hearers involved in the Action in Ministry to pick up images from the scripture texts in ways which were relevant to their lives. The first sermon uses the image of God’s light in several places, an image which was picked up by the parishioner/participants, as shown above and which comes from the first line of the lectionary text. (Isaiah 60:1) The third sermon also uses the image of light as a characteristic of the people who were faithful to God’s purposes and it specifically tries to put the congregation in the place of the servant people of light to whom the text refers. (Isaiah 49:1-7) It is in the fourth sermon that the word ‘image’ is used specifically in reference to the variety of images for God in the Old Testament. This is not explicitly a part of the lectionary text (Isaiah 9:1-4) but most probably relates to the verses which follow it and describe the names of the child to whose birth the text is referring.

In the sermons, the preacher gives much more time to the historical context of the passages than to the kind of comments above which deal with images. However, it is the images that he uses and talks about that are responded to in the data of the participants because it is the images, at least how they are used
by the preacher, that have the significant resonance with the people's lives. It is also possible that, at least in some cases, it is the repetition of hearing the images in both scripture and sermon that causes their impact. The historical context is heard only in the sermon. The power of the images is also, however, made very clear by the fact that when the sermon uses images that do not appear in the scripture passages, those images still show up strongly and frequently in the questionnaires and to a lesser extent in the verification session. It is at the end of Week 1's sermon that the preacher refers to there “...being two types of people in the church today: mourners and midwives. Mourners who pine for what was, and midwives who give birth to the future.”

The sermon then concludes by exhorting the people not to mourn for the past of the church and to state that the preacher's choice is to give birth to the future. Several questionnaires (S butterfly and S frog, Week 1 questionnaires) pick up not only on the images as used in the sermon, but also on the specific definitions of them and the ways in which they relate to their own life situations. "...I am, in a way, a person in Exile. I have spent some time mourning and am in the process of re-creating (midwifing). This has put me in a period of growth. (S frog, Week 1 questionnaire) The same respondent picked up on a reference to midwives in the sermon for Week 4 and strongly emphasised it in their questionnaire for that week for the stated reason that the reference to them had a surprising and, therefore, memorable effect. And reference to midwives as portrayed in the
sermon for Week 4 also emerged in the verification session of Feb. 7/99, thus further strengthening the conclusion around the possible power of images which occurred only in the sermon.

This last statement about the memorable effect of surprising information leads into another theme of the data, with which it interconnects. That theme is the strong emphasis on learning, on the acquiring of knowledge through scripture and sermon. However, before moving to that third theme, some comments must be made about a particular type of data which is related both to the theme of images and the theme of hope. A few of the respondents used, or were so moved by, the combination of images and emotion in scripture and sermon that they responded in great depth and detail about very difficult personal situations in their lives. I had not expected this and had not consciously sought after such responses in the formation of the questionnaires. Certainly, the questionnaires asked directly for personal response to and about the scripture passages as experienced in text and sermon. The expectation and assumption was that connections could be made between Old Testament texts and people’s lives. However, it was not expected that some of the respondents would delve so deeply into and be so open about their truly difficult situations and struggles. It is certain that the confidentiality assured in the questionnaires was a factor in allowing this to happen. What can also be determined from the nature and specific comments of these particular responses was that the parishioner/participants sometimes found
the words and images of the scripture, as heard and preached, to be helpful, hopeful and inspiring in their difficult situations. However, sometimes the words and themes of the scripture and sermon were also quite painful to hear and to connect with the realities of the lives of the respondents.

One such personal response to the images of the scripture was, "I am in a ‘dark’ phase in my life healthwise and need such upbeat encouragement." (S Pices, Week 1 questionnaire) This response was to the strong images of light and darkness that appear in the passage for that week of the action in ministry (Isaiah 60:1-6) Another lengthy response began by responding to question four of the six questions on the questionnaire and then flowed on through the other questions reacting to the preacher’s personal comments in the sermon. The preacher’s comments had flowed directly both out of his own experience in the congregation and his own experience of the scripture passage. (Isaiah 49:1-7) The questionnaire said,

I will be reflecting on [C’s] disappointment with the response to the stewardship campaign. Tithing is a particular dilemma for my family, being on a tight budget and not owning a home, and being in debt. I already give more to charity on a monthly basis than I do to myself, yet I still feel it’s not enough. I still feel guilty. Truthfully, I feel that maybe I do not belong in any church if I am not willing to tithe 3%. It seems like such a small amount until the end of the month, when things are so tight that I struggle just to get supper on the table. I use every budgeting and food stretching and recycling trick in the book, but still 3% seems like a large sacrifice...After a sermon such as this one (although [C.] is the best at it) I really feel disappointed with myself. Yet, I can’t do any better. To not be able to fix a problem, bothers me immensely. I feel that my faith should be strong enough to find the way. (S frog, Week 3 questionnaire)
The preacher’s experience of the words and images of this passage of scripture was quite opposite to the parishioner/participants’ experience as filtered through the preacher’s experience. This passage talks about God making the prophet into a “polished arrow”; a servant of God “…in whom I will be glorified” and the prophet’s response, “But I said, ‘I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God.’” (Isaiah 49:2b-4) The preacher’s journal records this response:

This past fall we ran a stewardship campaign that was the most difficult project I have been involved in during my time here. I was deeply wounded by my experience, but went from that right into the Christmas crazies without pause or a chance to process how I felt. Well this past Sunday accomplished that. I realised after last week that I had irritated some folks by talking about Y2K. Well I knew I would, but sometimes my job is to irritate. Well this week I let them know in no uncertain terms that it travels both ways. Isaiah’s words from the lectionary really struck home. I felt his anguish, it was mine. The whole experience of preparing and delivering the sermon was cathartic. They got the point, a number have called this week to say they understand more clearly what happened…Any way I’m now at least acknowledging the depth of my experience. From the preaching perspective it’s interesting that I found comfort in the OT. As a Christian my natural affinity would be the cross and resurrection motif. But in some ways Isaiah is more comforting. I’m not Jesus, but at times I try to be a prophet as do all clergy. The feelings of Isaiah reflect a very modern experience. A culture of disregard, the frustration we all feel. Isaiah felt it, he lived it, his experience is real to me. (Week 3 journal)

It is clear from this variety of data that Old Testament scripture passages can resonate, through the public reading and preaching of them, with the realities of the lives of those who hear them. They can resonate with extremely deep and painful realities in ways that are both positive and negative; both affirming and difficult depending on the life situation of the hearers. The same passage can
connect with the powerful feelings and experiences of both preacher and hearers when those feelings and experiences are quite or completely opposite from one another. The pastoral implications of this are difficult to determine since both the deep reaction of the preacher to this passage, in combination with the current reality of his life and the opposite and deep reaction of the parishioner/participant in combination with the current reality of their life, were revealed in a confidential process. The pastoral question is how to set up, is it possible to set up, a way for these deep reactions to be shared in a way that is faithful to the image of God born by the individuals and to the community of the congregation as the Body of Christ?

Theme Three – Knowledge ("It is what you know!")

The third theme which emerges very strongly from all the varieties of the data is the theme of knowledge. Sometimes this theme appears in combination with another, most often with the theme of hope, but it also often appears on its own, sometimes using the language of 'new' or 'different'. In the questionnaires, the theme is clearly seen in such comments as those in response to question 5 which asks, "Would you want to hear this passage preached again? Why or why not?". "I'd like to hear it again, but with a new twist..." (S circle, Week 1 questionnaire) "Yes, because every time you hear something. We always remember something different. Often a whole new idea has us thinking on a different tangent that is
good." (S 789, Week 1 questionnaire) "Yes. I might understand more the next time." (S Pices, Week 4 questionnaire) "It was uplifting and encouraging, but hearing new passages preached each week helps to expand my knowledge." (S 0729, Week 2, questionnaire) This last comment shows the combination of the theme of knowledge with the theme of hope. The importance of acquiring knowledge or learning something from the experience of scripture and sermon can also, as with the other themes, be seen in the negative responses as well. "No. I feel I have already heard it three times during the past three weeks." (S Pices, Week 3, questionnaire)

This theme of the acquiring of new or different knowledge as a major contributing factor in the ways in which scripture and sermon resonate with, and relate to, the lives of the parishioner/participants also emerges very strongly in the data of the verification session. In the beginning of the session, the group stressed how important it was to them to come together to study and dialogue. This study group was for some the opportunity to consolidate years of study, for many the opportunity to dialogue with scripture texts, an opportunity that they feel one does not get the chance to do in a church service. For all of the group, remembering that this is a group that although asked to participate in this Action in Ministry, is self-selecting in terms of its on-going life in the congregation, the opportunity to study together provided a much sought-after experience of church mid-week. The opinion of the group was unanimous that coming together to learn
something new has been an experience of deepening their faith. While this was very strongly articulated, there was also some awareness of possible ambiguities or even contradictions in this combination of the thirst for knowledge of the scriptures with the maintaining and deepening of faith through inspiration and hope. One of the participants presented in a very strong fashion his dissatisfaction with the way in which the church deals with the transmission of knowledge about scripture. "...some of us feel that our Sunday School and church preaching is dishonest. There is accepted, good scholarship but people in the pews don't hear it unless we pick up resource material." However, he then went on to discuss the complexities of the relationship between worship and scholarship by saying that when he does worship services in nursing homes, he does not use what he calls 'good scholarship', but rather does a 'traditional' service. He concluded this part of the conversation by asking the rhetorical question, "What is the reality we want preached?" (verification tape, Feb. 7/99)

In the experience of the preacher, his perceived lack of knowledge about the Old Testament texts proved to be very frustrating. He was even more frustrated by the fact that the knowledge he felt he needed, that would make him feel comfortable in preaching from the texts of this Action in Ministry, could not be easily acquired.

When I started to do my research for Sunday I made a very rude discovery. I subscribe to...I also go every week to...[a] web page. I go to my favourite preaching sites and between all of these I usually get one or two good ideas on which I can build my sermon on. But not this week, they
were no help at all. These journals and other preachers focus on the New Testament, not the OT. In fact I couldn’t find anything on the Servant Song. Well almost nothing... What’s with these people? And more to the point why is it I never noticed this before? When I review my resources, they are all geared to the new testament with only passing reference to the OT passages. Only now is this striking me as strange and unbalanced. I guess this means that I’m learning something already which was the point of the whole exercise... I’m also forced to pull out every commentary I’ve got which is again making me think, another good thing... Part of this deal was that I was supposed to spend the same amount of time on sermon preparation as I usually do in a normal week. Hello out there, it’s not possible, the resources are not as easily available, hence I have to dig more, ergo it takes longer. Memo to Karen: it’s time for you to start an OT preaching journal, sign me up now, preferably before Sunday. (Week 2 journal)

The same quote used above in the analysing of the preacher’s relationship to the theme of hope, also speaks to his relationship to this strong theme of knowledge and illustrates how the two are combined. As well, it brings in the theme of images.

