Our Lips Are Not Our Own:
Research into Guidelines for Preaching Scripture as the Church’s Book

By

Annette Geoffrion Brownlee

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Wycliffe College, Toronto School of Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry awarded by Wycliffe College and the University of Toronto.

© Copyright by Annette G. Brownlee 2013
Our Lips Are Not Our Own: 
Research into Guidelines for Preaching Scripture as the Church’s Book 

Annette Geoffrion Brownlee 
Doctor of Ministry 
Wycliffe College and the University of Toronto 
2013 

Abstract 

This thesis is an investigation into an approach to preaching which attempts to hold together a theological interpretation of scripture and homiletical theory. In it the author claims that the church is the natural habitat for hearing God’s Word and is the soil in which our particular social locations are rooted. She argues that an embrace of the textually mediated world of scripture and the incommensurability of our neighbor offers a way forward for preaching in a post-modern world. 

The author presents an argument for claiming the church as the primary location for hearing God’s address in the context of various social locations for the purpose of preaching. She locates her approach within an Anglican ecclesiology and the work of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, reviewing six homileticians who, to varying degrees, work out of that school: Mark Ellingsen, Richard Eslinger, Charles L. Campbell, William Shepherd Jr., David J. Lose, and Tom Bridenthal. She presents David Yeago’s doctrine of inspiration as a response to those who claim that a cultural-linguist approach to preaching mutes God’s voice. Finally, she presents data from a group of Anglican clergy who tested out the homiletic method she had devised, The Six Questions of the Sermons, which is modeled after Paul Scott Wilson’s The Four Pages of the Sermon.
For Amie, with my gratitude and affection.

Hear this, all you peoples;
Harken, all you who dwell in the world,
You of high degree and low, rich and poor together (Psalm 49:1)
Acknowledgements

As I complete this project I give thanks for the congregations I have been bound to over my adult life. They have listened to scripture with me and received my preaching with charity and expectation: St. Paul’s East Cleveland; St. Luke’s, Cleveland; Grace, Newington, Connecticut; Emmanuel, Stamford, Connecticut; Ascension, Pueblo, Colorado; and St. Paul’s L’Amoreaux, Scarborough, Ontario. I also give thanks for the community of Wycliffe College. For Dr. George Sumner, Principal who asked me to take on this project. For the students with whom I read classic sermons and who have encouraged me in this project. For the faculty who welcomed me as a peer. For my colleagues in Kingston, who were willing to put themselves into my hands for six weeks. For Chris Dow, note taker, travel companion, and fellow rock hound. For my advisor, Dr. Dorcas Gordon, and her timely encouragement. And, finally I give thanks for my family, Ephraim, Hannah and Isaac, with whom I break daily bread and reach out for living bread.
# Table of Contents

## Introduction
- The Ecclesial Location of Preaching: Bound to God’s Word and God’s People  
  1
- The New Homiletic  
  8
- The Eventful Word and Characteristics of Preaching  
  11
- A Cultural-Linguistic Home and the Development of a Research Project  
  15
- My Research Project  
  18

## Chapter One
- A Cultural-Linguistic Approach to Preaching and its Critics  
  22
  - A Cultural-Linguistic Understanding of the Church  
    23
  - Questions of Correlation in Preaching  
    24
  - Post-Liberal Theology  
    26
  - Reading Scripture as the Church’s Book: A Communal Hermeneutic  
    30
  - An Intratextual Reading and the Practices of the Church  
    34
  - Six Post-Liberal Homileticians  
    36
  - Critiques of Post-Liberal Homiletics  
    48
  - A Response to the Critique of a Post-Liberal Homiletic  
    53

## Chapter Two
- The Church, Spirit and the Doctrine of Inspiration  
  62
  - The Theological Foundation of Yeago’s Renewed Doctrine of Inspiration  
    64
  - Implications for a Cultural-linguistic Homiletic  
    69
  - Interpretative Consequences: A Faithful Reading of Scripture  
    72
  - An Anglican Understanding of the Church and the Spirit: Believing is Belonging  
    80
  - Richard Hooker and the Book of Common Prayer  
    81
  - The Privileged Place of the Visible Church  
    83
  - The Fallible and Corrupt Church  
    86
  - The Spirit’s Use of Scripture in the Church  
    88
  - An Anglican Hermeneutic and Homiletic  
    89
Chapter Three

The Church as a Habitat for Habitat for Hearing Jesus .......................................................... 93

We are All Hearers of God’s Word ......................................................................................... 98

The Church’s Distinctive Knowledge for Hearing Jesus ...................................................... 107

Our identity Within Christ’s Embrace ................................................................................... 122

Areas of Homiletic Concern ................................................................................................. 124

Chapter Four

From Theory to Practice ......................................................................................................... 139

Collaborative Sermon Preparation ......................................................................................... 142

An Overview of the Six Weeks of Collaborative Preparation .............................................. 145

Evaluation of the Research Project ....................................................................................... 161

A Response to Constructive Comments on the Identity of Jesus Christ ......................... 169

Final Observations ................................................................................................................ 174

Conclusion

Love as the Hermeneutical Criterion ..................................................................................... 177

Appendices

Appendix I Preaching Guidelines for Research Project, May, 2011 .......................... 183

Appendix II Preaching Guidelines for Research Project, July 2011 .......................... 188

Appendix III Research-in-Action Project Methodology .................................................... 194

Appendix IV Questions used in Evaluation of Research Project .................................. 197

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................. 200
INTRODUCTION

THE ECCLESIAL LOCATION OF PREACHING:
BOUND TO GOD’S WORD AND GOD’S PEOPLE.

*I am a story teller by nature and use lots of stories in my preaching and yet I still have an uneasy feeling sometimes about the connection between the story and the scripture.*

—A Research Participant

In the fall of 2008 I was a student in Dr. David Jacobsen’s advanced degree course at Knox College, *Homiletical Options.* The course was a survey of homiletical theory, beginning with the New Homiletic, and the 1958 publication of *Design for Preaching* by H. Grady Davis through the present time. By 1975 the New Homiletic, with its turn to the subject and emphasis on the narrative form of scripture and the universal nature of experience, had redefined the form of the sermon, the authority and role of the preacher, and the place of scripture. I had been a preacher and pastor for over twenty years but had never read this literature. As I read and analyzed this literature along with my classmates and Dr. Jacobsen, I began to appreciate the multivalent relationship between homiletic theory, theology, and other disciplines. I also found that as I cut my teeth on homiletic theory I sharpened my own theological, ecclesial, and homiletical commitments. This, in turn, led directly to the area of research for my thesis and the argument I set out here for a post-liberal turn to the listener and the church as the location for hearing God’s voice. I am enormously grateful for this fine class. In this introduction I trace the formation of my interest in trying to develop a cultural-linguistic approach to preaching and an argument for a post-liberal turn to the listener through the intersection of my reading of homiletic theory and theology with my experience of parish ministry, preaching, and now working in a seminary.
I have been an Anglican priest, pastor and preacher for almost 25 years in a variety of parish settings: in inner city Cleveland, a blue collar neighborhood in Stamford, Connecticut, an economically diverse church in southern Colorado and an immigrant congregation in Scarborough, Ontario. In each parish I have bound myself to God’s people and God’s word through the quotidian nature of ministry. It is the specific ecclesial setting of the local church, as I describe below, which has shaped me.

Richard Lischer, in *The Preacher King*, speaks of the place of the congregation in Christianity for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The congregations I have served have taught me the same lesson that Ebenezer taught King. Lischer writes:

Ebenezer had taught King that the basic unit of Christianity in the world is the congregation…Perhaps he understood that Christianity was never meant to work in the lecture hall or at the level of abstract principles but, rather, among a community that is joined by race, family, neighborhood, and economics, but whose truest identity transcends all of these. The power of Jesus is in the church. The congregation is the laboratory for the love commanded by God and the instrument of his justice. The black preacher knows that if it isn’t happening here, it isn’t happening.¹

As a parish pastor I have learned that there is a vital relationship between what goes on in the pulpit and in the rest of the life of the parish. This organic relationship involves the proclamation of the Word, in sermon, sacrament and the practices of the church, the individual listeners in their many contexts and backgrounds, and the building up of a corporate sense of identity in the church as a visible witness in the world to the new life given to all in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1-3). In the Body of Christ I have learned that one cannot atomize the hospital room, the pulpit, the local jail, the neighborhood and the mission trip or field any more than the eye can say to the hand I have no need of you.

I was raised in and have always served in the Anglican church, with its rhythm of liturgies, hymns, and colors; its seasons of silence and celebration; and its lectionary readings based on the cycle of the liturgical year, which winds around and is given shape and voice by the life of Jesus Christ given in scripture. Thus, ecclesial location is not only a web of relationships and church practices, it is also a hermeneutic. This hermeneutic is not a specific hermeneutic or method of reading scripture, such as might shape a Lutheran, but the setting forth of a lens through which to read scripture in the church, based on its telos, Jesus Christ, and its apostolic handing on through the apostles and communion of saints.

I brought to my reading of homiletical theory a commitment to the church as the natural habitat for the hearing, proclaiming and living of scripture. I brought my commitment to scripture as God’s address to the church (Rev. 3:22) which has a specific identify, vocation and mission given by the One who addresses it and whose Word creates it. Such a claim has implications for the role of the preacher within the community of the church. She is set apart for a specific ministry, but like all of God’s people the preacher is first and last a hearer of scripture. Other coursework and my reading of St. Augustine, Karl Barth, George Lindbeck, Hans Frei and others further refined these commitments. In various ways they are all writing about the church as the location for knowing the triune God through the storied world of scripture. I was eager to study homiletic theory that took as its starting point the life, activity and organization of
the Christian community as the fundamental form of the interpretation of the Christian scriptures.\(^2\)

I claim this starting point at a time in the life of the larger church, and particularly in the Anglican Communion, when both the role of scripture and the nature of many of the church’s practices are a source of contention, disagreement and division. The theology of the sacrament of marriage, ordination, the relationship between baptism and Eucharist, the role of scripture and the understanding of unity in the church are all contested in the Anglican Communion at this time.\(^3\) Though this is not a new historical dispute, it can lead to an erosion of confidence in the church and scripture--first-order language and practices--as primary vessels of the Spirit’s saving work in the world.\(^4\) Does an attempt to develop an approach to preaching which is based on the first order language and practices of the church seem untimely or nostalgic? Perhaps. But I do so in the hope that any veiling of scripture is not a reason to turn away from it but is possibly part of a “divine pedagogy” which thrusts us back on the narrow way of Jesus Christ.\(^5\) R.R. Reno describes such pedagogy:

> We should not try to ignore or correct or deny the spiritual dryness of the *concreta Christiana*. The difficulties are quite real…But precisely as such, the difficulties and impediments are constitutive of the very saving power of Jesus Christ. The impotence we perceive is part of the potency of new life that is promised, for it forces us to submit ourselves to a lifetime of obedient searching


\(^4\) Beginning with the Reformation the disagreements between Catholics and Protestants over the relationship between Church and scripture led to an erosion of confidence in both. The perspicuity of scripture and the teaching role of the Church became places of competing claims and discord. For a fuller historical investigation of this erosion, see Radner, “The Absence of the Comforter: Scripture and the Divided Church”, in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

\(^5\) For a discussion of Augustine’s understanding of a divine pedagogy see Paul Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).
in the very *concreta Christiana* we might so quickly abandon as inauspicious and lifeless. The weakness forces us to look again rather than to look elsewhere.⁶

In the face of the erosion of confidence in *concreta Christiana* I brought to my reading of homiletic theory a commitment to the life, activity and organization of the Christian community as the fundamental form of the interpretation of the Christian scriptures even in their current weakness. Such weakness, as a part of the new life we are promised in Christ, as R.R. Reno has eloquently stated, calls us to look again, attentively and expectantly, rather than looking elsewhere.

In *Captive to the Word*, Miroslav Volf argues that the dangers of abandoning scripture are far worse than the difficulties of knowing how to read it today. He writes of the resurgence in the last two decades of a theological reading of Scripture, by both biblical scholars and systematic theologians. “The return of both to a theological reading of the scriptural texts—is the most significant theological development in the last two decades.”⁷ He places the importance of this resurgence in light of the eclipse of the theologian’s role in shaping public life, how *it is* life in lived in the broader society in the light of God’s purposes for the world. “To the extent that theology is able to shape broader society at all, it will be able to do so largely to the degree that it is able to shape the life of the Christian communities.”⁸ Richard Lischer noted that Ebenezer Baptist taught the black preacher and King that if love wasn’t happening in the location congregation, “it isn’t happening.”⁹ In a similar vein, Volf acknowledges that, in western

---

⁶ Russell Reno, *In the Ruins of the Church*: Sustaining Faith in a Diminished Age (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), 144.
⁸ Ibid., 10.
⁹ Lischer, *The Preacher King*, 79.
societies which are no longer Christian, if it theology isn’t shaping the location 
congregation, it isn’t happening in the larger culture.

Volf lists many of the signs of this resurgence of a theological reading of 
scripture, from dictionaries and commentaries to interfaith encounters, and from working 
groups to newly organized journals on theological interpretation of scripture. My 
project is an attempt to add to his list homiletical methods and conversations, that is, to 
begin to ask the question, what does a theological reading of scripture sound like in the 
pulpit? This question is rightly asked in the context of the purpose of local Christian 
communities in God’s economy of salvation. Volf and other theologians suggest that, at 
this time local Christian communities are a primary place of public witness to the Gospel 
and the context for the interpretation of scripture. This emphasis on the ecclesial 
location of the interpretation of scripture and the role of local congregations raises 
questions of individual and corporate identity, formation and discipleship.