This is a pain. You see I have this problem. I love new ideas, whenever I get a chance to try something new I leap at it with the enthusiasm of a teenager for his first car. But it’s January, right after Christmas and I’m tired, uninspired and just want to coast for the next few weeks. But not me, I leapt at the chance to be part of this Old Testament study. It seemed like a good idea at the time... but today? Just give me the boring old lectionary with Christian texts... The good news however is that I just interviewed [H] for my book and he gave me some wonderful images of exile for the OT and the contemporary church that I can tie into this week. So maybe it will work out after all. (Week 1 journal)

The combination of all the forms of the data on the theme of knowledge seems to indicate that for a number of those who hear scripture and sermon in a worship service, and particularly those that are involved in a study group, there is
not only a desire for new knowledge but the acquiring of it is a way of deepening their faith. As with the previously-discussed themes, for the parishioner/participants, there is little or no difference in this between the Old and the New Testaments. Knowing more about either or both testaments helps them with the relating of the words of scripture to the realities of their day to day lives. This is also a passionately articulated need, this need for learning something new and different in the discerning of the presence of God and in integrating new knowledge into the forms of worship as they currently exist in The United Church of Canada. In the preacher’s quest for the knowledge that will make him feel comfortable enough with the texts to preach them, there is frustration when the knowledge is such a struggle to acquire. A pastoral implication that can be drawn from this data is that in the midst of very busy schedules, preachers may tend to avoid preaching from the Old Testament because the resources on which to draw are more limited and inaccessible than they are for the New Testament. However, when the knowledge is acquired, the preacher revels in inspiration and images.

There is also a divergence in this theme between the preacher and the parishioner/participants. In all three of the four sermons, at least a couple of paragraphs are given to detailing the historical context of the Old Testament passages. The preacher obviously felt it necessary to set the context in detail in order to help the hearers make the connections between the passages and their
own contexts. However, it is the themes, such as that of hope, that are commented on and related to the realities of life. It is only in the theme of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, as this theme weaves its way through the data, that the historical context of the passages becomes a part of the responses. It may be that it was the setting of the context of the passages which enabled the people to see the connections between them and their own contexts, connections which they articulated as hope and images.

**Theme Four – The Relationship between the Old and New Testaments**

("If the root is holy, then the branches also are holy.")

The theme of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments of the Bible was certainly one of the themes underlying the assumptions that went into the design of the action in ministry. However, the action in ministry was intentionally designed, as much as possible, to allow the theme to emerge rather than to be in any way imposed on the participants. In the data of the questionnaires, there were a few comments such as the one in response to the question “Would you want to hear this passage preached again? Why or why not?” “It would be nice to hear other than at Christmas we hear little O/T preaching these days.” (S 70221, Week 1 questionnaire) Another response to the same question implies that any importance and relevance of the Old Testament is directly linked to the New Testament. “Yes, as it appears to tie in with the New Testament.” (S Pices, Week
A third response to the question may be setting some kind of boundaries around what is acceptable to hear from the Old Testament and what is not. "It depends on the focus of the sermon. I wouldn't want to hear about 'choseness', which is a possible theme to expound upon." (S star, Week 3 questionnaire) This comment could be interpreted as a supersessionist one, in which the respondent does not want to deal with what is a major Old Testament emphasis and theme because it is seen as irrelevant to the respondent's time, place and faith. If taken in relationship with the responses of S circle which will be discussed below, this is indeed possible. However, it is also possible that S star could be just as selective about New Testament texts.

The responses of S circle to question 5 of the questionnaire were consistent in their belief that the texts of the Old Testament are irrelevant to the details of life as lived in their time and place. The respondent brought this belief to the action in ministry and maintained it throughout the project. In answer to question 6 "Is there anything else you want to say about your experience?" was written, "I believe the Christian church is asking all newcomers to adopt Jewish history lessons and that limits who will listen. Furthermore, if you're a Jew, the Old Testament would mean a lot, but, the people we address are not Jewish and never intend to be. So, lets stop assuming we have Jews in the pew." (S circle, Week 1 questionnaire) And in the last week of the Action in Ministry, "It is difficult to see modern day details that are brought to mind by this passage. I don't have a [clue] what day of Midian
is." (S circle, Week 4 questionnaire) As has been made clear by the responses of others that have been discussed above, while this position is vehemently held by the particular respondent it is not at all widely held by the parishioner/participants in general. It represents one end of a spectrum.

This end of a spectrum in the life of The United Church of Canada was also represented through the verification session, along with the opposite end and a variety of positions in-between. In the course of that session the statement was made by one individual that "...we don't get enough Old Testament preaching" and they then went on to speak of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the fact that Jesus was a Jew who talks about scripture, i.e. the Old Testament. When this same speaker also said that the Old Testament was "good for us", I followed up by asking "Why is it good for you?". A debate of great intensity and passion followed. (Feb. 7/99 verification session)

A. "We call ourselves people of the Judeo-Christian relationship, well let's not forget the Judeo part of that because that's where we came from."

B. "When Jesus says 'Is it not written in scripture?' He's not talking about the second letter of...[garbled, but implying something in the New Testament]...he is not quoting Paul."

...Indistinguishable conversation...

A. "I think it's important that we understand that we are part of a religion that developed from the knowledge of one God. And the Jews see themselves and were the chosen people and Christ felt he was one of the chosen people and he was not attempting to get people to follow him as a Christian, they were following him as a Jewish teacher. Anyway, that's where I'm going."
Researcher. "Why is it good for you to hear Old Testament?"

A. "I guess because I'm old!" (general laughter)

B. "I remember Malachi."

C. "History is important."

D. "Which is what the Old Testament is. I also view this as a stumbling block to the growth of the church, because, would you be interested in learning the history of Vietnam or history of China to become a part of this people? It's like a stumbling block. Not only do you have to go and believe somethings about Jesus, but also you have to marry into this Jewish tradition. That's what you're asking people to do; to become part of the Christian church. And it isn't necessary to marry Jewish traditions, or, do we leave that tradition behind and grow in a different way?"

...Indistinguishable sentences...

You'd have a hard time joining a group that had that as their history, you're not a Zorastrian, you're not a Hindu. We're asking people to buy into the Old Testament...well, geez...we're asking a lot of them."

B. "But I don't think, like, that is the same, that is the common line down to us spiritually, in terms of our faith. To me, it has so much wisdom that we hear a lot of times these days, and that's from whence it comes, is the Old Testament."

D. "You go into a church and you start your own Jewish worship, coming out of those ancient countries...wait a minute...I live in W., I have a modern name, you know, this is very foreign stuff to me."

B. "But not anymore so than talking about, reading about stuff about some group of Jews that were wandering around in the first century, either, so in that respect, what we're doing in the Christian church is that we are trying to follow the teachings of Christ, Christ taught the Old Testament."

D. "But do you have to become Jews to learn it?"

B. "No!!! but you have to read the teachings to be able to learn the teachings. And the teachings of Christ are the Old Testament."

E. "With several fictional overlays!" (laughter)
F. "With a new twist too!"

D. "Never mind...historical documents...and interpretation..."

...Indistinguishable conversation...many speakers...

B. "New twist...'You've heard, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say to you,' but I say, like 'Vengeance is mine saith the Lord.' Like, he taught a different philosophy, he taught a philosophy of forgiveness versus a philosophy of retribution."

G. "Yeah, but you can also find that if you ignore the New Testament. You can also find changes in position of God, who is always unchanging but...(laughter). If you compare passages in some of the earlier writings of the Hebrew Scripture and later writings of the Hebrew Scriptures, you find a different God. In the very earliest, you find a God who walks in the cool, walks around in the garden in the cool of the day. He's just a guy, he's walking around, you know, he's about 5'8", 5'9" and all that sort of thing, he's very much, you know, a person-type God, who can walk up and talk with Adam and Eve, they can stand there and talk to him and all that sort of thing. And as we go further along, this God becomes more powerful and more physically separate and that's just in the Old Testament.

...Indistinguishable conversation...

E. "The fundamental difference is in how you approach life...understanding and forgiveness in Old Testament...(garbled...many speakers)...What we're talking about is a focus and I think the emphasis is much more so one of forgiveness in the New Testament then it was throughout the Old Testament.

B. "There's a progression of sorts, but it's definitely pronounced. I mean, you've got a major prophet, if you want to take the Jewish view of Jesus, that, you know...Judaism before Isaiah is a different story too.

E. "Sort of like a court, sort of like how a judicial court will establish a new precedent and I think that's what Christ did."

B. "Yes, very...I would agree and put a focus, codified it...but you can't understand it unless you go back."

E. "Well, I think there's a real need to go to the Old Testament too...a lot of wisdom there that we miss as well."

B. "Yeah, because otherwise, what's he talking about?!!"
E. "And a lot of truth...when you start reading through Psalms, there's so much that we miss."

This dialogue from the verification session shows a tendency in the relationship of the parishioner/participants to the biblical texts to see the historical context of the Old Testament as being far removed from that of our own while the historical context of the New Testament seems to be perceived as being almost exactly like our own. The repeated references to our modern times, our modern names reveals that for this speaker at least, there is some connection between the New Testament and their particular context, a connection that does not exist between their context and the Old Testament. Consciously or subconsciously, the two thousand year gap between the context of Jesus and our current context is skipped over or not taken into much account. Jesus is not seen in the continuity of the history of Israel, but rather, there is seen to be a very definite line or break between the Old and New Testaments. This is also observed in the preacher's response to the beginning of the action in ministry when he implies that it will be much harder to prepare sermons from the Old Testament than it is from the New and he refers to the “…boring old lectionary with Christian texts.” (Week 1 journal) There is another opinion voiced by a number of the parishioner/participants, however, that there is a line of continuity leading from the wisdom of the texts from the Old Testament through Jesus to the New Testament and then the church. The fact of this continuity is strongly stated and held side by side with the belief that Jesus introduced a 'new twist' to all the
wisdom of the Old Testament, a new twist that could often be defined as forgiveness rather than vengeance. (Feb. 7/99 verification session)

Given these different pieces of data and their different emphases what can be said about this fourth theme of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments is that generally both preacher and participants consciously or subconsciously perceive there to be a gulf or lack of continuity between them. The nature of this gulf is not so much articulated as simply felt. A minority, but not isolated, opinion sees some continuity between Jesus and the Old Testament in certain aspects of his teaching, but even in this continuity there is the firmly-stated belief in his 'new twist'.