---

10 Ibid., 13–14.
11 Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (Notre 
Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); Stephen Fowl, Engaging Scripture: A Model for 
Theological Interpretation (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); Ephraim Radner, Hope Among the 
Fragments: The Broken Church and Its Engagement of Scripture (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004); 
Reno, In the Ruins of the Church; James Buckley, Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the 
Practices of the Church (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001); Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, 
“Learning To Read the Bible Again,” Christian Century (April 20, 2004): 23–24; Angus Paddison, 
Scripture: A Very Theological Proposal (London: New York: T & T Clark, 2009); Michael Root, Sharper 
Than a Two-Edged Sword: Preaching, Teaching, and Living the Bible (Grand Rapids: William B. 
Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008); Reinhard Hütter, Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice (Grand 
Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000) and Volf, Captive to the Word.
Chaplain, Wycliffe College

I also brought to my reading of homiletic theory my new ministry setting at Wycliffe College, where in 2008 I began to serve as Chaplain. Wycliffe is an evangelical-Anglican Seminary, one of the seven member colleges of the Toronto School of Theology on the University of Toronto campus. Wycliffe prepares students for ordained, academic and multiple lay ministries. In fall, 2010, Wycliffe enrolled 270 students, from 19 countries and 40 denominations, whose median age is under 30. Currently the students are about 50% Anglican and 50% other denominations. This denominational soup, while maintaining its Anglican heritage and worship, is united by the commitment to the enduring Word of God and the inheritance of the reformed tradition. All would confess, in some way or the other, that scripture is God’s enduring and living Word.

As I began to listen to student preachers in Wycliffe’s Founder’s Chapel, and helped students with their preaching I discovered that they often seemed unsure of what to do with their commitment to the authority of scripture. They seemed unsure of how to read scripture, the place of historical-criticism in their interpretation of it, and how to proclaim it. I observed that in sermons they frequently defaulted to pietism, moral exhortation, and personal experience. How could I help them? As I settled into my

---

12 I began this position in January 2008. I serve as Chaplain, responsible for pastoral care, the liturgical life of and student preaching in Chapel. In the fall of 2011 I also began to teach a required second year M.Div. pastoral theology course, Theological Integration.

13 One student, David Ney, summed up how this problem in manifested in preaching. Here is a portion of his e-mail, from March 31, 2010, used with his permission. The problem with history is that Lessing’s "ugly, wide, ditch" must be bridged. And the way (even conservative evangelical) Christian preachers bridge it is to follow the course of liberal Protestantism by finding some ethical principle in the original historical context and apply it to the contemporary context. This, certainly, is my experience. One of the important events that led to my interest in the Church Fathers and my pursuit of graduate studies at Wycliffe was a sermon I once preached on Isaiah. I did my work, my historical critical work, as I had been trained to do. Found some key words, researched them. I looked at the historical context. Found the text
new ministry setting at Wycliffe I added to the ecclesial lens a pedagogical lens through which I read homiletic theory. The question I brought to my studies became not only how might my study strengthen my own preaching but how might it also help to strengthen the preaching of Wycliffe students and other clergy who are committed to scripture as God’s address to the church? Thus, in Dr. Jacobsen’s class I read homiletic theory through the multifaceted lens of my contexts of ministry: ecclesial, congregational, Anglican, and pedagogical.

The New Homiletic

In the New Homiletic, Craddock, Rice and the others were part of a larger time of creative exploration in liturgy etc. in the church. They were seeking to revitalize the preaching ministry of the church by rescuing it from its long-standing bondage to an Aristotelian frame of reference and its more recent captivity to the world behind the text. They turned to the narrative form of scripture and the narrative quality of experience and in so doing set about evaluating and redefining the form of the sermon, the place of the listener, and the authority and role of the preacher. In 1971 Fred Craddock, building on Grady’s work, published As One Without Authority. The title alone speaks to a radical rethinking of the role of the preacher, but within the field of homiletics Craddock’s book

 wasn't about Christ but about Cyrus, or someone else. What was left for me to do was to offer some words of moral application, an aphorism perhaps. But I stepped back and said, “Golly! I might as well have been interpreting a passage from Josephus’ Jewish War, or any other historical document for that matter.” Certainly, wonderful principles might be garnered about respect for authority or some other topic from an historical-critical reading of the Jewish War. The question however is this: what makes scripture different? How can we read it in order to preach not just good advice but good news? Oprah is very good at giving good advice.

is considered to have “dropped a bombshell on the homiletical world” for far more than its title. Richard Eslinger calls it a Copernican revolution in preaching.\textsuperscript{15}

This homiletical bombshell changed the basic pattern of preaching in North America and dominated the preaching literature for thirty years. That we would not think of preaching the Johnannine epistles in the same way we preach on John’s Gospel is due to the creative work of the new hermeneutic and the new homiletic. Today their emphasis on the subject remains, but in the intervening years it has taken two distinct directions.

The first is in the turn to subjects in all their rich contextual variety. The assumption that all the hearers in the pew were the same no longer held. Ronald Allen’s recent book, *Preaching and the Other: Studies in Postmodern Insights*, examines the homiletical implications of the complexities of social location, diversity and boundaries in a post-modern world.\textsuperscript{16} Lucy Atkinson Rose and John McClure, for example, have explored methods of preaching where the preacher and congregation are in a partnership.\textsuperscript{17} Others, such as Justo L. and Catherine G. Gonzalez, wrote about preaching out of a commitment to a Latin American liberation theology.\textsuperscript{18} Feminists, such as Christine Smith, have written about preaching from feminist perspective.\textsuperscript{19} Smith, Charles Campbell, Walter J. Burghardt and others have written about preaching through the lens of social justice.\textsuperscript{20}

William MacClain and Henry Mitchell wrote about characteristics of African-American

\begin{enumerate}
\item Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 93.
\end{enumerate}
preaching. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale was one of the first to write about the need to exegete one’s congregation along with the biblical text.

A second outgrowth of the New Homiletic comes from homileticians who, without negating the many contributions the New Homiletic, began to question the limits of narrative preaching, the narrative quality of experience and whether preaching as an event is too individualistic. By the mid-1990’s a few homileticians began a call to change the subject of preaching away from the listener and back to God. Paul Scott Wilson of Emmanuel College, Toronto School of Theology, was an early voice. William Willimon called for preaching that lives under the text and the world it renders. That world, he writes, exists not only in the imagination but in the church as it gathers, breaks bread and drinks wine. Others wrote about preaching doctrine for a new century. They raised important questions of the role of the Church. Thomas Long, in *Preaching from*

---


Memory to Hope, declares that the trusted structures of narrative preaching have come unravelled and that American preaching is in a time of upheaval.27

It is within the homiletical literature of Paul Scott Wilson, Richard Lischer, Charles Campbell, and Michael Pasquarello, that I found a homiletical home. I will loosely categorize these homileticians as post-liberal in that all to some degree take into account the claim that “language is what permits and generates thought.”28

Before I move onto the homiletical and theological literature that has served as the foundation for my own work, let me briefly outline key characteristics of the New Homiletic and my response to them which have played a role in shaping my own developing theory. They are: the sermon as event, the marriage of scriptural and sermon form, and the preacher’s experience as central to the communication of the Gospel.

The Eventful Word and Characteristics of Preaching

These characteristics of narrative preaching came out of what Craddock called a shift in the starting point for homiletics. Craddock began his book, As One Without Authority, during a sabbatical year in 1968-69 in Tubingen at the Institute for Hermeneutics where a Copernican revolution in hermeneutics was underway.29

Craddock wrote, “All consideration of the structure, unity, movement, use of the text,

---

28 Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, 93 Wilson does not use post-modern as one of the categories per se in which he describes homileticians. He uses it as an further description of various schools of theological preaching, such as law gospel.
29 James Kay, Preaching and Theology (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 78.
etc., must wait upon the prior consideration of what words are and what they do.”

With that he began to develop a method of preaching based on the new hermeneutics’ word-event theology, what he calls the theology of speaking, coming out of Gerhard Ebleling’s work on Heidegger’s ontology of language. In addition to this updated theology of the word as event, Craddock drew from the growing interest in the Bible’s literary forms, a Kantian turn to the subject, and the narrative quality of human experience. These led to a general consensus within the New Homiletic that the goal of the sermon form is to recreate the movement and structure of story. Paul Scott Wilson, in *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, points to the publication in 1983 of *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture* by Don Wardlaw as cementing the relationship between sermon form and scripture begun by the New Homiletic. He quotes the back cover of Wardlaw’s book, “preaching ought to be biblical not only in theological content but in form and style.” By marrying the form of the sermon and the literary form of the scripture, Craddock and others sought to recreate in the sermon the experience of the text for the listener.

Here is the beginning of the Copernican shift in homiletics and theology. Craddock and others assumed an ecclesial and confessional location, biblical literacy, and perhaps because of decades of positivist preaching, that interpretation and application were tasks parishioners could complete on their own. Craddock’s understanding of preaching, its purpose, form and place in the church was based on language studies and

---

31 Kay, *Preaching and Theology*, 79.
literary form; the ecclesial location of scripture was no longer a primary hermeneutical lens. As Paul Scott-Wilson has argued, questions of theology, church and the interpretation of scripture were not central.\textsuperscript{34}

This focus on the single sermon as transformative event shifted the focus away from the church’s cumulative and quotidian proclamation. I knew from years of preaching, even on the best Sundays, that the New Homiletic hung far too much on any one sermon, and, albeit unwittingly, ignored the formative role of preaching over time within a community, isolating the sermon from its place as part of a larger tapestry of the practices of the church and the preacher’s relationship with parishioners. In addition, Craddock’s word-event homiletic method made me realize that I was interested in homiletic theory that asked not only what the words of scripture did but what God was doing with those words. This realization led me try to articulate a doctrine of inspiration that did not negate the contributions of the new hermeneutic and literary studies. I was to find such a doctrine in David Yeago’s article, “The Spirit, the Church, and the scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited.”\textsuperscript{35}

A second characteristic of New Homiletic preaching is the intentional marriage of the form of the scripture passage and the form of the sermon. Sermon methods coming out of this period, (such as Lowry’s loop), were based on this goal of recreating the experience of the text in the sermon.\textsuperscript{36} In his work Paul Scott Wilson continues the

\textsuperscript{34} Wilson, \textit{Preaching and Homiletic Theory}, 39, 54-5,74.
\textsuperscript{35} In Buckley, \textit{Knowing the Triune God}, 49–93.
\textsuperscript{36} See Lowry, \textit{The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form}. 
emphasis on sermon form but marries it to the form of a particular theological interpretation, scripture as law and gospel, rather than the form of the scripture.  

This conversation about the relationship of the form of scripture to the form of the sermon led me to ask, what sermon form best assists in the hearing of scripture in its ecclesial setting? I was to find models of sermons which emphasized the hearing of scripture among the sermons of St. Augustine’s, who, in many ways, employs an inductive approach, akin to Fred Craddock and others.

Finally, I realized that in the New Homiletic, coupled with the emphasis on the narrative quality of experience and the eventfulness of the Word, the role of the preacher was being redefined. The new homileticans, in response to an era of positivist sermons, deemphasized the need for interpretation, exhortation or exposition of the gospel narrative. The preacher’s task is to ‘deliver’ the eventful experience of the Word, either in the replicating of the experience of the form of the scripture in the form of her sermon or in the delivery of her own experience, or the experience in a story, of film or play. Because the New Homiletic is based on the universal nature of the narrative quality of experience, the preacher could confidently and best serve the Gospel with her own story and experience-- what she is here and now, that points beyond what we are here and now. The preacher’s authority rested in her humanity.

The New Homileticans had confidence in the listener’s ability to know what to do with the experience delivered in the sermon and their ability to connect it with the

38 See the fifth chapter in the *Preaching the Story, examples of Charles Rice’s sermons*. They are story sermons, based on biblical texts, but taking their story-lines from a poem, a play, two novels, and a movie. He simply tells the story in some of them, following his own dictum: Contemporary literature becomes its own application.
39 See Rice, “The Preacher as Storyteller.”
40 Ibid, 33.
scripture read before the sermon. Forty years later, in a church that is far more biblically illiterate, I do not share their confidence. I also know that as a white, Western, educated woman, wife and mother my experience is far from universal. Their emphasis on the preacher’s humanity, however, is not something I wanted to cast aside. I wondered, what is the relationship between the preacher as interpreter, theologian and person with her own experience? Thomas E. Breidenthal’s essay, “Sharper Than a Two-Edged Sword: Following the Logic of the Text in Preaching” proved a helpful model of how to be both a theologian and bring one’s own experience into the pulpit.⁴¹

In summary, from my study of the New Homiletic I took into my reading of post-liberal homiletical theory a keen interest in sermon form, the role of the preacher and a search for a doctrine of inspiration that did not negate the interest in the literary forms of the Bible and the eventfulness of the Word.

A Cultural-Linguistic Home and

The Development of a Research Project

In the course Homiletic Options we began to read homileticians who were questioning the limits of narration and the implications of post-liberal theology. Charles Campbell, in Preaching Jesus, developed the homiletical implications of the work of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck of Yale.⁴² Other homileticians, William J. Shepherd Jr., Richard Eslinger and David Lose, also have written about homiletical implications of the

⁴¹ In Root, Sharper Than a Two-Edged Sword: Preaching, Teaching, and Living the Bible, 32–44.
⁴² Charles L. Campbell, Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
work of Frei and Lindbeck in both constructive and critical terms. In Lindbeck’s
cultural-linguistic approach, his starting point is an understanding of language as prior to,
and constituting, thought. In linking the language of scripture to the formation of the
church, he hopes to restore the storied world of scripture to its natural habitat, the church,
without retreating to a pre-critical stance.

As I read these homileticians through a theological lens, I found a home. As I
read them through a pedagogical lens, given my role at Wycliffe College working with
student preachers, I was not confident that I would know how to apply their post-liberal
approaches to preaching—how to read scripture through a cultural-linguistic lens and
move from it to a sermon—based on their works. How, I wondered, could a cultural-
linguistic approach to scripture and homiletic method meet in a coherent and accessible
way? This question became the foundation of my research project.

Paul Scott Wilson’s *Four Pages of the Sermon* became my model. Wilson is
one of the first homileticians to call for a return to preaching scripture through the lens of
theology. As an heir to the New Homiletic, Wilson holds onto the marriage of scripture
and sermon form. But, as said above, Wilson arranges a marriage between a law-gospel
interpretation of scripture and the form of the sermon. In Wilson’s method the four pages
of the sermon are: law in the world, law in the text; gospel in the world, gospel in the
text. His goal is, in part, to duplicate for the hearer the experience of grace communicated

---


in the Gospels. Two things about his method appealed to me. First, a single method provides students both with a way to read scripture and to move from scripture to sermon text. Second, his method is simple and accessible. Pedagogically it works.