Theme Five – The Integration of Scripture in the Worship Service

(“Praise the Lord with the lyre... For the word of the Lord is upright,”)

The fifth theme of the data in this action in ministry can be referred to as the integration of the scripture in the worship service as a whole. It is an assumption, as was stated above, that the various elements of a worship service are in relationship to each other, each contributing to the totality of the worship experience. This assumption was not intentionally being sought out in the setting of the wording and format of the data, but nonetheless, it emerged with strength and clarity. It emerged most strongly in the verification session in which the
conversation moved, without any direction from me, to the totality of the worship experience and the place of the Old Testament scriptures in that totality. It was in a discussion of the frequency with which the questionnaires talked about the texts as ‘inspiring’, or in some cases ‘not inspiring’, that the conversation moved to the worship service as a whole. Those speaking were talking about their need for a “brighter tomorrow”, the “grimness of work and society” and the reality for them that church is a “re-centring” experience which reminds them of what kind of persons they want to be and gives them the energy to go on. One speaker then focused on the experience of God claiming them, God thinking that they were really neat, God loving them, which is a message of inspiration and hope and the relief that one can make mistakes. That speaker then immediately began to talk about a piece of music which is the last part of the worship service of this particular congregation. The same piece of music is repeated every week and it always brings a lump to the throat and tears to the eyes of this person. In the further words of the verification session, “the song puts the seal on the re-charging that worship is.” (Feb.7/99 verification session)

The observer of the verification session also noted the import to the participants of the discussion of the whole worship service or experience. Not only must a good sermon be controversial and have a hook that powerfully entices one in, but singing is a vital part of the total worship experience. The readings can slip away in the thoughts, feelings and lives of the worshippers. It is
the music and the sermon that have the most potential and on-going impact. The observer also caught what is a majority position of the group, "I don't think it matters where in the Bible a passage comes from if it can address something that is going on in my life." (Feb.7/99 observer's notes)

In the context of this theme of the integration of the scriptures with the totality of the worship service, there is a definite connection between the images theme discussed above and such comments in the data as, "I hope the 'polished arrow' metaphor will stick with me, but for the most part Sunday sermons or readings tend not to remain in conscious thought past Sunday." (S star, Week 3 questionnaire) There are a number of comments in the data about sermons generally not staying with people much past the Sunday service and yet, there are also many comments about the Sunday service being an experience of recharging hope and inspiration for the difficulties of the coming week. From the data of the action in ministry it seems that the images of scripture and sermon are very important parts of worship in fulfilling the need to experience hope in the realities of life. The historical context of the scripture passages may not necessarily remain in conscious thought in the minds of the hearers once the Sunday worship service is over, but it seems that the images and/or an inspiring experience of hope taken from text and sermon are more likely to do so.
Some Conclusions – Thematic and Analytic

In conclusion, in the analysis of the five major themes that have arisen in the data of the action in ministry, themes that are defined as major according to the frequency and level of passion by which they arise, a number of things can be seen. The participants in the action in ministry expressed in their data a strong need for the feeling and experience of hope in their lives. It is the current realities of their personal lives and their societal context which give rise to this need for hope. For many, the worship service in its entirety needs to be and is an opportunity to experience the hope in a way that enables the living out of the week ahead. This is most likely to happen when connections are made between the scripture, the sermon and the general details of the lives of the hearers. For almost all of the parishioner/participants it does not matter whether the scripture of the worship service is taken from the Old or the New Testament. What matters is whether it, as preached, inspires the needed hope. What matters is whether it contains the images and feelings that are required for the living out of the time ahead. The sermon is an extremely important part of this bearing of hope as can be seen by the fact that images in the sermon that do not appear in the scripture texts can be of substantive import for the hearers. The images are of significance when they convey the message of love, acceptance, a positive relationship with God and the certainty that the dark realities of current life are neither God’s purpose nor the final answer. What also emerged in this action in ministry was
the fact that the preacher could be an instrument of this conveying of hope through scripture and sermon whether or not he was experiencing it himself in a particular week.

While the positive images and hope conveyed by the texts and the sermons are considered by the participants in this action in ministry to be the most relevant and lasting aspect of scripture in their lives, there is also for both the participants and the preacher, a strong tendency to combine the theme of hope with the theme of knowledge. People come to worship and they listen to scripture and sermon in order to learn something, in order to be challenged, in order to get a new perspective on their lives and their context. The preacher's data clearly conveys his need to have a certain level of knowledge about the texts in order to feel comfortable and competent in preaching from them. And in the case of the less-familiar Old Testament texts this has pastoral implications because it requires a greater weekly time commitment than is the case in his more usual practice of preaching from the New Testament.

The hearing and experiencing of Old Testament texts can also raise and resonate with deep personal issues, often providing comfort and sometimes proving to be painfully challenging. This raises a question of whether there needs
to be some opportunity for support and reflection following worship services.\textsuperscript{97}

The group which engaged in this action in ministry very clearly stated that not only was one experience of church not enough for them in the course of their week, but that they also needed an opportunity to dialogue with the texts and with each other, an opportunity that is not provided in the current worship services of The United Church of Canada.

In terms of the relationship of the Old and New Testaments to each other, the preacher's identification with the prophet Isaiah in the painful realities of life is to be noted. And especially, his surprise at discovering that identification. Most of the parishioner/participants found the use of Old Testament texts in the worship service to be a good thing, and indeed, were perplexed that it was not a more common occurrence. One participant commented that they have had five ministers in this particular congregation, none of whom have regularly preached from the Old Testament. Another participant felt strongly that it was not only unnecessary for the church to preach these scriptures, but that it was in fact harmful to its growth because of their irrelevance and obscurity. There was also much ambivalence around issues of the place of current scholarship in the worship experience. The meaning of Old Testament texts for the Christian was the implied subject of much of the data.

\textsuperscript{97} In the worship tradition of some of our Jewish sisters and brothers, there is often time for questions and comments following the 'sermon' part of the service.
The implications of this data for The United Church of Canada can be summarised as follows. There are many people attending Sunday morning worship services who, because of painful, discouraging and frustrating circumstances in the context in which they live their day to day lives, have a great need for hope. This hope can be experienced and appropriated through the scripture, sermon and music of a Sunday morning worship service that is relevant to their lives and experiences. Some of those present on Sunday mornings also need and want another experience during the week; an experience of coming together in Christian community in which they can both feel accepted and have the opportunity for reflection and dialogue with their Christian tradition. There is also a need, often integrated with the need for hope, for the acquiring of knowledge about the Bible and theology. This knowledge has a direct relationship with the deepening of faith, the feeling of hope and a connection with God. The images of scripture and sermon, either on their own or in relationship with each other, are easily appropriated by the hearers and carried forward into the week ahead. These images are extremely significant in the bearing of the needed hope. What is more ambiguous is the relationship of this need for hope and the acquiring of knowledge, this power of images and the integration of some of the elements of the worship service: scripture, sermon and music, with current, or what is perceived as current, biblical scholarship. Noticeably absent from this particular theme was any mention of the Sunday morning prayers. What is also ambiguous, is the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and the
contribution of that relationship to the experience of the parishioners/participants when Old Testament texts are preached in Epiphany.

The data of the action in ministry is clear that hope, knowledge, images, the integration of worship can all be perceived or acquired, by the parishioner/participants, through the experience of hearing Old Testament texts preached regardless of the time of year. In the perception of the majority of the participants, who have experienced primarily New Testament preaching, whether they experience what they need or not has nothing to do with the particular testament which is preached from, nor any expectations they may have about the liturgical time of year. What is essential is the relationship of the texts to the realities of their lives, the acquiring of knowledge, the strength of the images, and the power of the worship experience. This is not the case for the preacher who felt a lack of knowledge about the Old Testament to be a definite barrier to preaching, especially given the pastoral realities of the Epiphany season. There is a need in The United Church of Canada, not only for a sensitivity to those for whom a once-a-week, relatively passive worship experience is not enough but also for an easily accessible and comprehensible preaching resource, print form and Internet form, which focuses on the Old Testament lectionary passages.
Chapter Five  Conclusion

This concluding chapter of my thesis will bring together what has preceded it, aspects of the introductory, theory, methodology and data analysis chapters, in a way which will not only draw them together but will point to some future directions for the preaching of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada.

In the second chapter of this thesis, the theory chapter, I began by setting out the theological assumptions and beliefs that I bring to this discussion. These include my belief that God is revealed in the Old Testament, my belief that Jesus knew and lived that reality according to the scriptures as they existed in his human context, my belief that for us as Christians God is revealed in Jesus in the scriptures called the Old and New Testaments and my belief that in the light and inspiration of the Holy Spirit the primary witness of the Christian Church has been in accordance with these statements. I also set out in that chapter my own personal experience of the Old Testament and the ways in which my particular context informs and builds on my experience. It was the realization as I talked about these texts, that my experience of them was not the same as that of many other folk in The United Church of Canada which began the process of exploration resulting in this thesis. I have, therefore, put into relationship a discussion of the place of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada and the experience of a group of United Church folk and their preacher.
I began doing that first by stating that in the history of the Christian Church the fact that the Old Testament has a place in its scripture has been the object of general consensus, though often discussed. I also showed, however, that there was a subtle but significant shift in the understanding of the place of the Old Testament that occurred as a result of the rise of historical criticism. With the rise to prominence of this particular method of biblical interpretation, the Old Testament came to be regarded more as history than as scripture with a living relationship to the church. Former methods of interpretation such as what John Bright refers to as the categories of typology, allegory and analogy, or what Shelley Cochrane refers to as the categories of typology, prophecy/fulfillment and realized eschatology, were no longer in much use as ways in which the church could try and discern the meaning and relevance of the Old Testament for its life in its current context.  

In that second chapter of this thesis, I also showed how that more general move in the place of the Old Testament in the church played out specifically in

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96 It is not important for this particular thesis to try to reconcile the categories of Bright and Cochrane nor to argue whether or not these methods of interpretation are still to some extent operative today. The point is that as interpretive methodologies they have been displaced and historical criticism has not replaced them with any similarly helpful method for the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. In a similar vein, United Church theologian Foster Freed in a recent conversation with me, stated that he has been starting to hear comments about the negative effect of the loss of typology on the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. Neither of us is advocating a return to typology which had, of course both its strengths and its weaknesses, but we are remarking on what seems to be a noticeable vacuum in Christian interpretive methodologies for the Old Testament.
The United Church of Canada. The official documents that deal with scripture through the seventy-five year history of this denomination indicate a subtle but significant shift. Statements such as the one that the holy scriptures are the primary source and ultimate standard of the Christian faith and life are replaced by ones that seem to be putting scripture in the service of the church. In continuity with some of the possible implications of historical criticism, the United Church often comes to regard the Old Testament as history too hard to understand.

This shift in the place of the Old Testament in the United Church occurs at a similar time as several other shifts or changes. It is the combination of them all which has contributed to what I have stated to be the theological problem of the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament, the result being a lack of Old Testament preaching in my denomination. One of these other shifts or changes has been the rise in the use of the lectionary in the United Church, to the point that almost all current worship resources assume and are based on its use. I believe there are some early indications of a growing realization that there are theological problems for the church inherent in an almost total reliance on lectionary use. These problems, which certainly include scripture seen to be in the service of the church and the church year as well as a lack of imperative to preach Old Testament, have not yet been addressed by the denomination. These indications of the realization that the problems exist, however, may be seen in the
production and very wide promotion of a non-lectionary-based new Sunday School curriculum. More definitive statements can be made after the curriculum, which is promoted as biblically-based as opposed to lectionary-based, comes into use in the fall of the year 2000.  

As things currently stand, the lectionary, based as it is on a more or less canonical cycle of Gospel readings with epistle, psalm and other Old Testament lessons selected to re-inforce the perceived themes and emphases of the Gospel readings, is in wide use in the United Church. And it is in wide use in the United Church in a time when there has also been, in the recent past, a shift in the ways in which preaching is done. This particular shift may be characterized, as a change from a wider reliance on a few particular texts chosen by the preacher, to a wider reliance on the texts set out by the lectionary. The result of this may be a feeling that the Old Testament work has been 'done', so to speak, by virtue of the Old Testament text merely been present in the emphases of the week. The difficult, historical passages are read in the Sunday worship and that is enough.

Another change or shift in the context of The United Church of Canada which

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99 It is noteworthy though, that in workshops promoting this new "BibleQuest" curriculum, one of the rationales given for its production is the general opinion among United Church folk that the children of the church do not know the biblical stories. The question that cannot be answered at this time is whether that reality, and I do believe it is a reality, has been caused by the prevalence of lectionary-based "Whole People of God" curriculum or by the particular form and content of the curriculum or, indeed, by some other factor or combination of factors.
has combined with those mentioned above is the current post-Holocaust setting in which the church finds itself. There is an often un-defined and even un-articulated understanding that in this period after the systematic attempt to destroy the people for whom what Christians call Old Testament is primary scripture, scripture cannot be preached in the same way as it was before the Holocaust. There is an often un-defined and even un-articulated guilt among United church folk, including preachers, about the explicit and implicit part played by the Christian church in the Holocaust. That guilt is well-grounded and has led to a silence in terms of Old Testament preaching. Current scholarship and writing available and in use in the United Church has not been specifically, practically helpful in offering a way forward in the preaching of those texts in this post-Holocaust context. Nor is there anything much available that is quickly and easily accessible and focussed on the problems raised by the combination of this post-Holocaust context with the rise in both historical criticism and the use of the lectionary. The result has been a lack of Old Testament preaching because of a perception of those texts as history, because of the placement of them in the worship resources of the church as implicitly secondary and because of the relatively unexamined understanding that they cannot be preached in the ways in which they used to be.

However, I agree with those such as George L. Klein that not only was the Old Testament foundational for the early Christian church and the gospel writers
and not only did Jesus, as his life and teachings are recorded for us, make frequent references to Old Testament figures and stories but also that the Old Testament provides for Christians important truths about God, our world and ourselves. For The United Church of Canada to limit itself to the New Testament, as it is currently doing to some extent, is to miss much of God’s revelation. It was those parts of my theory base, the central theological issue being the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament, in relationship with my assumption and experience that the Old Testament was not being preached frequently in The United Church of Canada which led to the creation of the question of this thesis. “What is the experience of a suburban United Church preacher and his congregation when the lectionary texts (year A) are preached during Epiphany?”

After determining the location and timing of the action in ministry, as detailed above, I determined that the most effective way of discerning what the experience of a preacher and his congregation was to the preaching of Old Testament texts during Epiphany was to employ the qualitative research methodology of phenomenology. The findings of qualitative research generally are based on the researcher’s interpretations of the subject’s interpretation of events. Phenomenology specifically focuses on the meaning of the lived experience. The first task in a phenomenological study is to arrive at an accurate description and then the researcher goes on to search for themes which represent the significant meanings for the subjects. The methodology of the action in ministry was
therefore designed, according to the principles of qualitative research, particularly phenomenology, to determine and describe the experience of the preacher and congregation and to analyse the emergent themes.

I turn now to the specific results of the data analysis in the fourth chapter of this thesis, though that material has also been integrated into what I have already stated above in this chapter. The data resulting from the experience of the preacher and the parishioner/participants when the Old Testament lectionary texts of the prophet Isaiah were preached in four weeks of Epiphany resulted in the emergence of five distinct themes. These five themes can be named as hope, knowledge, images, the relationship of the Old and New Testaments and the integration of Old Testament texts in the whole experience of worship. What is clear from the data is that the theme of hope emerged as the strongest of the five. There was a great need on the part of the participants to hear and experience hope in the context of their lives lived as Christians in the world. The parishioner/participants wrote about and talked about their societal context of insecurity, the fear of the unknown and the current uncertainty about the economic realities of life. And they were able, for the most part, to hear and experience the hope they needed and wanted in the texts of the prophet Isaiah that were preached for them in that particular season.
The fact that the parishioners/participants were able to hear the message of hope that they needed for the living out of their daily lives stood out in particular in relationship to several features of the action in ministry and the resultant data. One of these features was the fact that none of the four lectionary scripture passages of the action in ministry actually uses the exact word ‘hope’. Its impact and frequency of use in the data is directly related to the connections made in the sermons between the scripture and the lives of the congregants. While the scripture passages do not explicitly contain the word ‘hope’ they do contain phrases, contexts and themes which, when picked up and elaborated on by a preacher aware of the context of his people, convey a message of hope. Another noteworthy feature of the data in the category of this theme is that ‘hope’ can be both preached and heard even if the preacher is not feeling overtly hopeful at that particular time. What this points to is the fact that the effect of the text and the sermon on the text can go beyond the individual reality of the preacher.

There was a strong inter-connection between this theme of hope and the theme of images and what was also indicated by the data was that, for the most part, the participants were able to hear and carry with them into the week ahead the images that they felt they needed to sustain them. In the sermons, the preacher spent more time on the historical context of the Isaiah texts than he did on the images of the texts but it was the images, both from the texts themselves and as inspired in the sermons of the preacher by the texts, which are picked up
by the parishioner/participants as resonating with their lives. I believe that this is particularly the case because of the nature of the lectionary texts in this action in ministry. The prophetic, poetic texts of Isaiah are rich in imagery along with their implicit tone of hope. If an action in ministry were to be done with a different kind of Old Testament text, particularly a non-poetic non-prophetic kind of text, as I discuss below, this is the one of the five themes which emerged from this action in ministry in which I would expect to see the most change.

What is also clear from the data is that this experience of the participants was substantially different from the experience of the preacher. The preacher felt a lot of frustration in the preaching of the Old Testament texts. This was because of his own lack of knowledge, a fact which resulted in him spending much more time in sermon preparation than he would usually do. His frustration also occurred because as he did spend the extra time in preparation there was very little in the way of resources available to him. The preacher put the extra time and energy into his sermon preparation over that four-week period because of his commitment to the action in ministry of this thesis and because of his commitment to learning something new in the process. Knowledge of the texts in terms of their historical context, while not so important to the parishioner/participants, was a very important part of the preacher's ability to preach and confidence in preaching from them.
What is of substantial note in this data is that in spite of the preacher's frustration and lack of knowledge and need to spend extra time in sermon preparation, the sermons on Isaiah had great meaning and relevance for those who heard them. This is a result not only of the preacher's commitment to the project but also of his understanding of the context and realities of the lives of his parishioners. However, it is not in the least realistic to expect that in the stress and over-work of pastoral ministry that is the daily reality for most preachers, they will be willing or able to commit that kind of extra time and energy to the preaching of Old Testament texts. They may believe those texts to be essential to the life and ministry of The United Church of Canada, though that is not a common understanding as I have shown, they may have an excellent understanding of the context and lives of their parishioners, but they simply do not, can not spend the extra time preparing sermons on unfamiliar texts for which resources are less easily available than they are for New Testament texts.

Given the reality that the particular group participating in the action in ministry openly and readily articulated its need for knowledge as a way of deepening faith, what did not seem to make any difference to most of them was whether the knowledge they needed was about Old Testament or New Testament texts. This is a group for whom wanting to learn more about the Bible is connected with wanting another experience of church mid-week in order to get them through the week. This is a group who wants the opportunity to dialogue, an opportunity
which is not satisfied for them in a regular Sunday morning worship service, however important that also is to their faith life. This finding from the data that it did not matter to the group whether the knowledge they felt they needed came from the Old or New Testament connects with the fourth theme which I have named as the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

In analyzing the data of the preacher and parishioner/participants as it spoke to this fourth theme, I assumed that I would find that some of the folk were resistant to the inclusion of, or in fact the priority given, to the Old Testament texts in the worship services that were a part of the action in ministry. The preacher continued to be in favour of the theory and theology involved in this thesis, despite his well-articulated pastoral frustrations. What the data revealed in terms of the parishioner/participants was rather unexpected to me. There was only one of the eleven who, at least as it was set out in the data, was completely in the tradition of Marcion, believing that not only was the Old Testament not helpful to the Christian church, but indeed that it was a hindrance to its people. I had expected that to be the response of more of the parishioner/participants as a partial way of explaining the lack of Old Testament preaching in The United Church of Canada, the theological problem underlying it being the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. I had assumed in setting up this action in ministry and thesis that part of the reason that the Old Testament was not being preached was a resistance on the part of the folk in the congregations to hearing
those texts. I carried this assumption in spite of, or along side of, my experience of preaching and speaking about Old Testament texts as it is detailed in chapter two. The data of the action in ministry, however, caused me to re-examine my assumption with the resultant intensive search in other parts of the data for indications of why the Old Testament was not being frequently preached.

A factor in the data of the parishioner/participant who did not want to hear the Old Testament preached, and one which bears future investigation and consideration, was a particular dynamic in the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. While the context of the Old Testament texts was considered by this parishioner/participant to be very far removed from his own context, the context of New Testament texts he considered to be very much like his own. A question to be explored at another time is what this rather unconscious understanding of coherence and continuity between the context of Jesus and the contemporary context does to the place of the New Testament in The United Church of Canada. While as Christians, we do of course understand ourselves, our relationship with God and with our scriptures through the Risen Christ there are also some historical, social, geographical etc. differences between our context and the first century or so C.E. This dynamic on the part of one of the participant/parishioners exists side by side with all of the data from the other parishioner/participants that talks about the line of continuity between Jesus and the Old Testament. Jesus is seen as being in line with the wisdom of the Old
Testament and yet always adding a new twist to the proclamation of how we are to live our lives in relationship to God and each other.

The fifth theme to emerge in analyzing the data and to be explored in relationship with the theory and theology of this thesis is that of the integration of scripture in the worship service as a whole. The parishioner/participants were very clear that for them church and worship – terms which they used interchangeably, are re-centring experiences which remind them of what kind of persons they want to be and give them the energy to go on. There is a connection here with the images theme discussed above in this chapter and in more detail in the data analysis chapter. The data suggests it was the images and/or an inspiring experience of hope taken from the text and the sermon which is likely to stay with people and sustain them for the week ahead. As was also stated above, for most of those parishioner/participants of the action in ministry, it did not matter whether the scripture of the worship service is taken from the Old or New Testament; what matters is whether, when preached, it inspires hope.