I do not share Wilson’s commitment to reading scripture through a hermeneutic of law-gospel. In Chapter Three I lay out what might be called an Anglican approach to reading scripture, which is through the lens of scripture’s telos, Jesus Christ. But, as I thought about my own interest in a practical approach to preaching scripture as the church’s book, it was Wilson’s model I held onto. I hoped to develop a method akin to Wilson’s four pages of the sermon which poses questions which are both a guide to how to listen to the scripture as well as to the creation of a sermon. Why questions and not pages? The homiletician Lucy Lind Hogan describes stasis in classical rhetorical theory as a kind of methodology of inquiry. Stasis, Hogan writes, is a method of asking questions that enable a person to discern the points or questions that rest at the heart of the matter. Given my uncertainty about the relation of scriptural and sermon form, I wanted to loosen the bond between the sermon form and either scriptural form and theological content, whether it be a positivist three points and a poem, Wilson’s law-gospel quadrants, or Lowry’s five-fold plot sequence loops. Six questions seem to lead in that direction.

Would it be possible to develop a method of preaching out a cultural-linguistic approach to scripture that was both practically accessible and theologically coherent? What would I learn? This became my research project. The specific research question on

---

which my research was based is, *Can a series of questions be developed, building on a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church as a community formed by the storied world of scripture, which is simple enough to be used in weekly sermon preparation by Anglican clergy?*

**My Research Project**

In the summer of 2011 I gathered willing Anglican clergy in the Kingston area to work together on sermon preparation, using a series of questions I had drafted. We met for seven Wednesday afternoons and practiced using and refining the questions of the sermon I had drafted. (See Appendix I and II). Throughout our conversation and specifically in an eighth meeting for evaluation we asked many questions about the six questions: Were they helpful? Do they reflect the theological convictions we have talked about? Are there questions missing? Does the sequence matter? Can you understand what they are asking of you? Can you do what the question asks of you? Do they help lead to the creation of a sermon? I describe the weekly meetings and their evaluation in Chapter Four.

**A Post-Liberal Turn to the Listener**

Out of my work with Anglican clergy, coupled with my study of homiletic theory, I began to develop an argument for what I loosely will call a post-liberal turn to the listener. I present it in Chapter Three. My argument has three points. In the first I redefine the turn to listener through a post-liberal epistemology. In the second point I
claim that the church, rather than various social locations, is the natural habitat for the
listener (individual and corporate) to hear God’s voice. Finally, I explore some of the
homiletical implications of such an approach to preaching.

As said above, the New Homiletic began a major shift in homiletic theory, away
from positivist claims about scripture to a concern with recreating the eventful experience
of the scripture text for the listener. This turn to the subject blossomed into a rich
homiletical literature on the turn to the subjects in their various social locations.

I argue that in post-liberal preaching there is a new kind of turn to the subject,
though it is not defined as such in the homiletic literature, nor is it considered a
continuation of the New Homiletics’ turn to the subject. In a post-liberal turn to the
subject I employ a radically different epistemology than Craddock and others;
nevertheless I work within the homiletical categories the New Homiletic set forth. In a
post-liberal turn to the subject, the subject or person is defined neither by their various
social, economic and political contexts (though these are not ignored) nor by the
universal nature of human experience (though experience is not ignored). My definition
of the subject is based on the post-liberal claim that, as John Yoder has said, “the church
precedes the world epistemologically.”

I define the subject more concretely as a listener. Our universality is found not in a common human experience of the ineffable
but is found in the claim that God has addressed all of us in his Word and makes all of us
capable of hearing (Psalm 40:6). I argue for a a turn to the listener as created and defined
by God who addresses to the church in scripture. I will develop this first point of my

47 John Yoder, The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame
Press, 1985), 11.
argument more fully at the end of Chapter One, *A Cultural-Linguistic Approach to Preaching and its Critics*.

The second point of an argument for a post-liberal turn to the listener is that the church, rather than one’s social or political location, is the natural habitat for hearing the Word God addresses to the listener. This argument is made more fully in Chapter Three, *The Church as Habitat for Hearing Jesus*. There I will examine biblical examples of this claim. Looking at John Yoder and Charles Campbell I will also argue that just as the church precedes the world epistemologically, it also precedes the world axiologically.48 As Richard Lischer wrote about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s understanding of the church, “Christianity is a community that is joined by race, family, neighborhood, and economics, but whose truest identity transcends all of these.”49

Finally, I will argue that the emphasis on the listener, defined not anthropologically but as creature of the God, works within some of the homiletical categories the New Homiletic set forth. It responds to the concern about the gap between the authority of the preacher and congregation, and builds on the emphasis on inductive preaching, but it does so from a different starting point.

Thus, in Chapter One, I present an overview of George Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic approach to doctrine and introduce homileticians who both work out of and criticize, this approach. In Chapter Two, I lay out a renewed doctrine of inspiration and an Anglican understanding of the church, and what I loosely call an Anglican hermeneutic. In chapter Three, *The Church as Habitat for Hearing Jesus*, I present my argument for a post-liberal approach to preaching. In Chapter Four I describe the

---

48 Ibid.
49 Lischer, *The Preacher King*, 74.
research project I conducted where Anglican clergy practiced using the sermon
guidelines I developed over a series of six weeks. In the Conclusion I present final
thoughts and directions for further study.
CHAPTER ONE
A CULTURAL-LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO PREACHING
AND ITS CRITICS

*It would be very easy to preach this text and focus only on obedience in the midst of struggle and not mention Jesus.*—A Research Participant

My preaching methodology, The Six Questions of the Sermon, takes as its theological foundation a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church, a renewed doctrine of inspiration and an Anglican understanding of scripture. This theological foundation, rooted in the Spirit’s use of scripture in the church, offers an alternative to the practice of correlating the symbols of scripture with a universal human experience and, I hope to show, can lead to a pedagogically accessible homiletic method.

There are a handful of homileticians who have begun to develop the homiletical implications of a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church. There are also their critics, who thoughtfully point out some of the weaknesses of these cultural-linguistic approaches to preaching. In this chapter, I begin by outlining the salient points of a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church, coming out of the work of George Lindbeck and Hans Frei of Yale University. I will then introduce six homileticians, who to various degrees consider themselves working out of what has become known as the Yale School of Theology, most fully describing the work of Charles Campbell and David Lose. Third, I will lay out and address the critical assessment of post-liberal preaching, made by Paul Scott-Wilson, James Kay and David Lose. Their chief concerns are that it
mates God’s voice and the need for personal faith, denigrates the non-biblical world and undermines the evangelistic thrust of preaching. I will argue that their concerns are not necessarily an inherent weakness in a cultural-linguistic homiletic but do point to the need to lay out a doctrine of inspiration that outlines how God addresses his people through the storied world of scripture and the practices of the church. In Chapter Two I will outline David Yeago’s doctrine of inspiration and an Anglican approach to scripture before turning, in Chapter Three to my argument for a cultural-linguistic homiletic and in Chapter Four, to my homiletic method, the Six Questions of the Sermon.

*A Cultural-Linguistic Understanding of the Church*

A cultural-linguistic understanding of the church begins with an emphasis on the role of the external Word to shape the self, the church and the world. Language is constitutive of thought, sentiments and realities, rather than expressive of them. A cultural-linguistic offers a hermeneutic for reading scripture as the church’s book. The key categories for interpretation are community and scripture rather than text and interpreter. This approach has provided me with a way to explore theologically my own Anglican evangelical identity, which, loosely put, reads scripture and finds its meaning from within the church and its tradition. Because the church is the place where both text and interpreter are situated and where scripture is both heard and enacted, a post-liberal homiletic provides a way to interpret and preach scripture which is not based on correlating its symbols with something beyond it in order to find its meaning.

---

Questions of correlation are central in biblical interpretation and homiletic theory. How does the preacher connect the scripture, these old texts, to her setting, that is, to new ears? Frequently in homiletic theory the image used to describe the correlation of scripture to the current time is a bridge. As Paul Scott Wilson has aptly stated, the bridge image asserts that there is a connection. But there is no agreement on how to move from the scripture—the then—to the now. Walter Brueggemann has made just this point “…we have no methodological consensus about how to move from “then” to “now”, or even if it is legitimate to make the move…The move very much depends on the interpreter’s judgment about the needs and prospects of the present situation, a judgment that is very personal.”

Some homileticians question whether the bridge model itself—regardless of the various options of how to erect and move across it—works at all. Preaching becomes what Harry Fosdick described as “an engineering operation by which a chasm is bridged so that spiritual goods on one side—the ‘unsearchable riches of Christ’-are actually transported into personal lives on the other.”

Edward Farley and William Shepherd examine structural flaws in the bridge paradigm and argue that the church needs a different way to span the distance between scripture texts and the proclamation of good news today. Farley argues that the preacher is given an impossible task of wringing from each discrete passage a life lesson, however

---

2 Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 50.
3 as quoted in ibid., 35.
improbable that may be. Very often the preachable lesson for life is not something gleaned from exegesis, so a phrase from the text becomes a jumping off place for the sermon. “The preacher must kill the passage in order to preach on it.”  

6 Farley calls for preaching minus the bridge paradigm “The Church must return to preaching not biblical passages, but the Gospel.”  

7 Shepherd turns to Lindbeck’s description of the experiential-expressivist theological position, which I describe later in this chapter, to explain why he believes the bridge paradigm is problematic. It rests on the questionable assumption that religious experience is universal and constant across time, space and culture, however differently it is put into words, what Lindbeck categorizes as a experiential-expressivist theological position, and thus, at root, is the same. Thus the task of the preacher is to uncover the religious experience embedded in the language of the biblical tradition. “The preacher need then only find the modern language that will express this experience and the congregation will nod their heads in recognition: Yes, I know that feeling.”  

8 In order for the bridge model of preaching to work, the preacher needs to be able to skillfully use the tool of analogy and have the confidence that there are contemporary religious experiences, which correlate with the ones expressed in scripture, available to her modern congregation. The difficulty, Shepherd argues, is that this model creates a heavy burden on preachers to find a transportable religious experience in many of the biblical texts.  

9 Because of this difficulty it leads preachers to find an appropriate word from God in other sources: movies, stories, or the preacher’s experience. Shepherd

---

6 Farley Edward, “Preaching the Bible and Preaching the Gospel,” 97.
7 Ibid., 100.
8 Shepherd, “A Rickety Bridge,”194.
9 Ibid., 195.
argues that with this model there is no cogent rationale for using the Bible in a sermon at all if one can locate experiences of the divine elsewhere.

Shepherd turns to the understanding of the construction of religious experience contained in Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic theological position to offer a model of biblical preaching that is not based on the bridge paradigm as he has described it. In Lindbeck’s model, as I will explore later in this chapter, the Bible is understood to provide the basic foundation from which Christian religious experience is constructed. A cultural-linguistic hermeneutic is rooted in the community of the church and its interpretation of scripture. It locates meaning in the ways we embody, perform or practice scripture in the church, what we might loosely call discipleship in and for the world, rather than in correlation with a universal religious experience.

Post-Liberal Theology

In 1984 George Lindbeck published *The Nature of Doctrine* as a kind of prolegomena to an intended larger work on the use of doctrine in the ecumenical dialogues to which he is so committed. Over the past 25 years his book has become deeply influential on both sides of the Atlantic, and along with his colleague, Hans Frei, Lindbeck is credited with introducing a new approach to theology, “post-liberalism” and the founding of a new theological school, “The Yale School”.11

---

10 Here and throughout this thesis I use the word church to refer to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church across time and culture, which is described in Scripture as the Body of Christ. The primary expression of the church is the local congregation. When I am referring to the Anglican Church specifically I will indicate it. This creedal definition of the church includes the historic reality of the church as divided and sinful. Though preaching and reading Scripture in a sinful and divided church is not the primary focus of this thesis I do address it in the section on an Anglican understanding of the church in Chapter Two.

The Yale School of theology comes from the work of Hans Frei, George Lindbeck and others. In the forward of the 1997 German edition of *The Nature of Doctrine* and included in the 2009 25th anniversary edition, Lindbeck remarks on his surprise at the seriousness with which theologians, philosophers and sociologists of religion, and even scriptural scholars have engaged his 1987 work. He states that the contribution of the volume was its ecumenical focus and that most of the ingredients of the book were borrowed from, among others, his colleagues Hans Frei and David Kelsey and the anthropologist, Clifford Gertz. In the *Identity of Jesus Christ*, Hans Frei’s later work, Frei moves from a realistic narrative reading of scripture, as laid out in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* toward a communal hermeneutic, coming out of the work of his colleague George Lindbeck. The work of the homiletician Charles Campbell is based on the work of Hans Frei.

Lindbeck’s aim in *The Nature of Doctrine* was to offer an alternative to liberal theology, which he describes as deeply pervasive and variegated in contemporary theology. Post-liberal theology is characterized, in part, by a questioning of the role of correlation in theology, specifically the correlating of the symbols of scripture with a universal human experience. Such correlation is the foundation of the New Homiletic. Lindbeck’s theology is called post-liberal because his goal was to offer a response to the

---

limits of the liberal enterprise without retreating to a pre-critical stance. His aim is to offer an alternative to a liberal method of correlation which is both rooted in scripture and the Christian tradition and deeply responsive to the genuine needs of the present age. A key difference is that it uses the Christian sources themselves to identify those needs.\textsuperscript{15} This stance has been described as a kind of generous orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{16}

Lindbeck presents taxonomy of theories of religion and argues for the value of the third theory, a cultural-linguistic approach. The three types are: 1) cognitive-propositional; 2) experiential-expressive; and 3) cultural-linguistic. He describes each in terms of the function of doctrine.

1. In a cognitive-propositional model doctrine functions as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities.

2. In an experiential-expressive model doctrine function as “nondiscursive symbols” and can change meaning.

3. In a cultural-linguistic model rather than functioning as truth claims or symbols, doctrine functions as authoritative rules of discourse, the way grammar functions in language. The function of doctrine is regulative.\textsuperscript{17}

Lindbeck’s concern in \textit{The Nature of Doctrine} is with the last two models in his taxonomy, which he evaluates in both non theological and theological terms. The central difference between the experiential-expressive and cultural-linguistic model is the way each conceives of the correlation between inner experience and external religious and cultural factors. An experience-expressive understanding of religion begins with inner experience and views religious symbols as deriving from a prior inner experience. A

\begin{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{16} Hunsinger, George, “Hans Frei as Theologian: The Quest for a Generous Orthodoxy,” \textit{Modern Theology} 8, no. 2: 103–128.

\textsuperscript{17} Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 1–4.
\end{flushleft}
cultural-linguistic understanding of religion reverses that order: “A religion is an external word, a *verbum externum* that molds and shapes the self and its world, rather than an expression or thematization of a preexisting self or of preconceptual experience.”

Rather than an expression of a universal experience or belief, religions function as a kind of cultural or linguistic framework that shapes the entirety of life and thought. In this model the stress is on the degree to which human experience is shaped, molded and constituted by linguistic and cultural forms.

Lindbeck describes three characteristics of a religion in a cultural-linguistic model:

1. It is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being a primary manifestation of those subjectivities.

2. It compromises a vocabulary of discursive and nondiscursive symbols together with a distinct logic or grammar by which this vocabulary can be meaningfully employed.

3. As language is correlated with a form of life and culture with behavioral and cognitive dimensions, such correlation takes place between the language of the religion and the forms of life that spring from it. In other words, there is a strong relationship between the language of Christianity and the practices of the church.

Lindbeck claims that in a cultural-linguistic model experiences and the expression of them are no less important than in an experiential-expressive model. The difference is in the understanding of the nature of the experience and its relation to expression and communication. Based on the work of Wittgenstein and others, Lindbeck argues that signs and symbol are a necessary precondition to the possibility of experience, even “unconscious” and “subconscious” and the richer one’s expressive or linguistic system the more subtle and varied and differentiated one’s experience can be.

---

18 Ibid., 34.
19 Ibid., 23.
20 Ibid.
Though Lindbeck offers this model as an alternative to liberal theology, he claims it is neither static or implicitly conservative or liberal. Consistent with this model’s philosophical commitment to the primacy of language over experience, the source of change is not from new experiences of self, world or of God that call for new religious expressions. Change is the result of the interaction of a cultural-linguistic system with a changing situation, where the current interpretive scheme, as embodied in the practices of the religion, develops anomalies in its application in new situations.21

*Reading Scripture as the Church’s Book: A Communal Hermeneutic*

Lindbeck proposes a way of reading scripture that is not dependent on a form of correlation to make it meaningful. A cultural-linguistic hermeneutic coming out of the Yale School has three distinctive characteristics: 1) a communal hermeneutic, 2) an intratextual reading of scripture and 3) an understanding of scripture’s ascriptive logic. I will briefly describe these in order.

Lindbeck states that the meaning of a scripture text cannot be esoteric or only available to those with extraneous information or interests. Rather, a normative or literal interpretation of a religious text must be consistent with the kind of text the community for which it is important takes it to be, that is, in part, literary considerations. The

---

21 Ibid., 25. He gives as an example Luther’s doctrine of the justification of faith. Understood through this framework Luther did not discover the doctrine of faith because of an experience he had in the tower. Rather the experience in the tower was made possible by his discovery of the doctrine in Scripture. Because in this model language, doctrine, rituals, stories, modes of action are primary and through them the self is shaped into various kinds of religious experiences it follows that how religions change or adapt to different cultures or situation will follow this norm.
meaning must be evident within the text—“what the text says in terms of the communal language of which the text is an instantiation.”

In an intratextual reading of scripture meaning is located within the text and the world the text describes. In an extratextual method, which is the basis of both propositional and experiential-expressive models, meaning is located outside the text or semiotic universe, either in the experiences it symbolizes or in the objective realities to which it refers. The text can be left behind once the propositional truths or experiences to which it points are established. In contrast, Lindbeck argues that to know what the word God signifies, one looks at how the word operates within a religious system and thus how it shapes reality of experience.

Here Lindbeck relies to a degree on the work of his colleagues, David Kelsey and Hans Frei, to describe how to interpret a text “in terms of the meaning immanent in the religious language of whose use the text is the paradigmatic instance.” What Lindbeck proposes is what he describes as the ways of reading classic works, non-religious and religious, those that have been alienated from theology, but are even more forcefully necessary in the reading of the preeminent canonical texts of religious communities. Classic masterpieces, such as *Oedipus Rex* and *War and Peace*, (he argues,) evoke their own domains of meaning by what they say about themselves and the events and people of

---

23 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 106. As I speak of a normative reading of scripture throughout this thesis I am referring to Lindbeck’s description of normative in the sense that its reading does not depend on information external to the text, which is only available to some. A normative reading is not necessarily uniform. A normative reading includes reading Scripture within the context of enacting it in the practices of the church. See Chapter Three for a discussion of the relationship between scripture and the practices of the church. For an accessible discussion of the unity and diversity of reading scripture see Volf, *Captive to the Word*, 22-40.

24 Ibid., 100.

25 Ibid., 116.
which they tell. They are understood on their own terms without external references. Their meaning is immanent.

Lindbeck claims that such is even truer of scripture: “A Scriptural world is thus able to absorb the universe. It supplies the interpretative framework within which believers seek to live their lives and understand reality.” This phrase, “Scripture absorbs the world,” is quoted often both to summarize and critique Lindbeck’s post-liberal theology. As we will see later in the chapter it is central in to David Lose’s critique of the limitations of a post-liberal approach to preaching.

The particular ways one reads scripture intratextually will vary depending on the character of the religion and the texts. The key characteristic of an intratextual hermeneutic is the direction of interpretation. It moves from text or story to reality. It does not translate scripture into extra biblical categories. It redescribes reality within a Scriptural framework. Lindbeck gives the example of the cross. The cross is not to be

---

26 Ibid., 103.
27 Lindbeck points to Augustine and Aquinas for such a use of scripture on 103-5. Augustine tried to describe everything from Platonism and the fall of the Roman world—extra Biblical realities—from within the Biblical world and Biblical categories. Aquinas’s efforts to do the same with Aristotelianism, and the German romantic idealism, to name of just two extra-Biblical realities, were part of the traditional exegetical procedures Aquinas employed “which assumed that Scripture creates its own domain of meaning and that the task of interpretation is to extend this over the whole domain of meaning.”
28 One set of interpretative techniques is appropriate when Torah is the center of scripture and another set when it is the story of Jesus (and another when it is Buddha’s enlightenment). Traditionally, within the Christian tradition, scripture has been read as a whole, a unified canon, which encompasses the whole cosmos. To this end typology and figurualism have been used, though not exclusively. Typology allows for the incorporation of the Hebrew Scripture into the New and by extension to extra biblical realities. Unlike allegorizing which can empty the Old Testament or extra Biblical realities of their content, typological interpretation “constituted a powerful means for incorporating all being into a Christ-centered world?”
29 Lindbeck turns to Hans Frei’s study of 18th century hermeneutics, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, which shows how radically Biblical interpretation has shifted in the last centuries. Frei details historically how the direction of interpretation has been reversed. Scripture ceased to function as the lens through which theologians viewed the world to an object of study itself, whose primary significance or meaning is located outside the text. While an intratextual meaning continued to shape the imagination of the West theologians did not make this meaning “methodologically primary”.


interpreted as a figure or symbol of suffering or hope of the messianic kingdom. “Rather, suffering is to be cruciform and hopes for the future messianic.”

Third, Frei claims that a literal reading of the New Testament texts is based on their ascriptive rather than a descriptive logic. The narrative does not describe, refer to, or illustrate the identity of Jesus Christ. Rather, it constitutes the identity of Jesus of Nazareth and also the church. Jesus is the subject of the predicates and not something else. Frei reasons that if the church has understood the character of the story of Jesus to be literary realistic narrative, then the normative or literal interpretation of that story will have to do with the interaction of purpose and circumstance to render the identity of the agent. Thus, a normative reading of the story of Jesus will render the identity—what Frei calls the “un substitutable identity” of Jesus of Nazareth—through the interaction of purpose and circumstance in the story. “The identity of Jesus in that story is not given simply in his inner intention, in a kind of story behind the story. It is given, rather, in the enactment of his intentions.” The theologically controlling meaning of the story will not be, for example, the metaphysical or existential status of Jesus. Lindbeck argues that while all interpretations might be within a Nicaean faith the implications for the church and its practices vary widely.

---

31 Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 93.
32 Here I use Lindbeck’s description of a normative or literal way of reading scripture. The meaning must be evident within the text, “what the text says in terms of the communal language of which the text is an instantiation, which is not dependent on material outside of the text.” (The Nature of Doctrine, 106.) For an accessible discussion on the question of whether Biblical texts have a single meaning, multiple meanings, or an endless possibility of meanings, see Volf, *Captive to the Word*, 22-40.
33 By this Frei is claiming that that Jesus’ identity is only available to us through the description of his actions, specifically through the display of his obedience in reference to God the Father, and not "by grasping certain of his inherent personal characteristics" or by seeking the "actual" man apart from the story as a storied figure. See Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 102-103, 106.
34 Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 94.
“The believer, so an intratextual approach would maintain, is not told primarily to be conformed to a reconstructed Jesus of History (as Hans Kung maintains), nor to a metaphysical Christ of faith (as in much of propositionist tradition), nor to an abba experience of God (as for Schillebeeckx), nor to an agapeic way of being in the world (as for David Tracy), but he or she is rather to be conformed to the Jesus Christ depicted in the narrative.”

This same principle applies to the reading of all scripture within the Church. The question must be asked, what kind of text over time has the Church understood the whole of canon to be? What is the literary genre of the Bible in its canonical unity? Lindbeck turns to David Kelsey for an answer. The whole of canon can be thought of as a kind of “vast, loosely-structured non-fiction novel.” Its purpose is to offer a description of its agent, God, by accounts of the interactions of God’s deeds and purposes with those of creatures in their changing circumstances. Though the climax is the crucified, risen, ascended, and ever present Jesus Christ the climax is inseparable from what precedes it. As with the identity of Jesus Christ in an intratextual reading of scripture the focus is not on God’s being in and of itself—for that is not the story found in the canon—but on “how life is to be lived and reality construed in the light of God’s character as an agent as this is depicted in the stories of Israel and of Jesus.”

An Intratextual Reading and the Practices of the Church

Lindbeck briefly articulates the conditions necessary for the future of post-liberal theology. His concern is the discussion of the intratextual reading of scripture without

35 Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, 106.
36 Ibid., 107.
37 Ibid.
intratextual practices. Coherent religious languages and communal forms of life are steadily eroding, he laments, in both the academy and the church and society. “Religions have become foreign texts that are much easier to translate into current popular categories than to read in terms of their intrinsic sense.”

In Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church, a group of catholic and evangelic theologians look at specific practices of the church and like Lindbeck they argue that the reading of scripture cannot be separated from the practices of the church. Their central claim is that “knowing the Triune God is inseparable from participating in a particular community and its practices—a participation which is the work of God’s Holy Spirit.” Preaching is a practice of the church—a theological, liturgical and pastoral practice at the least.

Summary

Lindbeck’s theology is called post-liberal because his goal is to offer a response to the limits of the liberal theology without retreating to a precritical stance. His aim is to offer an alternative to a liberal method of correlation, which is both rooted in scripture and the Christian tradition and deeply responsive to the genuine needs of the present age. His

---

38 Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, 110.
39 Ibid.
40 Some of the specific practices the explore are: reading the bible, liturgy, baptism, contemplation, welcoming the stranger—to name a few. James Buckley, Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 1. I would not argue that this means that those outside the church or of other faiths are unable to read scripture fruitfully. MiroslavVolf writes, “They do and therefore they can.” (Captive to the Word, 38) See his discussion of the fruitfulness of the Scriptural Reason Project, where Christians, Muslims and Jews read their respective scriptures together, 38-39. This is a different enterprise than Christians reading scripture together. Volf describes the necessity of Christian community reading scripture together. “In the absence of a robust ‘Christian culture’ in functionally differentiated and religiously pluralistic societies, the influence of Christian theology is highly dependent on the role it plays in the churches and para-church organizations where Christian language is alive and Christian practices are important. To the extent that theology is able to shape broader society at all, it will be able to do so largely to the degree that it is able to shape the life of Christian communities. “Captive to the Word, 9-10.
post-liberal theology is based on the claim that scripture is an external word, a *verbum externum* that molds and shapes the self and its world, rather than an expression or thematization of a preexisting self or of preconceptual experience. It employs a communal hermeneutic, an intratextual reading of scripture and an understanding of scripture’s ascriptive logic.

**Six Post-Liberal Homileticans.**

There are a handful of homileticians who have explored and critiqued various homiletical implications of the work of George Lindbeck and Hans Frei. They serve both in the academy and in the parish. Not all are well known. I will introduce six in this chapter. In chronological order of key publications they are: Mark Ellingsen (1990), Richard Eslinger (1993), Charles Campbell (1997), William H. Shepherd (1998), David J. Lose (2003), and Tom Bridenthal (2008). My goal is not to be exhaustive but rather to locate my own work within this body of homiletic literature and to name those who have influenced my work. Each author builds on the work of Frei and Lindbeck and the Yale School in different ways.