Another very important factor to emerge from the data around this theme, a factor to be further explored, is the different relationship between specific elements of the worship service and the scripture. There were numerous references made for instance, to the music of the four worship services and the ways in which the various pieces of music reinforced the inspiring experience of
hope for the parishioner/participants. It is clear that the place of the Old Testament in worship services of The United Church of Canada is one that needs to be in relationship with the other elements of worship. They reinforce one another. This is no surprise to any who work in a pastoral setting. What was glaringly absent from every piece of the data around this particular theme was any mention of the prayers which are a part of any United Church worship service. Scripture, sermon and music were all discussed in detail and note needs to taken (especially of the references to the importance of music) because these were not in any way solicited in the questionnaires or the verification session. I actually had not given much thought to what connections might emerge between those elements of worship. The unsolicited nature of the comments about other features of the worship service made the complete absence of any references to the prayers even more obvious. This is an area of possible future exploration.

What also did not seem to connect for those producing much of the data of the action in ministry was the fact that the Old Testament Isaiah texts were being heard and preached on in the liturgical season of Epiphany. It was a major assumption of the thesis proposal and the design of the action in ministry of this thesis that the data of the preacher and his congregants would be more vivid if that Old Testament preaching took place in a highly Christological liturgical season of the church year. I believe that the reluctance on the part of a number of those involved to do the action in ministry in Advent actually proves that
assumption to be true. The theological problem of the uncertainty around
Christian interpretation of the Old Testament in the current context of The United
Church of Canada is shown by the reluctance of the preacher to preach it during
the highly Christological season of Advent. My ministry base group was also
against it for the same kinds of reasons. It seems, therefore, that the cultural
baggage of the season has precedence when there is not a strong or clearly
thought out method of Christian interpretation. Pragmatically then, the choice was
to move the action in ministry to the Epiphany season in the hope that the
Christological character of that season would help the data emerge with at least
some of the vividness that it might have had if the action in ministry had occurred
in Advent. It seems in reality, however, that the particular time of year had very
little or no impact on the results. The preacher’s sermons did not focus on the
liturgical time of year so much as on the Old Testament texts themselves and the
responses of the parishioner/participants did not in any way indicate that they felt
the sermons or their total experience of the texts in worship was missing anything
by this lack of Epiphany focus.

The reasons for this may include the congregation involved not being one that
strongly emphasizes the liturgical rhythms of the church year or they may include
the recognition that Epiphany is not well understood or considered in The United
Church of Canada. However, this must be juxtaposed with the recognition that
the lectionary texts chosen for that time of year have been used since ancient
times to speak specifically to that time of year. It is important to remember Cochrane's comments about the ancient hermeneutic which governs the lectionary, and is applicable here whether or not the texts chosen for Epiphany have always been exactly the same in the lectionary. It is also important to remember that the early church was engaged in the Christian interpretation of scripture as it tried to make sense of the death and resurrection of Jesus and tried to deal with the growing tension between it and the synagogue. I believe that the church's understanding of both testaments and of the nature of Jesus would be greatly enhanced by a deepened understanding of these issues. This could lead to an increased level of comfort and familiarity with the texts which could lead to an increased frequency in preaching them which could lead to an increased level of comfort and hope to be derived from them.

To Boldly Go… - Future Possibilities and Directions

In terms of specific future directions, I believe that a similar action in ministry to the one detailed above, one taking place in an overtly highly Christological liturgical season such as Advent or Easter would yield vivid data on the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. The data so arrived at might be less positive, more unsettling than the data of my action in ministry, because it would be a more challenging exploration of the relationship between The United Church of Canada and the cultural context in which the lives of her people are lived out. A similar action in ministry could also be undertaken using different kinds of texts from the
Old Testament. The action in ministry in this thesis used the texts of the prophet Isaiah as those were set out by the lectionary for the particular time of year in which the project took place. In my initial discussions with the preacher, as I ascertained his willingness to involve both himself and his congregation in the production of data around the preaching of the Old Testament, he expressed his hope that the texts would be narrative ones, the Exodus story, for example. Implicit in his comments was his belief that such kinds of narrative stories would be easier for him to preach, that he had a greater understanding of those kinds of Old Testament texts, that he appreciated the drama and characterization of such texts. The question then arises as to what the data of an action in ministry would be like if the texts involved were those with which the preacher felt a greater level of familiarity and comfort and/or were narrative texts preached in our current context in which, as Buttrick pointed out, narrative preaching is being emphasized. It would build on the work of this thesis to find out.

The data discussed in the chapters of this thesis arose from using prophetic texts as the Old Testament texts preached in Epiphany according to the lectionary. Prophetic texts, although varying greatly in terms of style, date and content, can be said to have some particular characteristics. They are most often in poetic form with the prophetic books being made up of complex collections of oracles, sermons, narratives, biographies, history, laments, visions, sayings and prayers. They are not often arranged in a narrative or historical linear chronology.
One of many possible definitions of prophecy and its role comes from James Ward and Christine Ward whose definition is particularly directed towards preaching from prophetic texts:

The true prophet, in the biblical tradition, acts as the conscience of the religious community. The prophet is not an outsider, but an insider who embodies the community’s experience and vocation in his or her own life. Thus the prophet is the representative of the community and not merely its critic or adversary. Prophets express the judgment of God, and they experience it in their own life. And, similarly, they not only proclaim God’s forgiveness and empowerment, but know it first hand. They are not mechanical instruments of God’s communication with the community, but full participants in the community’s life, in its aspirations and disappointments as well as its failures and achievements.  

These kinds of characteristics of prophetic texts will lead to certain kinds of data when the texts are preached. I think that the strong emphasis on ‘hope’ and ‘images’ that arose from the data of this action in ministry was specifically related to the character of the prophetic texts. The poetic nature of the material and its expression of themes of hope, as re-inforced in the sermons, resonated with the lives of the parishioner/participants. This was a coming together of those particular texts with the depths of the lives of the participants which may reflect the understanding of those who originally put together the lectionary. Those poetic, prophetic texts were chosen as the church continued to try to make sense of the death and resurrection of Jesus and of the hopeful reality Christians believe he brings to the world. Apparently, that message, as mediated through the texts, still needs to be and can be heard.

\[100\] Ward and Ward, 12.
Given the above comments then, a possible future direction for this kind of work, which would I believe give a more complete picture of the place of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada, would be to do a similar action in ministry with different kinds of Old Testament texts. In different congregational settings four weeks could be spent with narrative texts, four with wisdom texts, four with legal texts, four with apocalyptic texts, four with psalms, four with proverbs etc. It is hard to categorize such texts as Job, Ecclesiastes and Lamentations but the data from hearing them preached would add to the understanding of the presence or absence of them in the United Church and the ways in which they make connections or not with the lives of the people.

Another possible direction that could be taken with this particular emphasis would be to have the preaching which is focussing on the Old Testament occurring in congregations which have a variety of levels of experience with those texts. This particular congregation did not have much experience with the preaching of Old Testament texts, nor did its preacher. ¹⁰¹ I believe that a lot could be learned about the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament and about what makes it possible for the Old Testament to be preached regularly in a United

¹⁰¹ It is of note that since the time of the action in ministry the preacher involved has preached Old Testament texts more frequently. He articulates an increased level of comfort with Old Testament preaching though his tendency is still to choose narrative texts.
Church congregation by analysing the data explicated in this thesis alongside that
gathered from a congregation in which Old Testament texts are regularly
preached. Again, this would add to the richness of the data and the completeness
of the picture of the place of the Old Testament in the United Church.

It would also be most profitable, I believe, to extend the dialogue on an
ecuménical basis and work with data from both United Church and other Christian
denominations, perhaps those which have quite diverse understandings of
scripture from that which I have to shown to be at least implicitly operative in the
United Church. I suspect that there is much to be learned by such an endeavor, a
suspicion that was reinforced by a brief conversation with a Catholic colleague.
He inquired about the progress and topic of this thesis and in the course of that
discussion I mentioned my assumptions that there is a lack of knowledge about
the Bible and that the Old Testament is not being preached often in the United
Church, certainly not often in comparison to the representation it has in the
lectionary or the percentage of the Christian Bible that it makes up. My
colleague’s response was swift and energetic, "Do you think that is happening for
the same reason that it happened in the Catholic church?" "Well, why did it
happen in the Catholic church?" I asked. Again his response was swift and
energetic, "Because we thought the people were not capable of understanding it!"
"Then, yes." I said, "The reason is the same."  

On a different note, but also arising from the combination and integration of the theory and data of this thesis, it was one of my assumptions going into the action in ministry that scripture, and in the context of this work, particularly the Old Testament, reveals God to us as Christians and therefore connects with the realities of our lives created as we are in the image of God. The Old Testament can speak to and about both the joys and the places of difficulty that we experience in ways that are both comforting and challenging. I assumed and hoped that the parishioner/participants and the preacher would experience this to be so both in the process of the action in ministry and in their future relationship with the Old Testament. I believe that the data reveals that this did indeed happen, for the preacher in terms of his ministry with the congregation and for the parishioner/participants in terms of the realities of their lives at work, with their families and in the congregation.

What I had not expected was the depth and intensity of some of those connections. There are pastoral implications, or at least future implications, for

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this kind of pastoral reality. Given the boundaries of confidentiality set out in the
covenant form of the action in ministry and the methodology chapter of this
thesis, there was no way of bringing the depth of the pastoral concerns which
arose in the data to the attention of the preacher, who is, of course, also pastor to
the congregation. The concerns which arose were not of the magnitude to be
considered life-threatening nor were they numerically large, none the less they
were significant and arose from more than one individual. These folk are
obviously dealing with issues of pain in their lives which either the scripture or the
sermon or the confidentiality of the process or a combination of all three enabled
them to articulate. This is another reason why the preaching of the Old
Testament is essential to The United Church of Canada.

So the question to ask then, is what would be pastorally helpful for this kind of
reality? I can offer only very tentative suggestions based on my assumptions and
reading of the data, my pastoral experience and my knowledge of the particular
process of this action in ministry. I am also taking into consideration the
characteristics of the participating group which they themselves articulated. The
group said, among other things, that they needed a second experience of church
to get them through the realities of their weeks and that they wanted this
experience to contain the opportunity for response and dialogue, an opportunity
that a typical worship service does not offer. I stated above my belief that data
based on an experience of Old Testament texts could be fruitfully gained through
the medium and methodology of bible study, as it was through preaching. The
data would of course not be exactly the same as that gained through hearing Old
Testament texts read and preached, but it would be helpful data in its own right
because bible study is another of the major ways in which folk of The United
Church of Canada encounter biblical texts.