**Mark Ellingsen**

Mark Ellingsen, who was a student of George Lindbeck’s, is a Lutheran pastor and currently on the faculty of the Interdenominational Center in Atlanta. In 1990 he published *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative*, which is the first attempt to develop a
homiletic theory based on the work of the Yale School.\footnote{Ellingsen, \textit{The Integrity of Biblical Narrative}, 70–96. Ellingsen blends the work of Hans Frei, George Lindbeck and Brevard Childs in a way he claims is uniquely his own.} His goal is to provide a method of preaching scripture that “refuses to allow interpreters to project their own material presuppositions on the biblical account,” so that the autonomous, normative and public meaning of the text can speak.\footnote{Ibid., 64.} To do so he turns to Frei’s employment of realistic narrative and the literary analysis of non-fiction narrative coming out of American New Criticism and Eric Auerbach.\footnote{Ibid. See chapters Two and Three.} Ellingsen presents a ten-step method which takes the preacher from determining the text’s boundaries to sermon manuscript.\footnote{They are: determine the text’s boundaries, establish the text, identify grammatical features, do comparative philology, compare parallel texts, investigate key words, consolidate findings, use systematic confessional materials, apply to contemporary situation, concretize the analogues, outline the sermon, and rehearse the delivery. Ibid., 70–96.} Ellingsen suggests that preachers focus on the correlation or “analogues” between the identity of the characters of the biblical accounts and the identity of parishioners.\footnote{He turns to Luther to make the strange and troublesome claim that, given the difficulty of correlating the historical biblical context with our own at times, there will be times when certain passages will not be appropriate for proclamation. “They will not be the Word of God for using that situation.” Ibid., 67.}

Ellingsen’s focus here is on narrative preaching, as contrasted with storytelling preaching; and while the Christian community and the church are a part of that narrative he does not follow Frei’s move into a cultural-linguistic approach to reading scripture and a communal hermeneutic. As Charles Campbell has pointed out, Ellingsen argues for a single, descriptive meaning of biblical narratives, “which are not dependent on any faith commitment or form of life, but can be arrived at by any disinterested reader, whatever his or her context.”\footnote{See Ellingsen, 32, 40-41, 63-4, 77. Campbell, \textit{Preaching Jesus}, 182.}
Richard L. Eslinger

Richard L. Eslinger’s 1995 book, *Narrative & Imagination: Preaching the Worlds that Shape Us* presents an approach to preaching that combines a narrative hermeneutic, coming out of the work of Lindbeck, Frei, Hauerwas, and L. Gregory Jones, and imagination theory, based on the work of Margaret Miles. His hermeneutic privileges 1) a narrative mode of interpreting scripture; 2) the biblical narrative world; 3) the ecclesial context for narrative interpretation.\(^{47}\)

Eslinger extends the intratextual world of scripture to include the on-going community of the church. “This world is both *intratextual*—that is, the world of the internal relationship of the Bible’s texts—and *ecclesial*—incorporating the church’s life here and now.”\(^{48}\) He turns to the work of Stanley Hauerwas to provide “a necessary expansion” of Lindbeck’s notion of intratextuality.\(^{49}\) “The biblical-story is not self-referential but rather creates a people capable of being a continuation of the narrative by witnessing to the world that all creation is ordered for God’s good end. The church is the necessary context for the testing of that narrative.”\(^{50}\)

Eslinger’s work describes the function of the biblical narrative in terms of its “double-movement”.\(^{51}\) He states the dual function of the biblical narratives is both to create a people with an identity disclosed to them in the narrative and to form them as people capable of hearing that story. Consistent with most post-liberal homileticians he would agree that a purpose of preaching is to build the church.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 27.
\(^{49}\) Ibid., 26.
\(^{50}\) Ibid.
\(^{51}\) Ibid., 30.
Among the six homileticians Eslinger is one of two who tackles the question of how a cultural-linguistic approach to the Christian gospel can also communicate truth claims about itself, beyond the world of its own storied scripture. He presents various alternatives and settles on the fourth, which claims that the question of truth “becomes useful of the entire Christian paradigm for interpreting, self, God, and the world.”

Charles Campbell

*Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* is the most substantial work on the homiletical implications of post-liberalism. Campbell’s approach is based on a rejection of the apologetic goal of liberal theology to relate the meaningfulness of Christian faith and scripture to a general human experience. Campbell argues that the purpose of theology and preaching is not apologetics, where Christ can become a cipher for an independent understanding of human existences, but Christian self-description. The purpose of preaching is not to find the meaning of Jesus for our lives per se, independent of Christology, but an Anselmian faith seeking understanding though participation in the worship, disciplines, practices, and language of the church. “Jesus’ meaningfulness depends not on his relevance to us, but on our faithfulness to him, on our becoming a faithful community shaped by his identity.”

---

52 Ibid., 35-38.
54 Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 61.
Campbell argues that because narrative preaching has focused on the genre of narrative and formal matters of plot, with little consideration for the content or function of biblical narrative, the consequence is that “the world absorbs the Bible.” Campbell shifts the focus away from the genre of narrative to what he argues is its purpose of narrative: to render the unique, unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ and the building up of the church. “The gospel narratives—and the biblical narrative as a whole, which renders the identity of God in Jesus Christ—point us beyond formal considerations of sermon structure to the crucial matters of Christology. It is the central character rendered by the gospel narratives, not narrative plot in general, that is at the heart of preaching shaped by the biblical story.”

Finally, Campbell places the church in the center of preaching in three ways. First, the goal of preaching is to build up the church. “God in Jesus is not primarily the predicate of individual human needs or experience, but rather the subject who gathers and builds up the eschatological people of God.” Second, the church, an interpretative community shaped by its common language and practices, embodies Jesus Christ and carries forward the Gospel narrative by becoming a character in the ongoing story of Jesus. The beginning of preaching is not the isolated preacher in her study with her lections for the upcoming Sunday. Scripture is not an autonomous text.

Sermons become a means through which the Christian community enters more deeply into its own distinctive speech, so that Christian ideas, beliefs and experiences become possible. Preaching seeks to recreate a universe of discourse and put the community in the middle of that world by instructing the hearers in the use of Christian language by showing them how to use it.

---

55 Ellingsen, *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative*, 79.
56 Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ*, 173.
57 Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 221.
58 Ibid., 234.
Third, the church is the “middle term” as the preacher moves from the texts of scripture to preaching good news today. “Rather than asking how texts connect with predetermined individual needs or …with ‘general human experience’ or how they are relevant to…society, preachers should quite consciously ask what the Spirit is saying to the church through the church’s Scripture.”

Campbell’s last point marks a fundamental shift in the direction of sermonic flow. An inductive approach based on liberal apologetics moves from the particulars of human experience to general conclusions. In a cultural-linguistic approach inductive preaching “begins with the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth and moves from there to the church in and for the world.”

Campbell does not present a method per se, but suggests an inductive approach beginning with scripture and focusing on the character of Jesus. He calls for sermons which use the ascriptive logic of scripture as its guide and “dare to preach Jesus of Nazareth in all his particularity by rendering him as the subject of his own predicates.” He describes faithful preaching as an interpretive performance of the story of Jesus on behalf of the church. Campbell explores the non-violent implications of the performance of the story of Jesus in preaching fully in a later work, *The Word Before the Powers*.

**William H. Shepherd Jr.**

William H. Shepherd Jr. is one of the few Anglican homileticians working within a cultural-linguistic framework. He has taught preaching and biblical studies at Candler.

---

59 Ibid., 230.
60 Ibid., 193.
61 Ibid., 193.
School of Theology, Virginia Theological Seminary, George Mercer Memorial School of Theology, and Immaculate Conception Seminary, and currently works in the Diocese of Connecticut.

In *No Deed Greater than a Word*, Shepherd proposes a cultural-linguistic understanding of biblical preaching, which he describes as the reading of texts within, and for, an interpretive community, claiming that the congregation is a kind of interpretative community.\(^63\) Shepherd’s theory is based on the work of both J.L. Austin and George Lindbeck, and he turns to Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic method to offer a way to understand how the sermon can be a performative act.\(^64\) Shepherd claims that the sermon is a kind of performative utterance which creates the church. “The sermon grows out of and in turn builds up an interpretative community, the church. Preaching is a performative act. It creates a new world.”\(^65\)

Shepherd turns to reader-response criticism to describe the congregation as a kind of interpretative community and the place of the preacher within it. Given his commitment to the constitutive nature of the preached Word, the interpretative community of which he is a part is not only the specific congregation of people, contexts, and situations, but the one we hope to participate in creating. “The question is not only what a kind of implied listener you have, but what kind you want. I am not being Pollyanna here—the sermon will certainly pinpoint sin in all its forms and diagnose the ills of humanity. But the sermon cannot stop there. It must go onto preach the gospel

---
\(^64\) Shepherd, *No Deed Greater Than a Word*, 23.
\(^65\) Ibid., 58
and the applied listener of that gospel is one who is not mired in sin, but liberated by God.”

David Lose

David J. Lose holds the Marbury E. Anderson Chair in Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary, in St. Paul, Minnesota where he also serves as the Director of the Center for Biblical Preaching. In Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Post-Modern World Lose seeks to describe an approach to preaching by which preachers can offer their sermons as vibrant, living, and faithful articulations of the classic confession, “Jesus is Lord,” in a post-modern world. Like other post-liberal preachers, Lose is trying to offer a third way between a “modernist foundationalism and its privileging of supposedly universal criteria of truth and meaning and a post-modern antifoundationalism and its retreat into ethnocentrism”.

Adapting Paul Ricouer’s sense of the on-going dialectic of participation and distanciation, Lose offers a proposal for preaching that both roots hearers in the tradition, and encourages the distance needed for critical reflection and response, which enables them to appropriate the tradition. The preacher confesses a real and risen Lord in an assertive, but what Lose hopes, is a non-coercive manner. His goal is to create the necessary safety and distance so that the hearer may appropriate the Gospel herself. It is a both-and approach. Confession articulates the essential Christian tradition and response to present context and circumstance in ways that 1) offers hearers a

66 Ibid., 55.
68 Lose turns to a model of situated knowing (which creates both accountability and responsibility) from Haraway and participation and distanciation from Calvin Schrage, down through Ricoeur and Gadamer, to allow the distance in conversation of interpreting texts, that enables us to make something our own. Lose, Confessing Jesus Christ, 55.
communal identity and simultaneously 2) preserves the space in which they may be encountered by and appropriate the identity for themselves.\textsuperscript{69}

Lose’s approach shares with other post-liberal homileticians a commitment to the ecclesial context of preaching and interpreting scripture. The goal of a confessional sermon, he says, is to both create a communal identity and create the distance needed to appropriate it. He locates preaching within the wide web of church practices; and in doing so removes from it the need to shoulder the whole confessional conversation of the church.

Lose offers a three-step method for reading texts as confession and then proposes four stages in moving from biblical text to sermon within the community of faith. I will outline them here. The three steps for reading texts as confession are: 1) Exegetical study directed toward discerning the distinct confession of the faith in question; 2) Recognition that we come to scripture with our own confession, which shapes our ability to make sense of the confessions in the text; 3) As with all confessional speech, the biblical texts seek a response and for preachers that response is the sermon.\textsuperscript{70}

The four related stages (which he explores in terms of distinct activities) are:

1. Approaching the text on behalf of the congregation.
2. Describing our listening for the text’s distinct confession.
3. Discerning what the confession might mean in light of the rest of the canon.
4. Articulating that new confession for the community so as to actualize the text in order that it may be appropriated through the power of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 231.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., See Chapter Five, “Confession and Biblical Canon”, 167-188.
\textsuperscript{71} See Chapter Six.
Lose raises three central concerns about Charles Campbell’s appropriation of the work of Hans Frei. \(^{72}\) I will turn to these concerns more fully later in this chapter. In turn, the concerns center around Campbell’s appropriation of a communal hermeneutic, an intratextual reading of scripture and its ascriptive logic. First, Lose claims that Campbell’s definition of preaching as an event that primarily constitutes a people undercuts the biblical understanding of *pistis* as both a personal assent and trust. Here Lose turns to the critique of Campbell by James Kay, who argues that Campbell’s appropriation of Frei’s understanding of realistic narrative is inadequate to the task of preaching, because realistic narrative cannot render self-involving agency.

His second concern also revolves around Campbell’s use of realistic narrative and the world it renders. He believes that Frei’s understanding of narrative is faulty. Frei overestimates the stable semiotic universe of discourse the biblical text renders and is misguided in his attempt to seal it off from other semiotic universes. This creates a false dichotomy between the world inside of the text and the world outside of the text.

Lose’s third concern is related to the last. Lose argues that Campbell’s focus on the ascriptive logic of the scripture narrative and an intratextual reading fails to create the critical distance by which hearers can be encountered by the Gospel and thus appropriate the preached narratives for themselves. His concern is that Campbell’s proposal will yield greater adherence to the tradition and competent practice, but it cannot lead to greater fidelity, as understood as trust and confidence. \(^{73}\)

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 111–126.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 126. In response to Lose’s critique of Campbell in my homiletic method I try to protect the place of personal assent and trust, what Lose describes as *pistis*, without ignoring the power of the Gospel to create a people. Secondly, I will argue that Lose’s claim that Frei’s understanding of Biblical narrative creates a false dichotomy between the world in and outside of the text misinterprets the world the Biblical text renders. And thirdly, while I do not address Lose’s concern about the need for critical distance directly in the Six Questions of the Sermon I try to balance communal identity with personal fidelity.
Thomas Breidenthal

Thomas Breidenthal is the Bishop of the Episcopal diocese of Southern Ohio, USA and was formerly Dean of Religious Life and of the Chapel at Princeton University. His method of preaching is found in *Sharper Than A Two Edged Sword*, essays from a conference on reading the Bible theologically and confessionally, sponsored by the Center for Catholic and Evangelic Theology and Duke Divinity School.74

Breidenthal writes as a practitioner and describes the process he employs for preaching scriptural sermons. He describes an approach that is sufficiently concrete as to be pedagogically accessible. His method, like Lose’s four stages of the sermon, tries to hold onto the need for both a personal response to God’s address and the building of communal identity. It is based on following the logic of the text, standing under scripture himself, and making the move from preaching his own experience of the text to being a theologian in the pulpit.

First, Breidenthal focuses on the logic of the text and not on external correlates. “I am not interested in stories, poetry and descriptions of visual artwork that parallel the drift of scripture, unless, like ancient Midrash, they find their source in a scriptural conundrum and loop back to scripture as soon as they can.”75

Second, Breidenthal focuses on the need for the preacher to put herself in a position to be addressed by the Word. This is a moral practice that lies at the heart of preaching, “placing oneself as preacher in a position to be addressed, probed, and

---

75 Ibid., 32.
dissected by a scriptural text, so that through one’s own preaching on it, the text can intrude upon God’s people with grace and power.” 76

Third, he helps the preacher to move from exegesis to engagement with the text on its own terms and then to making the shift from focusing on how the text addresses the preacher to how it addresses the collective Christian journey. “I am not interested in bringing my listeners to a deeper engagement with their own journey as distinct from our common journey as the body of Christ. What I desire for them and for me is that we should all stand collectively exposed and healed by the text revealed to us as word.” 77

With this last move Breidenthal makes his own contribution to post-liberal preaching. He writes compellingly of the need for the preacher to put herself in a position to be addressed by God in and through the text, and then to continue the hard work of preaching by shifting her focus.

I do not mean to imply that that God’s word requires anything of me to do its work, still less that I as a preacher am beyond the reach of God’s word unless I present myself before it. But there is a difference between Christ the living Word who can hunt us down wherever we are, and the written word of God, which must be taken up and read….For Scripture to come alive we must choose to read it. We must place ourselves in a position to be addressed.” 78

Breidenthal argues that after the preacher has put herself in a position to be addressed by the Word, she must shift her focus.

The preacher is first and foremost a theologian rather than a testifier and theological reflection is nothing more than the self-subordinating generalization of our religious experience so that everyone can see his or her own walk with Christ reflected there. Theology is a kind of two-edged sword we wield against ourselves lest we forget that the true subject of the Christian walk is not the individual believer but the church. 79

76 Ibid., 33.
77 Ibid., 34.
78 Ibid., 33.
79 Ibid., 41.
A Summary of the Proposals of Six Post-Liberal Preachers

All six homileticians are looking for an approach to preaching which is a third way between a kind of pre-critical propositional preaching and a correlation of scripture with a human experience of the religious embedded in the language of scripture. With the exception of Mark Ellingsen, all turn to the church and its practices as the location for preaching and interpreting scripture while offering different emphases on the balance between corporate faith and practices and the need for personal trust. All offer proposals that engage the preacher with the logic of the biblical narrative. The largest difference among them, as the next section points out, is their employment of an intratextual reading of scripture and its ascriptive logic.

Critiques of a Post-liberal Homiletic

In this section I summarize and respond to the critiques of a post-liberal homiletic by three homileticians James Kay, Paul Scott Wilson, and David Lose. Their critiques focus on the work of Charles Campbell’s Preaching Jesus and more generally on the work of Hans Frei and the Yale School. They share the same central concern, which is that a post-liberal approach, with its focus on language as the grammar of faith, subverts the need for personal faith because the voice of a living God is muted. One only need learn the language and practices of the community of faith to function as a Christian. As a result preaching becomes catechesis rather than proclamation.

Kay argues that Frei’s description of the function of the biblical narrative—to render the identity of Jesus Christ—cannot lead to God’s self-involving agency and thus
mutes God’s voice and our need to respond with personal faith. Wilson questions whether the elevation of the community over the individual diminishes the need for personal faith; and Lose wonders whether the description of preaching as an event which constitutes a community likewise diminishes the need for personal faith.

David Lose raises three additional concerns about a post-liberal homiletic. He lays out the first two, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, in *Confessing Jesus Christ*. Lose argues that Frei overestimates the stability of the semiotic world of scripture and thus the degree to which it can be sealed off from other semiotic universes. Secondly, he worries that Campbell’s post-liberal approach does not provide sufficient critical distance for appropriation. Lose’s final concern is found in his article “Narrative and Proclamation.” There he argues that Campbell’s appropriation of Frei’s work reverses the evangelical sermon flow as given in the incarnation and denigrates the created world.

These critiques deserve attention. In my homiletic method, The Six Questions of the Sermon, my emphasis on address and identity is in part a response to the thoughtful criticisms of these homileticians. Here my response is theological. Because Lindbeck’s method is based on the Word as *verbum externum* I maintain that a post-liberal approach to preaching need not necessarily mute God’s voice or diminish the need for personal faith. Because the biblical narrative renders the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ it more clearly discloses the one who addresses us it offers the possibility of hearing more fully the living voice of Jesus Christ, risen and ascended, and the invitation to respond in trust and faith. In addition because a post-liberal homiletic emphasizes the building of the church through preaching it invites its hearers into a relationship with Jesus Christ that is both personal and corporate.
In order to counter the concerns of these homileticians and to develop my argument that a post-liberal homiletic need not mute God’s voice or reverse the evangelistic flow of sermons I will need to be able to locate the place of the Holy Spirit in a post-liberal theology. In the next chapter I will argue that David S. Yeago’s renewed doctrine of inspiration, “The Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited” locates the work of the Holy Spirit in the storied world of scripture and the practices of the church. In the remainder of this chapter I outline the critiques of Kay, Wilson and Lose, and then turn to my response.

In Preaching and Theology James Kay presents a theological assessment of post-liberalism from the Yale School. His assessment centers on Frei’s claim that knowing the identity of Jesus Christ is the same as having him present, “for to know who Jesus is, in connection with what took place in the narrative is to know that he is.”80 The problem with this, Kay says, as evidenced by Frei’s own claim, is that narrative at best can only render, “the presence of information, of an entity.”81 It does not render “self-involving agency, which is what the claim for Christ’s presence in proclamation entails.”82 Thus in Kay’s assessment, Frei’s focus on the story without attention to the promise of the gospel does not adequately account for “how faith finds itself addressed by Jesus Christ, or Jesus Christ as the presently acting Subject of the proclaimed Word of God.”83 The consequence is to take away the need or basis for preaching as interpretive witness because narrative recitation is sufficient.84

80 James Kay, Preaching and Theology (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 118.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 119.
84 Ibid.
In *Preaching and Homiletic Theory*, Paul Scott Wilson provides a comprehensive review of key homiletic trends in the last fifteen years. Wilson turns to Campbell’s *Preaching Jesus* in his assessment of post-liberal preaching. He welcomes many of Campbell’s concerns and criticisms of contemporary preaching. However, in response to Campbell’s elevation of the community over the individual, Wilson cautions that both are essential. “Both must respond to the confessional question, who do you say that I am.”

Despite the many contributions of Campbell’s homiletic Wilson assessment of post-liberal preaching, like that of Kay’s, is that “it mutes God’s voice.”

Wilson adds an additional concern, which is that the post-modern emphasis on communicating God through language systems diminishes God’s transcendence. It “does not account for the notion of a God who is truth and is capable of transcending the limits of our language to impart knowledge and revelation.” Finally, Wilson refers the reader to David Lose’s detailed critique of post-liberal preaching and the primacy of the storied world of scripture over the created world, which I will take up next.

In *Confessing Jesus Christ* David Lose offers a three-point critique of Campbell’s post-liberal homiletic. As mentioned above, they are: the removal of need for personal trust and assent, a miscalculation of the stability of the semiotic universe of scripture, and the lack of necessary distance needed for appropriation. Here I turn to two additional concerns about Campbell’s homiletic, which he raises in “Narrative and Proclamation”. In that article he argues that there are two problems with the rendering of the relationship between the storied world of scripture and the non-biblical world: it cuts off preaching’s

---

85 Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 114.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 141.
evangelistic movement, and it denigrates the created world. It presages a serious misapprehension of the doctrine of the incarnation.\(^88\)

Lose locates the beginning of Campbell’s misstep in his well-meaning effort to reverse the direction of sermonic flow away from its starting point in human experience. Lose argues that while the narrative structure of sermons in Campbell’s method begins with the storied world of scripture and then moves out into the world of the hearer its aim or function is the opposite, “to draw hearers out of their world and into that of the Bible.”\(^89\) He writes that scripture does not say, “And the word created a new world and invited us into it.”\(^90\) Lose asks an important question, what happens to the world of the hearer? He warns that Frei’s claim that the biblical story is the one place that renders the identity of Jesus can lead to an assertion that “God is at work in no place outside of the narrative” (his italics), not in church, sacrament or word.\(^91\)

Lose claims that sermons should take their shape or movement from the pattern of Christ’s incarnation: just as Christ came down for us, so our sermons should move from scripture to the world.\(^92\) He argues that because Campbell claims that the form or movement of our sermons is patterned not after the form of the biblical narrative, but its function-to render the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ—they are unevangelistic for they pull the reader back into the world of scripture rather than move from scripture to the world.

\(^{89}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{90}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{91}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{92}\) Ibid., 8–9.
A Response to the Critique of a Post-Liberal Homiletic

I will respond first to the concern of James Kay, that a post-liberal theology mutes God’s voice and our need to respond in faith. Then I will turn to the concern of Lose that a post-liberal theology reverses the evangelistic thrust of preaching, denigrates creation and the need for personal faith. I will take up his concerns about the stability of scripture’s semiotic universe and the need for critical distance in the following chapter.

Kay’s critique of a post-liberal homiletic revolves around his claim that narrative on its own cannot render agency and thus, that scripture, in Frei’s hands, cannot render self-involving agency, “which is what the claim for Christ’s presence in proclamation entails.” Kay claims that narrative at best can render “the presence of information, of an entity.” Kay states that this is evidenced by Frei himself who claims that knowing the identity of Jesus Christ is the same as having him present—“‘for to know who Jesus is—‘in connection with what took place in the narrative is to know that he is.” Thus in Kay’s assessment, Frei’s focus on the story without attention to the promise of the gospel does not adequately account for “how faith finds itself addressed by Jesus Christ, or Jesus Christ as the presently acting Subject of the proclaimed Word of God.”

Kay seems to be saying that Frei’s move from narrative identity to presence ultimately fails because of the function of story (my emphasis). “A narrative as a narrative, unlike promise as promise, for example, does not render self-involving agency, which is what the claim for Christ’s presence in proclamation entails.” It can render the

---

93 Kay, Preaching and Theology, 118.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid., 119.
97 Ibid., 118.
identities of “putative subjects” Kay argues, but not ones with self-involving agency. This claim is highlighted by his own turn to the storied world of scripture to identify the God of promise. His reading reveals a God of agency and thus address. “If we attend to the Scriptures and liturgical traditions we discover that promises about the future are embedded and enacted in them. There God is repeatedly identified as the God who makes promises.”\(^98\) What then is the difference between Kay’s reading of the scripture and liturgical traditions, which renders God’s agency and address, and Frei’s, which he claims does not? This difference Kay attributes to the limits of story. Kay’s reading, through the lens of promise can render God’s agency; Frei’s through scripture’s ascriptive logic, cannot.

Let me try to respond. Though Frei turns to the genre of realistic narrative to understand how the scripture functions, he moves beyond that when he refers to talking about the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ as the resurrected one. Frei’s coupling of identity and presence hinges on the specific, that is, unsubstitutable identity of God in Jesus Christ, not on a claim about the function of narrative. As Campbell states, Christians are interested in narrative only because Jesus is what he does and undergoes, not because of anything magical about it.\(^99\)

The adjective “unsubstitutable” is the key to understanding Frei and Campbell’s claim. They are talking about Jesus and no one else. And for Jesus his identity—the resurrected One—is his presence. Jesus’ identity as the resurrected one is the witness to God’s self-involved agency, God’s action, hidden in the tomb, when he gave new life to his son. It is also the key to his ongoing agency, the very thing Kay claims identity cannot

\(^{98}\) Ibid., 120.

render. If Jesus is not alive he cannot be Emmanuel, God with us, through the ages. He cannot be present. He cannot be the one who address us, as the risen Christ addressed Mary and now sits at the right hand, interceding for the world until he comes again. For Jesus Christ “what took place in the narrative is to know that he is.”

Thus, with Frei, I argue that Jesus’ identity as the resurrected one, as rendered in the narrative and nothing else, is in fact his presence. The identity rendered there, however, is of a living Savior who is present with all creation, who dwells with his people. It is this acclamation at the beginning of our liturgy, “Alleluia, Christ is risen”, which allows the church to praise him, listen to him, pray to him and reach out hands to receive his living body. The identity of Jesus is his agency. This is scripture’s very claim.

Kay argues that we must start with the extra-biblical categories of promise and performative utterance in order to account adequately for how faith finds itself addressed by Jesus Christ, or to establish Jesus Christ as the presently acting Subject of the proclaimed Word of God. Likewise, David Lose argues that we must begin with the doctrine of the incarnation in order to hold onto a Jesus who moves out into the world. I argue that holding onto the identity of Jesus as rendered in the narrative helps us see that the distinctions Kay and Lose make between the narrative and the categories of promise, incarnation and performative utterance are not as clear as one might think. For these hermeneutic tools—incarnation, promise, performative utterance—are all rendered from within the biblical narrative.

The Genesis story of creation reveals a God who defines performative utterance in terms that our speech, our sermons, and all language can only shadow. It reveals a Son who is the one, full, perfect and sufficient performance and embodiment of that word, the

---

100 Kay, *Preaching and Theology*, 118.
Word made flesh (Col. 1:15-17). To read the narrative through the lens of promise or the incarnation is not to step outside its storied world but into the logic of the identity of the resurrected one, who promises to be with us until the end of the ages. A post-liberal approach to preaching applies the brakes to peeling off characteristics of Jesus—incarnate, a God of promises—from the man revealed in the narrative. Kay and Lose seem to resist the need for such brakes.

Wilson, Lose and Kay worry that in a post-liberal homiletic preaching becomes recitation of the narrative rather than proclamation. Their concern is unwarranted as evidenced by scripture’s own use of the narrative. Frei turns to the “logic” of the narratives, not its mere repetition, and notes that the epistles are models of this. The narrative serves as a measure of the identity rendered there, but as scripture itself testifies, it is not an impassable wall. Campbell commends Richard Hay’s exploration of Galatians 3:1-4:11 in *The Faith of Jesus Christ* as a model of developing the logic of the narrative into a discursive argument based on the story of Jesus. “There can be continuity between the language of story and discursive language, that the relationship between the two can be, in at least some cases, organic rather than artificial.”

It is this kind of continuity that Breidenthal is trying to incorporate in his sermon method, with the move from the preacher’s own need to be addressed by God in scripture and then to move to interpretation on behalf of the community. Likewise in my method, the Six Questions of the Sermon, I try to make a similar move from what is God saying to me (my personal experience of God’s address in the story) to what God is saying to and about the community.

---

101 As quoted in Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 205.
Let me now turn to David Lose’s concern that a focus on the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ as rendered by the narrative can lead to the denigration of the listener’s world and the non-evangelical movement of sermons. Here I argue that these concerns rest on a misconstrual of scripture’s parameters. Rather than denigrate the listeners’ worlds, an intratextual reading of scripture can lead to an understanding of God’s sovereign redemption of the listener’s worlds and our new identity as Christ’s disciples in our worlds and for their sake. It is decidedly evangelical.

Lindbeck argues that “cultures and religions have the potential to be all-embracing and possess the property of reflexivity.” This makes it possible for theology to be intratextual “not simply by explicating religion from within but in the stronger sense of describing everything as inside as interpreted by the religion, and doing this by means of second-ordered concepts.” Scripture describes, as it were, all worlds, claiming that “they” are one in God’s sovereign ordering. Scripture does not absorb the non-scriptural world in the sense of denigration. Rather, scripture describes the created world because there is only one world and it is God’s—all of it, all of the created smaller worlds, that is reality: families, nations, the future, the past and on and on. Scripture’s own narrative lets us know that the God rendered in scripture, and not another, is at work outside of its immediate referents. Scripture absorbs all our little worlds not by denigrating them but raising them up to the very place of God’s redemptive activity. They are God’s and no others.