A possible future direction therefore, for this kind of work around the Christian
interpretation of the Old Testament and its pastoral implications could be taken
through a bible study process. Such a process might combine an experience of
the texts with what is obviously a need by some in the church, an opportunity to
both respond to the texts and open a verbal and reflective dialogue between them
and the peoples' experiences. This could be done both with the minister of the
congregation participating and without the minister participating, to see what
differences that creates in the data and experience of the people in terms of Old
Testament texts. It is important to state here, however, that while I strongly
believe that this is a direction which can and should be followed in The United
Church of Canada, pastoral realities also include the fact that many folk are very
busy and would not respond to another opportunity for church during the week.
This maintains the focus on the Sunday morning worship service as people's
primary biblical experience.
There are also further, future directions to be taken around the use of the lectionary, preaching in The United Church of Canada and a general lack of biblical knowledge on the part of the preachers of the church as these greatly contribute to the theological problem of the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. It would be helpful to do some archival research around the introduction of the lectionary into the United Church. The reasons for its introduction are heard simplistically stated in a variety of contexts, the primary one being the fact that, in theory, it pushes preachers to proclaim the Gospel in relationship with texts that might not be their particular favourites. It is also said that the use of the lectionary in The United Church of Canada is an ecumenical move, connecting this denomination with the history of the church since it is an older practice in many other denominations.  

Archival research around the actual introduction of the lectionary into our denomination could look at the minutes of the committees discussing it at the time as well as anything else written then, either for public consumption or for the internal purposes of those promoting the lectionary. A deepened understanding of the theological strengths

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103 In his book, Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching, Paul Scott Wilson says the following in a brief discussion of the advantages of using the lectionary to determine the texts for preaching, "...these include: a) wide exposure to a broad selection of the Scriptures over the three-year cycle, a yearly progression through the life and ministry of Jesus and systematic treatment of individual books for series preaching, b) ecumenical advantages such as a ministerial Bible study, opportunities for interchurch or interdenominational study groups, and availability of a wide range of educational and homiletical support resources, and c) the possibility of easy coordination of educational and worship in the church." P. 53. After briefly stating the advantages of choosing one's own texts, he goes on the say that there are disadvantages to both methods, but it is not part of the purpose of this book to discuss what those disadvantages are.
and weaknesses of lectionary use would also be gained by looking at the documents about the lectionary which exist in those denominations which have been using it for a much longer period than the United Church. A question that should be asked is whether there are any Christian denominations who considered the possibility of using a lectionary and chose for theological reasons not to do so. An examination of their reasons would definitely inform this discussion.

Fruitful data to inform this discussion could also be obtained, I believe, from an examination of sermons preached in the context of The United Church of Canada, particularly in the years just prior to and just after the introduction of the lectionary. This research would need to take into account, though, an understanding that any noticeable change in the frequency of Old Testament preaching could be considerable years in taking effect. Attention would also need to be paid to those particular time periods, broad as they are, set out by Buttrick. In an interesting convergence with Buttrick’s comments, I had a conversation on January 24, 2000, with Professor Alan Davies, retired professor of religion, University of Toronto, ordained minister in The United Church of Canada and co-author of the book *How Silent Were the Churches: Canadian Protestantism and the Jewish Plight during the Nazi Era*. In this conversation about the nature of my research, Prof. Davies made the comment that as far as he was concerned, The United Church of Canada experienced the death of preaching in the decades of
the 70's and 80's, a death of preaching from which it has not yet recovered. This is one of the particular periods that Buttrick, although not speaking to a United Church context, names as marking a shift in the nature of preaching. The question is whether there is any convergence or relationship between this shift and the kind of movement marked by the comment of Bill Lord, detailed above. This needs further research.

In the area of biblical knowledge it is a well-known discussion in theological colleges, though probably more anecdotal than documented, that students for the ministry of the past decade or so arrive with far less knowledge of the Bible than was the case in previous generations. In response to this reality, Emmanuel College instituted an introductory Old Testament course, one of the primary aims of which was to get the students to read through the whole Old Testament. I was the teaching assistant for this course in the fall terms of 1991 and 1992. I believe that this is another factor in the theological problem of the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament in The United Church of Canada, a theological problem which has resulted in a lack of preaching those texts in this denomination. I believe that ministers who feel uncertain about their biblical grounding and overwhelmed with the pastoral responsibilities of their ministry, which in our context grow increasingly complex, may preach primarily New Testament texts because that seems an easier thing to do. The Old Testament is, of course, a much longer part of scripture than the New Testament, covers a much greater
variety of historical periods and contexts and argueably a much greater variety of literary types of material. It also may be seen, as I have shown above, as historical material seeming to be at a great distance from the preacher and the pastoral needs of the people in the pew. Since it is often read as a part of the recommended lectionary readings, since there is little accessible help available in terms of how to preach these texts in a post-Holocaust and since preachers' pastoral realities allow limited time for the preparation of sermons, I believe that a result is an avoidance of this part of scripture.

Whether this is a cause of, or a result of, or both, of the kind of data that led initially to this thesis, another area of future work could be a study of the general perception that the people in the pew are less knowledgeable now than has been the case in previous generations. It is a pastoral reality that bible study is not a priority for the overly-busy people who make up many United Church congregations. Other lectionary-based denominations in this situation have taken this situation in hand by producing resources available to the persons in the pew.\footnote{An example of this kind of resource, which would of course have to be adapted to the liturgical praxis of the United Church is "Living with Christ" a monthly publication by Novalis Press which lists the daily lectionary readings in a liturgical format suitable for individual devotions. This particular resource also converges with the data of my action in ministry in the area of the integration of scripture into the worship service as a whole. The daily readings are set in the format of an office or daily worship liturgy, which includes musical suggestions and prayers.} At the current time, our lectionary material is primarily in the hands of the 'experts' – ministers, Church School teachers, bible study people etc. - in spite of
the fact that it is printed in the new hymnbook. However, folk really only have the opportunity to see during worship and then only for hymns and psalms, unless they are flipping through it during sermons!

Therefore, it is time to discuss a final future implication, one which I have drawn from serious consideration of the comment by the preacher in week 2 of his journal the action in ministry, "Part of this deal was that I was supposed to spend the same amount of time on sermon preparation as I usually do in a normal week. Hello out there, it's not possible, the resources are not as easily available, hence I have to dig more, ergo it takes longer. Memo to Karen: it's time for you to start an OT preaching journal, sign me up now, preferably before Sunday."

Therefore, what is needed is a simple, accessible resource or book which focusses on the Old Testament texts of the lectionary. A resource or book which is both helpful with the specifics of weekly preaching and which builds a new way forward in the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. The introduction to the book or resource would give some understanding of the essentialness of the Old Testament to the Christian church in general and to The United Church of Canada in particular. The introduction would also try to set some context for the Old Testament, dealing with the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and including suggestions for the integration of Old Testament texts in the whole of worship. Brueggemann and Cochrane would be primary resources for this kind of book. Brueggemann
because of the clarity of his position that the Old Testament can be at one and the same time the completely intact scripture of the Jewish people for whom there is no need for further biblical revelation and a major part of the scripture of Christians for whom Christ is revealed in both the older and the newer scriptural revelations. Cochrane would also be very helpful as a resource for this type of work because of her views on the lectionary. She maintains the importance of the lectionary to the worship life of the Christian church but also encourages us to understand the presuppositions that govern its formation and theology past and present.

The specific format of the book or resource would be like that of Cochrane's *The Pastor's Underground Guide to the Revised Common Lectionary* or Herbert O'Driscoll's *The Word Among Us: Reflections on the Readings of the Revised Common Lectionary*, with short paragraphs on each of the lectionary readings but with particular focus on the Old Testament ones. However, it would be unlike Cochrane's book in its specific approach to the Old Testament texts. Cochrane takes a particular tact with the lectionary texts, explaining their relationship to each other, what has been left out of particular texts and how they have been mis-interpreted. The book or resource for which I see a need would take what I call a less logistical, more positive, homiletic approach which is what O'Driscoll does in a very brief way. The book or resource would attempt to give possible meanings for the Old Testament texts in relationship to the other lectionary texts
for each week in the cycle of the church year. It is my hope that those meanings would contain integrity in terms of the historical origins of the texts, would be helpful in terms of their Christian interpretation, and would give some idea of how the texts have been used and interpreted in the life of the Church, in a very simplified version of what John Sawyer does with Isaiah in The Fifth Gospel. I hope that this would encourage preachers to use the Old Testament texts in ways which speak hope, contribute to the need for knowledge which is an important part of the worship experience for some folk, and give them the inspiring images they need to get through the week.

Another way to put this is to say that it is my hope that this thesis and its future implications will be helpful in making explicit God's relationship of love and justice with us as it is revealed in The United Church of Canada in the Old Testament, as it reveals to us the One who is "...a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:32, NRSV)

The final word goes to the preacher writing in his journal on the fourth and final week of the action in ministry..."So out of this I truly hope can begin a process of balance. Of the church and its writers producing resources to lift up OT preaching. To give the OT it's [sic] place [as] a scripture. Not the old superseded word of God, but the living word of a living God that calls to us with truth, justice
and hope. And if all I have learned is that, then it's a good beginning.” (Journal, Week 4)
A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES: HEARING AND PREACHING THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES IN A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

A Doctor of Ministry Thesis Proposal Submitted to the Doctor of Ministry Programme, Toronto School of Theology, The University of Toronto

St. James-Bond United Church, Toronto

Professor William H. Irwin CSB, Thesis Director

Mr. Doug Finley, Ministry Base Group Representative

The Rev. Leo Huard O.Carm, Collaborative Learning Group Representative

Third Draft, September 22, 1998
The Background and Context of this Applied Research Thesis

I am the full-time ordained minister of St. James-Bond United Church, Toronto. I have responsibility for Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care and the overall coordination of the ministry of the congregation for its own sake and for the sake of God’s world.

St. James-Bond is located beside one of Toronto’s largest Jewish communities and the congregation has much contact: both informal, day to day contact and formal study and dialogue contact with its Jewish sisters and brothers. A five week dialogue series in 1997 between Holy Blossom synagogue and St. James-Bond focused on Scripture; both Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament.

I am interested in Hebrew Scriptures because The United Church of Canada, as well as the wider Christian Church, shares these texts with the Jewish faith tradition and because Inter-Faith Dialogue is a major part of my ministry at St. James-Bond. My primary interest in Hebrew Scriptures, however, comes out of my own experience of them. I hear and feel God through the richness of the narrative, the vividness of the prophecy and the vitality of the characters in these texts. There is something mysterious, challenging and comforting in the knowledge that these statements of faith and divine/human relationship have been important to two faith traditions for so many years. Texts whose historical detail and context I find intellectually fascinating, texts whose language and imagery I find aesthetically moving, also speak profoundly to me of God’s love.

Today, Christians who want to move away from all appearance or suggestion of supersessionism, and who want to respect the sensitivities of people who see pejorative valuation in words like ‘old’ and ‘new’, are trying to find another way of referring to what we have traditionally called the “Old Testament”. “Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church-Jewish Relations Today”, The National Task Group on United Church-Jewish Relations, 8.