To try to establish the right correlation between the scriptural world and the “non-biblical worlds” is, as I said, to misconstrue scripture’s parameters. My argument is that parameters of the world which scripture describes renders a God—and no other—who is

---

active in, and creator and redeemer of, a broken and sinful world which extends far beyond scripture’s immediate referents. First, scripture contains the same history as the non-biblical world: Israel, Babylon, Egypt, Rome, the church, the Gentiles. From the Torah to the Prophets, Job to Revelation, scripture’s explicit text indicates the larger world of its connotation, and commits its names to this larger world, if only in the future.

Second, not only are the forms of non-Israelite history shown to be God’s, but they are linked intimately, if only retrospectively recognized, to Israel, as in the case of Cyrus and also all “Babylons” of the world. In the end, the tree of Life in John’s revelation is for the healing of the nations, understood in their fullness, not in their limitation. Thus, to say that scripture not only absorbs the world, but names it, is to speak of God’s redemptive sovereignty over all creation and God’s use of it for those his redemptive purposes.

Although the details of this scriptural naming of the larger world—how it will happen and the immediate circumstances of its happening—are left open-ended, the promise that this precise naming is extended to the entire creation is emphasized. For example, Revelation describes the Heavenly Jerusalem that embraces the redeemed creation in the explicit terms of Israel and the apostles. Scripture includes its own opening to becoming the single narrative that names the whole of Creation, just as the whole of Creation itself is made “by, through, in, and for” the one image of God, Jesus Christ (Col. 15ff.)

Is Creation thereby “denigrated”? Is it somehow placed across an unbridgeable chasm from scripture? Lose asks, what happens to the world of the reader? Those worlds, marred by both individual and corporate sin, and are seen anew, as the place of
God’s redemptive activity and the place Jesus sends the listener. Nothing in the identity of Jesus, especially his relationship with his disciples can lead one to think that he calls us to stay in Bible land. Scripture’s narrative itself—and nothing else—lets us know that the God rendered in scripture, and not another, is at work outside of its immediate referents. Our identity is apostolic because he is the one who was sent. As John Yoder, says, “The Christian does not withdraw a priori, as if obedience were thought to apply to some other world than this rebellious one.” 103

Lose asks, what happens to the world of the listener? Perhaps a more helpful question to ask is, what happens to the listener? Is there not a parallel between the relationship between the world of the Bible and all our little worlds and our old self and the new we have become in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5)?

Finally, David Lose expresses the concern that understanding faith as a language system diminishes the need for personal trust and adherence. In a cultural-linguistic model experiences and the expression of them—trust, love, hope, assurance, guilt—are no less important than in an experiential-expressive method. The difference is not in the importance of the affective dimension of faith in the understanding of the nature of the experience and its relation to expression and communication. The stress is on the degree to which human experience is shaped, molded and constituted by linguistic and cultural forms. 104 As with the identity of Jesus Christ in an intratextual reading of scripture the focus is not on God’s being in and of itself—for that is not the story found in the canon—but on “how life is to be lived and reality construed in the light of God’s character as an

103 Yoder, The Priestly Kingdom, 12.
104 Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, 23.
agent as this is depicted in the stories of Israel and of Jesus.” Trust is named and embodied in discipleship.

Summary

Paul Scott Wilson, James Kay, and David Lose have argued that a post-liberal approach to preaching, with its focus on language as the grammar of faith, subverts the need for personal faith and proclamatory sermons because the voice of a living God is muted. The argument continues that an intratextual reading of scripture denigrates the created world and reverses the evangelistic flow of sermons. They become attempts to pull listeners into the storied world of the Bible. I have argued that a post-liberal approach to preaching need not necessarily mute God’s voice and the need for personal faith. Rather, given that the biblical narrative renders the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ such an approach offers the possibility of more clearly disclosing the one who addresses us, and our personal and corporate identity as sinful people who respond in faith. Rather than pull us back into the world of scripture, as Lose fears, or render faith simply a set of practices and virtues, a cultural-linguistic approach to preaching, with its ascriptive logic and intratextual hermeneutic, has the possibility of rendering a deep description of the one who addresses us in scripture. Scripture renders a God—and no other—who is active in, and creator and redeemer of, a world which extends far beyond scripture’s immediate referents. Rather than pull us back into the world of scripture Jesus sends us out into all our little worlds, knowing they are all God’s, now and in the future, as are we.

105 Ibid.
The concern of Wilson, Lose and Kay, that a post-liberal homiletic mutes God’s voice, point to the need to provide a pneumotological complement to a cultural-linguistic understanding of scripture and the church. In the following chapter I turn to a renewed doctrine of inspiration, as outlined by David Yeago, in an attempt to do just that. An Anglican hermeneutic, like Yeago’s doctrine, focuses on the Spirit’s use of scripture and the practices of the church.
CHAPTER TWO

THE CHURCH, SCRIPTURE AND THE DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION

*The purpose of preaching and the preacher is to facilitate shema – hearing, listening and obedience to the voice of God.*
— A Research Participant

Paul Scott Wilson, James Kay and David Lose have argued that a post-liberal approach to preaching mutes God’s voice and denigrates the created world and the evangelical thrust of sermons. Others have argued as well that a cultural-linguistic method seems to diminish God’s agency. In a discussion of the work of Charles Campbell and Hans Frei, in *Conversations with Barth on Preaching* William Willimon argues that what is missing in the work of Charles Campbell and Hans Frei is agency; and because of this Campbell’s homiletic method cannot work because effective preaching cannot be only social enculturation or learning a new language. He reminds us that Jesus Christ constitutes the only possibility of preaching being heard. Jesus Christ gives content to the work of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit gives the means of our encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. William concludes that “Barth will not allow us to follow them into their intratextual, communally rendered linguistic world” because even theirs is anthropologically grounded.¹ Joseph Mangina makes a similar critique that Lindbeck substitutes talk about the church and Christian practices for God himself.²

---

In this chapter I argue that David Yeago’s doctrine of inspiration as presented in “The Spirit, the Church and the Scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited,” provides a necessary description of how the Spirit works in scripture and the practices of the church to address these concerns. The Holy Spirit uses the intratextual, communally rendered linguistic world of scripture for our encounter with Jesus Christ who, through the Spirit, both addresses and forms us into a people capable of hearing and responding to his living voice. The intratextual, communally rendered linguistic world of scripture, as I argued in the last chapter, reveals God, Father, Son and Spirit who is active far beyond scripture’s referents. Finally, renewed ecclesial practices of interpretation, based on the intratextual, ascriptive logic of scripture, offer a way of encountering Jesus Christ fully and deeply as one who address us.

Yeago’s work makes three contributions to a post-liberal homiletic. First, it lays out a theological foundation for a description of a cultural-linguistic homiletic in which preaching is proclamation of the voice of the living God. Second, it lays out the interpretative consequences of such a renewed doctrine of inspiration. When this foundation is brought to preaching it renders a description of Jesus Christ, his address of us, and our response and identity as his disciples who have been joined to the Spirit’s mission to the nations. Third, it offers a renewed description of the correlation of scripture texts and current hearers of God’s Word. As I have argued in the last chapter, rather than pull us back into the world of scripture, as Lose fears, such an approach sends

---

us out into all our many worlds, knowing that in the midst of their individual and corporate brokenness, they are all God’s, now and in the future, as are we.

In the first half of this chapter I first present a summary of David Yeago’s doctrine of inspiration, then turn to his description of its interpretative consequences, and finally, look at how these might address the concerns raised about the limitations of a post-liberal homiletic. In the second half of the chapter I offer a description of the Anglican Church, which is the context for my own preaching and my research project in preaching. An Anglican understanding of the church and the Spirit’s use of scripture in the economy of salvation and its interpretative consequences has much in common with Yeago’s.

*The Theological Foundation of Yeago’s Renewed Doctrine of Inspiration*

David Yeago seeks to present a doctrine of inspiration which is renewed in two ways. First, his goal is to retrieve earlier notions of the inspiration of scripture without retreating into a doctrine of plenary inspiration or of pre-modern exegesis. Secondly, he refuses to locate the Spirit’s work primarily in formal matters of canon and language studies.

Yeago anchors his doctrine of inspiration in three confessions the church makes about itself, scripture, and the Spirit’s work. The first confession is that the Church, as a corporate body, knows something of the most immediate relevance to the interpretation

---

4 I will address whether it is possible to speak a normative Anglican understanding of the church or an Anglican approach to reading scripture later in this chapter.
5 “Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited,” 55.
6 Ibid.
of both the scripture of Israel and the apostolic testimony: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, the church has a privileged place in the Spirit’s mission. Third, the church has distinctive knowledge about scripture itself. I will take them in order.

The Distinctive Knowledge of the Church

Yeago turns to the apostles’ reading of scripture in light of the resurrection to make his claim about the church’s distinctive knowledge. “It knows that the resurrection has taken place which allows the apostles to read the scripture of Israel in a new way. What was written remains the same—that has not changed—but it is interpreted quite differently “in light of new insight into what they pertain to, what they are about.”

He turns to the work of Paul Van Buren, who describes the actions of Peter and the other apostles, who after the resurrection turn to the Jewish scriptures to find their ABC’s and grammar book. Van Buren says that Peter does not simply turn to the scriptures in a spasm of ethnic loyalty, as “his tradition.” Peter turns to them because he believes they embody the word and will of the One who by raising the Lord Jesus from the dead has disclosed the ultimate skopos of all his words and purposes.

It is within the Christian community’s distinctive knowledge of Christ’s resurrection that Yeago locates the Spirit’s work in scripture and the economy of salvation. The work and mission of the Spirit is to glorify the God of Israel to the nations by making known and glorifying Jesus, the crucified and risen Savior sent to fulfill God’s mission and purposes. In other words, the “Spirit bears witness to Jesus as the son of the

---

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
God of Israel and to the God of Israel as the Father of Jesus and in doing so, obliquely to
the Spirit of the Father and the Son.”

_The Place of the Church in the Spirit’s Mission_

It is within this context of the Spirit’s mission that Yeago insists on the privileged
dposition of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church in the interpretation of scripture
and its practices. Why this inseparable link between the Spirit’s work and the church? It
is not only because the church knows that the resurrection has taken place. The earthly-
historical community of the church, the renewed Israel gathered to the crucified and risen
Messiah, is the sign that the Spirit plants on the earth as witness to the Father and the
Son. Yeago turns to John’s Gospel. It is through the unity of his people that the unity of
Jesus with the Father is made known to the world (John 17: 22-3). Thus, because of the
role of the church in the Spirit’s mission, experiencing a foretaste of eternal life is not
separable from participating in the sanctification of the disciples.

_The Church’s Distinctive Knowledge about Scripture_

Yeago makes the important point that the church has understood a third goal of
the Spirit’s use of scripture, which has to do with scripture itself. A doctrine of
inspiration explicates the church’s particular and distinctive knowledge about scripture
itself. Yeago reminds the reader that from its beginning the Church has held that its
knowledge of the resurrection contains not only information about the identity of Jesus

---

but “knowledge about the scripture themselves.”\textsuperscript{10} Testimony in scripture to the resurrection is not something added to the event after it happened; rather “the testimony of the prophets and apostles is in a real sense an aspect of the resurrection-event itself.”\textsuperscript{11}

Yeago turns to 2 Corinthians to demonstrate how an understanding of scripture’s inspiration was “the most durable way” to articulate the unity of the resurrection with the double attestation in the prophets and apostles.\textsuperscript{12} “Now we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. We have the mind of Christ” (2:12, 16). “And we speak of these things not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things by spiritual things” (2:13). It is into this theological framework, Yeago argues, that the church embolden by 2 Timothy 3:15-7 placed the prophetic and apostolic scriptures. They are God’s breathed divine discourse able to communicate the wisdom that leads to salvation.

In summary, Yeago anchors his doctrine of inspiration in three confessions the church makes about itself, scripture, and the Spirit’s work. First, is that the church, as a corporate body, knows something of the most immediate relevance to the interpretation of both the scripture of Israel and the apostolic testimony and that is the resurrection. Second, the church has a privileged place in the Spirit’s mission. Third, the church has distinctive knowledge about scripture itself. Scripture, in a sense, is a part of the resurrection-event itself.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[10] Ibid., 60.
\item[11] Ibid.
\item[12] Ibid., 62.
\end{footnotes}
Yeago’s renewed doctrine of inspiration is not based on an understanding of the Spirit’s production of the words of the Bible but on the Spirit’s use of this God-breathed discourse in the economy of salvation. His doctrine is clear and accessible. To say the biblical texts are inspired is to say that the Spirit has formed and made these texts its own in its on-going mission. Scripture functions as a quasi-sacramental instrument of the Holy Spirit, through which the Spirit makes known the mystery of Christ in order to form the church, that glorifies the Father and the Son before the nations, and is a sign of Christ’s messianic domination. In other words, “in scripture the Spirit bears witness to the church and the church is the witness the Spirit bears to the nations.”

Yeago turns to the distinction between scripture as discourse and scripture as written text to explicate how the Spirit has made the scripture its own. To describe scripture as discourse is to focus on it as intelligible utterance, that is, on what is said. To describe scripture as a written text is to focus on the discourse written down, that is as an enduring thing-in-the-world. Scripture is both and displays characteristics of written texts, consistent across time, and as things said, utterances, that will be read and pondered in ways that are not fully fixed. It is both of these characteristics of scripture—as fixed text and discourse—that allows it “to intrude on the church” as the one witness of the one Spirit and for that witness to be read, heard, preached, pondered, received, and embodied across time and contexts. Thus, as Yeago emphasizes, to say that the Spirit has made the scriptures its own is to speak of the Spirit’s putting the fixed texts to work

---

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 63.
sacramentally: the Spirit takes up the fixed texts, gathers them into a single discourse addressed to the church. In doing so the Spirit renders human discourse as divine discourse.

Yeago argues that it is necessary for the Spirit to make the human discourse of scripture its own. He turns to the second chapter of 1 Corinthians. To understand “the gifts bestowed on us by God” (I Cor. 2:12) the nations must receive the Spirit, and not simply human words. Why? It is Spirit and only the Spirit, who makes such understanding possible (I Cor. 2:12). Yeago rightly refuses to separate the Spirit’s use of scripture from the role of the church in the economy of salvation. To talk of the Spirit’s role in rendering human discourse as divine discourse is not entirely different from saying that scripture is inspired and useful for teaching, reproof and correction (I Tim. 3:16). This is not a turn to grammar and practices in lieu of personal faith, as Lose fears. Yeago writes, “the witness of the Spirit required not only words as its medium but also the life of a people formed by the wisdom and power of God present in the crucified Messiah.”