Supersessionism is defined in “Bearing Faithful Witness”, as the “Christian teaching that the church has replaced or superseded Israel in God’s plan of salvation;” 41.

This United Church study document also discusses in detail the advantages and disadvantages of each of the possibilities in terminology for the two parts of scripture in the Christian tradition. Well aware that there is much work still to be done in this area, well aware that choices in terminology are at this point, provisional, I choose to refer to the two parts of scripture as ‘Hebrew Scriptures’ and ‘New Testament’. These terms have the advantages of minimizing supersessionism and at the same time being fairly recognizable, though I am also well aware of their lack of symmetry.

I am aware that Islam also shares with Christianity and Judaism many faith stories. For this research project however, I limit my work to the two faith traditions about which I have some understanding and which share scriptures in what is to a great extent a verbatim structure.
and justice. This interest, experience and passion took me to Th.D. work in Hebrew Scriptures and then to continue in this area of study in the context of a D.Min. programme when my pastoral responsibility to St. James-Bond made Th.D. work unfeasible.

Before coming to St. James-Bond as minister, I spent ten years as a guest preacher, Bible study/conference leader and presenter. I primarily used Hebrew Scripture texts in all of these contexts because that was what I loved and knew best.

The reaction was startling and time after time, more chronologically senior members of whatever context I was working in would tell me how good it was to hear those stories that they had not heard since they were children. Time after time, younger members of whatever context I was working in would tell me how good it was to hear those Hebrew Scripture stories, because they had never heard them before. I was startled and so began to deliberately test this learning, continuing to push in the area of Hebrew Scriptures and listening more intentionally for the responses.

Statement of the Research Problem

Starting with my own experience of Hebrew Scriptures and remembering the responses when I have preached and talked about these texts, responses that these texts had not been heard for a long time or had never been heard at all, my research question is therefore specifically framed as follows:

“What is the experience of a suburban United Church preacher and his parishioners when the Hebrew Scriptures lectionary texts (year A) are preached during Epiphany?”

I have chosen preaching as a vehicle for the exploring of this question because in The United Church of Canada, preaching is one of the ways in which Hebrew Scriptures are heard, spoken and experienced. There is a Hebrew Scriptures text suggested for reading and preaching for each week of the church year in a format based on The Revised Common Lectionary. Hebrew Scriptures texts are also recommended in United Church resources for occasional services such as weddings, funerals and home communions.

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107 Pages 998-1012 of the new United Church Hymn and worship book, Voices United.

108 For example, the booklets published by The United Church of Canada Working Unit on Worship and Liturgy from 1984-1990. These booklets cover a wide variety of service types and
Bible Study is another vehicle by which Hebrew Scriptures may be heard, spoken and experienced in The United Church of Canada. A statement of The United Church of Canada, *The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture* reflects the variety of Biblical opportunities in the life of The United Church when it encourages ministerial leadership to the task of...: i) "...making the resources of biblical scholarship accessible to congregations, through sermons, Christian education programmes for persons of all ages, and other means as seem necessary;""109

For the purposes of managing this research, however, I will limit the study to preaching. James D. Smart, in the context of a discussion of Scripture and Hermeneutics, states that the primary channel of communication, and for most members the only channel, is the preaching that takes place in Sunday worship.110 Leander Keck makes a related point in his statement that, "When a professor of New Testament writes about biblical preaching he is not dabbling in someone else's discipline (that of the homiletician), not taking an imperious stand vis-a-vis the church. He is simply bringing one important aspect of his work to fruition where it counts most—or ought to."111

I have chosen Epiphany and the three Sundays which follow it, for the timing of this research study. Epiphany begins as the Gentile (non-Jewish) Magi encounter the one of whom they inquire, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?” (Matt. 2:2 NRSV) This research project begins as a Gentile Christian congregation encounters texts which were Scripture for that child, texts which were and are Scripture for the Jewish faith tradition, texts which were and are Scripture for the Christian faith tradition.

Theoretical Framework and Assumptions Involved in the Study

In terms of the biblical, pastoral and theological issues or themes implicated in my study, biblical issues play a key role. One of the primary biblical issues is that of canon. The United Church of Canada has and does officially hold up both

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all recommend the use of Hebrew Scriptures texts, with the exception of the booklet of baptismal rites which uses imagery from Hebrew Scriptures in the language of its prayers.


Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament as primary vehicles through which God is revealed, God’s word is proclaimed and God’s love is appropriated. I want to know how this is experienced in the hearing and preaching of Hebrew Scriptures in a United Church congregation.

The theological issues that bear on this study include supersessionism (as defined in footnote 114) and promise/fulfillment theology.112

Christology is also a theological issue that bears on this study. The United Church document, The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture speaks of Christology in the following way; "...the presence of God embodied by Jesus Christ is transmitted through the prism of the biblical witness. It beckons and challenges Christians into relationship with the living God attested to in the Bible. The Bible is our unique, primary source for our knowledge of God. In it we discover the tangible well-being - salvation or wholeness - people experience by being in touch with Jesus Christ, God-with-us. So, for Christians, the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the risen Christ are central."113

My Christology is also informed by such statements as the following; "We cannot point to any other salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God...We are well aware that these convictions and the ministry of witness stand in tension with what we have affirmed about God being present in and at work in people of other faiths; we appreciate this tension; we do not attempt to resolve it."114

In terms of my theology of pastoral ministry:

- I believe that God loves humanity and creation.
- I believe that the Bible, read for Christians through the experience of the Risen Christ, is the primary way in which that love is shown.
- I believe that the Bible makes God’s love and the ways in which that love issues in justice - visible, concrete and identifiable for the current global context.

112 The 1997 United Church Study document, "Bearing Faithful Witness", outlines promise and fulfillment theology in the following way; "The most prominent way of using Jewish Scripture texts within Christian writings involved a promise-and-fulfillment motif. This motif also came to be the primary one for characterizing the relationship between the testaments themselves. Christian writers claimed that the Jewish Scripture texts presented promises that Jesus and Christianity fulfilled." 7.

113 The United Church Publishing House, The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture, 1992, 66.

- I believe that for Christians and for the Christian church as a whole and in all its particular manifestations, the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament both speak vividly about God's love and justice.
- I believe that the early church, searching their scriptures, which correspond to what we call Hebrew Scriptures, found them to witness to Jesus Christ in ways that spoke to their experience of his resurrection and enabled them to proclaim that experience.

The Action in Ministry:

I will undertake my Action in Ministry during Epiphany 1999.

My action in ministry will take place within the broader rather than the narrower context of my ministry. It will occur in a United Church congregation other than my own. The congregation does not have the geographical, social and relationship proximity to the Jewish community as has St. James-Bond.

The action will take place at Westminster United Church, Whitby, Ontario as a four week process. The preacher and the congregation have some familiarity with the Hebrew Scriptures but the intentionality and intensive experience of engagement with such texts will be a new experience.

1. The preacher will preach four sermons, each one based on the particular Hebrew Scriptures lectionary text for Epiphany Sunday, the Baptism of Jesus Sunday and Epiphany Sundays 2 and 3. The lectionary passages will be those of the Revised Common Lectionary, as set out in the new United Church hymn book. The preacher will inform the congregation that he is going to base his sermons for the next four weeks on the Hebrew Scriptures lectionary texts and he will encourage feed-back on the experience from the congregation. He will inform them that this process is part of a colleague's Doctor of Ministry programme.

The preacher will provide me with a written sermon text after each Sunday worship service. He will also journal throughout the process of exegesis, writing and feed-back. Feed-back is defined as comments on the sermon and/or the texts, made to the preacher on the way out of the service, at the coffee hour, in phonecalls in response to the sermon or in informal remarks over the course of

115 There is an arbitrary quality to this statement that the sermons will be "based" on the Hebrew Scriptures. A decision must be made as to what constitutes "based". For the purposes of this action in ministry, and recognizing that there will be some variation week to week, I define the term "based" as meaning that approximately two/thirds to three/quarters of the biblical content of the sermon will be drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures.
the following week. This journal will therefore provide the data of his particular experience.

The preacher will be asked to spend approximately the same amount of time on sermon preparation, neither more nor less than he would spend on sermons based on other texts. (In order to minimize possible supersessionism, I will provide the preacher with two articles on the issue before the action in ministry begins.)

2. There will be a focus group made up of eight to ten members of the congregation, self-selecting but representative of age, gender, length of time in The United Church and length of time in that particular congregation. They will covenant to attend an initial meeting, to attend the worship services which are a part of the action in ministry, to fill in four one-page questionnaires and to attend a final meeting. The questionnaires will be pre-tested at St. James-Bond United Church in the fall of 1998.

In December, before the Action in Ministry begins, I will meet with the group for the purpose of clarifying process.

I will give to each participant four copies of a one-page questionnaire. Each questionnaire will be identical except for the dating and reference to the appropriate Hebrew Scripture passage, according to each week. The questions will be identical each week in order to provide a consistent framework by which the data relating to varied Scripture passages can be analyzed. The questionnaires will be in separate, sealed and dated envelopes - each one to be opened only on the appropriate week. Every participant will be asked to complete the appropriate questionnaire for weeks 1–4, within twenty-four hours of hearing the texts and hearing them preached. They will then mail them to me immediately in the stamped, self-addressed envelopes I have given them. The questionnaires will be anonymous, but each participant will be asked to self-select a code or symbol which they put on each one for the purpose of data codification.

Then in February, I will bring the group together for one two-hour session in which the participants can reflect on their experience in relationship with each other. This session will be audio-taped. An observer will also be present at this meeting, in order to record, in written notes, the subtleties of expression, emphasis and body language. The observer will be Sylvia Hamilton, a United Church diaconal minister who is skilled and experienced in the observing of group process. I will facilitate the session. The preacher will not be present for this session.
The Research Methodology Operative in the Study

Phenomenology is not just a research method but also a philosophy and an approach. In phenomenology, the researcher seeks a deeper and fuller meaning of the participants' experience of a particular phenomenon...Phenomenologists try to describe the experience as it is and describe it directly without the various causal explanations.116

Phenomenology is the study of experiences and the ways in which we put them together to develop a worldview.117

Researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations.118

The purpose of the preacher's journal will be to obtain some understanding of the preacher participant's experience as he exeges, writes and delivers and receives feed-back (as defined above) on sermons based on Hebrew Scriptures texts. The copies of the sermons will have a validation function for the researcher, showing their relationship to biblical preaching (as defined above).

Each participant will be asked to sign a consent form, which will guarantee to preserve as much as possible, the anonymity of the data they provide. The consent form will outline the expectations of their participation in the research process and which will make clear how the data collected will be used or destroyed in the completion of the Doctor of Ministry thesis.

My initial meeting with the parishioner participants will be for the purpose of clarifying the process. It is my expectation that thus introducing myself to the group will also serve the purpose of encouraging their questionnaire responses to be more related to my research question and less related to their relationship to their preaching minister.

The questionnaire will be designed to obtain some understanding of each of the parishioner participant's experience when Hebrew Scriptures texts are

116 Janice M. Morse and Peggy Anne Field, Qualitative Research Methods for Health Professionals. (Sage Publications 1995), 151-2.

117 Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, Designing Qualitative Research. (Sage Publications 1995), 82.

118 Robert C. Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen, Qualitative Research for Education. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc.), 31.
preaching texts during the season of Epiphany. The questionnaire will be clearly-worded, to help the parishioner participants understand that this process is a recording of their experience, a recording of their encounter with the texts as read and preached.

The focus group will be a further data gathering instrument, an opportunity to go deeper into the experience of the parishioner participants as they listen and respond to each other’s experience.

The data collected by the observer will be of a somewhat different nature to the written and audio-recorded data and will thus offer a different angle of understanding into the experience of the parishioner participants.

All data collected will be coded so as to protect, as much as is possible, the anonymity of the participants and the congregation. The data provided by the minister’s experience will be kept and analyzed separately from that of the congregation, so as to provide different perspectives into the research question, but I expect the convergence points between those two sets of data to be most fruitful. The data collected by the observer will also be kept separate from the other two streams, but will be compared and contrasted to that provided by the participants.

By combining several lines of sight, researchers obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts; and a means of verifying many of these elements. The use of multiple lines of sight is frequently called triangulation.119

In speaking specifically of data analysis, Marshall and Rossman say that “Analytic procedures fall into five modes: organizing the data; generating categories, themes, and patterns; testing the emergent hypotheses against the data; searching for alternative explanations of the data; and writing the report. Each phase of data analysis entails data reduction as the reams of collected data are brought into manageable chunks, and interpretation as the researcher brings meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants in the study.”120

Following this model of data analysis, I intend in organizing the data, to read through it thoroughly and repeatedly until I am very familiar with it. Moving on then to the phase of generating categories, Berg is helpful in listing seven major elements in written messages which can be counted in content analysis. Since


120 Marshall, 113.
my primary data-gathering tool is a written questionnaire, this list is most appropriate, though not all of the seven elements of words, themes, characters, paragraphs, items, concepts and semantics will be equally useful.121

I will then move on to the process of evaluating the hypotheses that appear as the patterns between the categories become apparent, demonstrating as much as possible the plausibility of my hypotheses and theories. The writing of the report, as in any qualitative research study, will involve interpretation. Feldman calls this, ...a process of relating one's interpretations to the questions one is trying to answer and to existing theories." \(^{122}\)

Risks and Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of the study is that those involved in the action in ministry are self-selecting. They enter into the event with a predisposition to studying scripture, and, as do the participants in inter-faith dialogue, a certain a priori openness to engagement and to an examination of their faith and their assumptions.

There are also risks in this study, as in any study. It is possible that the participants, either preacher or parishioners, may find the process too structured. In the context of a worship experience, it might feel artificial or too analytical. It might also be unsettling in terms of people's faith stance and theology. The first-mentioned risk is probably unavoidable in most research projects, working as one is, with the qualitative research methodology. The second-mentioned risk indicates two factors to be considered in the design of the study. One is to watch for places where pastoral care is necessary and to ensure it is provided. For the parishioner/participants, pastoral care would be provided by the preacher in his role as pastoral minister to that congregation. For the preacher, I would provide pastoral care. The other factor, is to know that a possible disruption of the action in ministry would still provide significant insight and data since the question to be answered centres around people’s experience.

Finally, it is possible that the parishioners/participants and or the preacher will not find the Hebrew Scriptures texts to be helpful, meaningful or relevant to their lives and faith experiences.

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121 Berg, 181-2.

The Contributions of the Study

The specific contributions of the study, will be dependant on its outcome, however, based on the questionnaire, a number of possibilities may be reasonably expected. It may be discovered that the Hebrew Scriptures texts which are heard and preached are understandable, relevant and meaningful to the lives of both preacher and parishioners. It may also be found that the texts are experienced as understandable but not relevant or meaningful, or that neither preacher nor parishioners found the Hebrew Scriptures texts to be understandable. It might also be discovered that the experiences of the preacher and the parishioners are very different from each other and/or that their experience varies greatly from one scriptural text to another.

The contribution from any of these possible outcomes will be a deeper, fuller understanding of how certain Hebrew Scriptures are heard and experienced by a preacher and a congregation, therefore informing, either by positive or negative data my own preaching of Hebrew Scriptures texts.

While knowing that the results obtained from this study and from the analysis of the data collected through it, will be particular to the preacher and parishioners involved, I believe that the process will yield valuable insights and learnings for preachers, parishioners and the wider United Church of Canada around our understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures in our Christian faith context.

I hope to learn from both the preacher’s and the parishioners’ experiences some specific ideas which will translate into concrete strategies for ministers, concrete strategies which will encourage and enable them to preach from the Hebrew Scriptures with more confidence, ability, frequency and enthusiasm. The result of these learnings could translate, at a future date, into preaching workshops.

This particular study focusses on the Hebrew Scriptures through the vehicle of preaching. Preaching is one of the ways in which Scripture is experienced in congregational settings in The United Church of Canada. The choice was made to limit the study to that vehicle for the sake of what is possible in such an undertaking. In congregational life, however, Scripture is also experienced in such ways as Bible study, liturgy and pastoral visiting, all of which may be interconnected to preaching. It is therefore, my hope that the contributions of this study will have some relevance for those aspects of congregational life as well: helping, through workshops or study documents, to increase the confidence, ability, frequency and enthusiasm with which Hebrew Scriptures are used in Bible study, liturgy and pastoral visiting.
As I am, for the next five years, chairing The United Church of Canada's national Steering Group for the document “Bearing Faithful Witness - United Church Jewish Relations Today”, I expect this study to contribute to that process as well. Both processes are based on Scripture, both are engaged theologically in issues such as supersessionism, and promise/fulfillment and both processes engage the experience of preachers and parishioners. The learnings from this doctoral study will be enlightening and will provide strategic directions as the Steering Group shepherds the document through the levels of The United Church of Canada.
Questionnaire

PLEASE FILL THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IN WITHIN 24 HOURS OF THE WORSHIP SERVICE AND MAIL IT TO ME IN THE SELF-ADDRESSED, STAMPED ENVELOPE WHICH IS INCLUDED.

Questions:

1. What words or phrases first occur to you when you think of today's Old Testament passage? (choose at least three)

2. Which of these words or phrases is the most important to you and why?

3(a). In your opinion, what is today's passage about? (b). What mood, theme or message stands out for you?

4. What will this passage mean to your day to day life over the course of the next week?

5. Would you want to hear this passage preached again? Why or why not?

6. Is there anything else you want to say about your experience? (Please use the other side of this page)

Identification Code:
Consent Form for parishioners

I, Karen Hamilton, am a Candidate for the Doctor of Ministry Degree at Toronto School of Theology, The University of Toronto. The content of my research deals with the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures in The United Church of Canada: how they are heard and preached in Sunday morning worship services.

More specifically, I am currently engaged in the Action in Ministry part of the D.Min. programme. The purpose of the Action in Ministry is to bring the researcher’s assumptions, theory and theology into a lived experience of pastoral ministry.

My particular Action in Ministry will look at the effect and impact, on preacher and parishioners, of preaching the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures lectionary texts.

As a participant in this research, your participation is voluntary and, in so far as is possible, completely anonymous. Your identity will be protected from everyone, except me the researcher, by a particular and detailed system of coding the data collected from this project. Although, it is important to the outcome of my research that the participants stay with the project in its entirety, you may drop out of the process at any time, if the need arises. You are also free to not answer any particular question.

As a parishioner, involved in this Action in Ministry, you will be asked to complete four - one page questionnaires. One for each week of the research project. These questionnaires will be mailed to me, within twenty-four hours of the sermon to which they pertain and the data thus collected will be codified in such a way as to keep it confidential. You will be asked to meet with me and the other participants one evening before the Action in Ministry begins, for the purpose of clarifying the process.

Finally, you will also be asked to be part of a one evening focus group: a group of the other participant parishioners specifically gathered together, at a time of mutual convenience, to share your experience, thoughts, reactions and insights about the Action in Ministry. The discussion of the focus group will be audio-recorded and maintained in confidentiality. Any comments or discussion taken from it and incorporated in my thesis will be anonymous. An observer, bound to the confidentiality of our covenant, will be present at the focus group, for the purpose of providing back-up, written support to the audio-recording. That observer will remit to me all written notes and observations and will have no further access to the data collected.

You and your minister will not have access to each other’s raw data. Nothing in the thesis, thus developed, will identify the congregation involved in this project.
and upon acceptance of my thesis for the degree of Doctor of Ministry, all notes, data, transcripts, and recordings will be destroyed. It is understood that a completed and accepted thesis is a public document, housed for example, in the library of Toronto School of Theology.

I, the undersigned, understand the details of the above consent form. I agree to be a part of the Action in Ministry of The Rev. Karen Hamilton under the terms outlined in this document.

Participant’s Name: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Researcher’s Name: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________
Consent Form for preacher

I, Karen Hamilton, am a Candidate for the Doctor of Ministry Degree at Toronto School of Theology, The University of Toronto. The content of my research deals with the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures in The United Church of Canada: how they are heard and preached in Sunday morning worship services.

More specifically, I am currently engaged in the Action in Ministry part of the D.Min. programme. The purpose of the Action in Ministry is to bring the researcher’s assumptions, theory and theology into a lived experience of pastoral ministry. My particular Action in Ministry will look at the effect and impact, on preacher and parishioners, of preaching the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures lectionary texts.

As a participant in this research, your participation is voluntary.

As a preacher, involved in this Action in Ministry, you will be asked to keep a journal of your experience, thoughts, reactions, and insights as the research proceeds. Upon completion of the Action in Ministry, I will collect the journal. The data in it will be coded. For validation purposes, you will also be asked to provide me with a copy of each of the four sermons you preach during the course of this research. You and your parishioners will not have access to each other’s raw data.

Nothing in the thesis, thus developed, will identify the congregation or preacher involved in this project. Upon acceptance of my thesis for the degree of Doctor of Ministry, all notes, data, transcripts and recordings will be destroyed. It is understood that a completed and accepted thesis is a public document, housed for example, in the library of Toronto School of Theology.

I, the undersigned, understand the details of the above covenant. I agree to be a part of the Action in Ministry of The Rev. Karen Hamilton under the terms outlined in this document.

Preacher’s Name: Date: 

Researcher’s Name: Date:
Thesis Bibliography


*Catechism*. Toronto: The Board of Evangelism and Social Service, The United Church of Canada, 1944.


Clements, R.E. *One Hundred Years of Old Testament Interpretation*.


Lewis, C.S. *The Great Divorce*. Fount, 1946


Documents:


"Reconciling and Making New: Who is Jesus for the world today?", The Committee on Theology and Faith, The United Church of Canada, 1997.