**Implications for a Cultural-Linguistic Homiletic**

Here we have a response to two of the concerns raised about a cultural-linguistic approach to preaching. In the first, raised in *Confessing Jesus Christ*, Lose claims that the dichotomy Frei and Campbell make between the world inside and outside of the text is based on an over estimation of the stable semiotic universe of discourse the biblical text renders. He states that a reliance on intratextuality in order to seal off the biblical text

---

15 Ibid., 64.
from other semiotic universes is misguided. Turning to the work of Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Regina Schwartz on textuality, Lose argues that Frei falsely exempt scripture from the normal process of signification in which “signs cannot make meaning independent of other signs” and thus maintains the artificial bifurcation of the worlds inside and outside of the text.\(^\text{16}\) Yeago’s point is that it is the Spirit’s use of both characteristics of the text which allows the text to intrude on the world. While Yeago does not wade into the conversation about semiotic universes per se, he is claiming, along with Frei and others, that scripture and its Spirit-rendered ability to intrude on our world precedes the reader’s construction and interpretation of it. The biblical text and experience are not a two-way street, as John McClure suggests.\(^\text{17}\) There is traffic in both directions to be sure. But, as John Yoder has said, working from a cultural-linguistic framework, the church precedes the world epistemologically. We know more fully from Jesus and in the context of the confessed faith that we know in any other way.\(^\text{18}\)

Yeago here also offers a response to the concern that a post-liberal homiletic diminishes the need for personal trust and loyalty. Lose summarized this concern with his assessment of Campbell’s proposal:

My concern is that while Campbell’s proposal may yield greater adherence to a tradition, and even more competent practice of it, his method of preaching cannot lead to greater fidelity understood as a dynamic trust and confidence.\(^\text{19}\)

What does Yeago have to offer to the conversation about competent practices and fidelity? He links this conversation about the dichotomy between personal faith and

---

\(^\text{16}\) Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ*, 122–123.
\(^\text{17}\) See Lose’s discussion of McClure on this point, 123.
\(^\text{18}\) Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 11.
\(^\text{19}\) Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ*, 126. His method is based on preaching as confession, in order to provide the necessary space for personal appropriation of the confession. It is worth noting that confession of faith, formally in creeds and in personal testimony, is a practice of the church.
public practices to the Spirit’s mission. In the economy of salvation personal faith is always joined with the embodying of that response in the public life of the church, which is the Spirit’s sign of Jesus as the Son of the God of Israel. Because of the telos of its mission, the Spirit calls out of us a response that is always twofold: it is both a cognitive and personal assent, and an adherence to Jesus, through participation in his ongoing life in the church. Because of the mission of the Spirit—to plant the church as that sign to bear witness before the nations to Jesus as the Son of the God of Israel—this dual response to the Spirit’s witness, knowledge and adherence, cannot be decoupled. A personal response to God’s address of us in scripture, our growing trust and fidelity, has a shape and form, though it is not uniform—as seen in the practices of the church and in a life of obedience.

Lose’s claim that Campbell’s method of preaching (or any post-liberal homiletic) “cannot lead to greater fidelity understood as a dynamic trust and confidence” is simply unfounded. Not only does it restrict the movement of the Spirit but claims that the Spirit does not, and cannot, use the practices of the church to generate or deepen personal trust and fidelity. Because Yeago links the Spirit’s use of scripture and the practices of the church to its mission of making Christ public to the nations, he places the practices of the church, including its language and grammar, fully into the hands of the Spirit. The practices of the church do not substitute for personal faith; but likewise personal faith does not negate the necessity of participation in the practices of the church and learning its language, as a part of the Spirit’s use of our personal faith in the economy of salvation. There is no guarantee of this dual response to the Spirit’s witness, but then, there never is. Not in the hands of either Lose or Campbell.
Yeago presents a renewed doctrine of inspiration in which the Spirit uses scripture to bear witness to God, and form the Church as the witness the Spirit bears to the nations. It is the Spirit’s work to build the church as the public witness to Jesus as the son of the God of Israel and to the God of Israel as the Father of Jesus, and in so doing, to the Spirit of the Father and the Son. As the following section indicates, the hermeneutical consequences of such a robust doctrine of the Spirit’s use of scripture includes an intratextual reading of scripture. Rather than diminishing God’s agency, such a reading casts it in greater relief.

*Interpretative Consequences: A Faithful Reading of Scripture*

Yeago argues that a faithful reading of scripture must be consistent with what the church knows about scripture and the Spirit’s use of it within the economy of salvation. A faithful reading does not suppress the church’s particular ecclesial knowledge, rather this faithful reading claims the church as a starting place. It is intra ecclesiam, that is, from within the church as a decisive cognitive context for interpretation. This approach does not ignore or overlook the literary and historical characteristics of the texts, or the sociological context of the interpreters, but places these at the service of the Spirit’s use of the texts as divine discourse. This kind of reading is governed from the center of the canonical witness, yet allows the text to be illumined and explicated by the linguistic and literary particularities of specific texts, and contradictory texts, without displacing the center. The goal of such reading, like the *skopos* of scripture itself, is Christ glorified and the church built up in its distinctive life and mission as a sign to the nations.
Yeago devotes the remainder of his essay to unfolding the hermeneutical consequences of interpreting scripture from within the church’s ecclesial knowledge. These hermeneutical consequences derive from the logic of divine inspiration. His considerations follow the general outline of Barth’s three movements of interpretation: *explicatio*, *mediatio* and *applicatio*. His mandates for reading scripture are a reinterpretation of classical exegetical practices. They are: reading as deferential attentiveness to the words of scripture; receiving scripture as the discourse of a single agent; and hearing and discerning what the Spirit is saying to the one church across time in the continuum of divine purpose. Though he says he can do no more that point to a possible distant renewed ecclesial practice of interpretation, his discussion of each characteristic is anchored historically and within contemporary hermeneutical debates. Here I briefly summarize the three characteristics of a faithful reading of scripture which Yeago lays out.

*Meticulous Attention*

Yeago’s first rule for a faithful reading springs from the church’s knowledge that it has received, rather than constructed, scripture, and that the Spirit’s use of scripture involves it as both text and discourse. This knowledge leads the church to a deferential and indeed reverent *attentiveness* to the particularity of texts in all their detail. This includes descriptive fidelity to the literary structure, the movement of the text, and the historical particularity of the language of the text. Thus, the first characteristic of a faithful reading of the inspired scriptures is fitness with regard to what they texts say in
their concrete fixity and density. Yeago notes that such attentive reading has points of
contact with both modern literary hermeneutics and the practices of lectio divina and the
Divine Office. Thus his first mandate for faithful reading is: “Pay attention, meticulous
attention, to what the scriptures say; strive to do justice to the way the words go in the
text.”

Complex Unity

Yeago is not willing to define scripture as the product of the interpretative
community. The church has a commitment to the belief that it has received scripture from
the prophets and apostles and does not in any simple sense construct it. He welcomes the
insight of constructivists who say that what interpreters make of any text is partly
dependent on what they bring to it, in terms of what they know and believe about the text,
themselves, and the world. But he is careful to warn that this acknowledgement of the
role of the interpretative community is not a warrant for collapsing the distinction
between what the text says and what the interpreter or interpretative community makes of
the text. Through the “otherness of text” the church sacramentally encounters the
freedom and authority of Holy Spirit. His second mandate for a faithful reading of
scripture springs from the church’s claim that all scripture is the discourse of a single
voice, the Holy Spirit, despite the plurality of human authors. While it is possible to
speak of the unity of the canon on literary terms the unity of the canon as Holy Scripture
is a distinctively theological unity, which comes from the Spirit’s use of it to bear witness

---

20 Yeago, “The Spirit, the Church and the Scriptures,” 69. (Author’s emphasis)
21 Ibid., 71–2.
to Jesus Christ in his unity with the Father. Thus, his second mandate for a faithful reading is, “seek within scripture’s diversity the unity of the Spirit’s witness to Jesus Christ for the Church.” It is to read all of scripture as a single complex testimony to Christ—the res, as Luther states, to which all scripture points. Yeago thus amends his second mandate to emphasize this complexity. “Do not suppose that you have understood these signs, in their employment by the Spirit, until you have grasped how they pertain to Christ and his messianic domination.”

Yeago devotes the most time to this second mandate. He acknowledges and addresses the wide range of implications for church practices coming out of this second rule, especially as it concerns the reading of the Old Testament as pointing to Jesus Christ. There is no formal method—historical, literary, typological, critical, or allegorical—that can set forth the unity of the canon in abstraction from the theological claims of classical Christian theology.

Within this second mandate, Yeago reflects on the internal diversity of scripture and the need to interpret scripture from within the analogy of faith. Yeago turns to the exegetical rules of Johann Gerhard to highlight the church’s longstanding understanding of the complex relationship of textual particularity and diversity in a canon which is the one voice of the Spirit bearing witness to the single purpose of God. Gerhard lays down three concise rules for interpreting scripture, which Yeago summarizes. The sense of

---

22 Ibid., 71.
23 Ibid., 72.
24 Yeago states on p. 78 that this is in contrast to modernist hermeneutics who call into questions scripture’s authority by the internal diversity of scripture because “the canon is only conceived of from the start as a mere accumulation of pieces, each equally authoritative because it is in the Bible.” The liturgical tradition embodies Yeago’s second mandate. An epistle is read with the Gospel but with the Gospel reading in the place of emphasis, with the congregation called to stand and rise to greet the present Lord, speaks of a pattern of engaging the whole of scripture as it orients us toward Jesus Christ.
scripture is to be construed from within scripture; all interpretation is governed by the
rule of faith as summarized in the Apostle’s Creed; and texts are to be explicated on the
basic of the more common and clear parts of scripture. All three rules, Yeago notes, are
based on faithful, deferential attentiveness to the text.25

Yeago sees inherent in the first rule of intertextuality the possibility of a critique
of scripture from inside rather than outside the canon, building on the ancient rule of
analogy of faith. He hopes that his implicit critical dimensions in interpretation can be a
response to the modern moral critique of feminists and others who argue that the
authority of scripture is destructive.

Continuous Purpose: The Bridge between Old Texts and New Ears

Yeago’s third rule for reading scripture has to do with his claim that the textually
fixed discourse of scripture is the single address of the Spirit to the church across time
and contexts. Following the logic of inspiration how are we to approach the relationship
between text, interpreter and contemporary audience? To address this question and to
explicate this final rule he turns to an example of preaching at an ordination service. The
relationship he outlines between scripture, church, and interpreter, springing from the
logic of inspiration, echoes a cultural-linguistic homiletic.

Yeago uses the example of a passage from I Cor. 4:2 read at an ordination service.
He asks, how do we cross the gulf between Paul’s context and the context of ordained
ministry, which did not exist when Paul wrote these words to the Christians in Corinth? It

25 Ibid.66.
is up to the preacher to create the bridge between these words addressed to a situation long since gone, and to make them matter in some way in the current setting.

Based on the logic of inspiration, Yeago presents another way to apply the words of Paul across time. He begins with the liturgical setting in which the words are spoken and heard. In the context of the prayers for the invocation of the Spirit these words do not appear as a resource in which the newly ordained can find “relevant themes and promises.” Rather, they delineate the shape of the obedience which has just been laid on the shoulders of the newly ordained. Yeago insists, The words of Paul “do not offer to speak meaning fully within the horizon of the perceptions and desires of the ordained; they prescribe for them the horizon within which they will from now on live.”

Yeago emphasizes the role of the liturgy to establish the context in which the church gathers and knows the purposes of God. He speaks specifically of the context of the ordination service, for that is the example he is using, but his claims about the liturgical context speak of all liturgical settings. In the invocation in the ordination service the outpouring of the gifts is identified with the outpouring of the Spirit. What is evoked is the new context of Easter and Pentecost, “in which the church lives as the people gathered and formed by the Spirit to bear witness to Christ as his body in the world.” This is the context in which the words of Paul make sense, within the continuum of divine purpose and divine action.

Here is the bridge between old texts and new ears. It is not in the preacher’s efforts to sell the scripture by making it meaningful or relevant to needs or problems, but

---

27 Ibid., 87–8.
28 Ibid., 86.
in the discernment of the Spirit’s use of it in the church across time for the single purpose of God. Yeago writes:

Within this continuum, the discernment of analogies between Paul’s words and the present occasion is not the attempt to construct a narrow and unsteady bridge correlating events in the distant past with our concerns….Relevance is not established by coordinating the text with the expectations, perceptions, and felt needs of the hearers, but by bringing the hearers themselves into the realm, inhabited alike by Paul, the Corinthian believers, and the contemporary church, where the intentions articulated in the text hold sway.29

Yeago does not prescribe a mandate per se for this rule of applying scripture as he does with the first and second rule. But if he did it might read like this: don’t stop listening until you have discerned what the Spirit is saying to your church as a part the one church across time in the continuum of divine purpose.

Here Yeago address Lose’s concern about Lindbeck’s claim that scripture absorbs the world and thereby denigrates the created world and reverses the evangelical thrust of the preaching. Yeago acknowledges that the business of bringing the hearers into the realm where the intentions of the text hold sway is complex and multi-dimensional. In one sense, as I have argued in Chapter One, the realm where the text holds sway is all of creation, for the Messiah attested to in scripture is Lord of heaven and earth. In this sense, Yeago says, we enter that realm where the intentions of the text hold sway by the conversion of mind and heart, in order to live not by illusion but by truth.30 But in another sense, he claims, the church is that realm, because it is the church, through the Spirit, that knows and confesses that the resurrection has taken place, and it is the church that seeks to be formed in that truth though word and action. Thus there is a double framework; but Yeago argues that there is a single entry into the realm where the

29 Ibid., 88.
30 Ibid., 89.
intentions of the text hold sway, whether in the church or the world. That single entry is baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection and the implications of that for the Christian life. “The applicative dimension of scriptural interpretation is therefore essentially an exercise in the anamnesis of baptism.” 31

Summary

Yeago’s doctrine of inspiration is based on the Spirit’s sacramental use of the textually fixed discourse of scripture to the church across time and contexts. The Spirit uses scripture to bear witness to the Church, and the Church is the witness to Jesus Christ as the son of the God of Israel and his messianic domination, which the Spirit bears to the nations. Yeago’s doctrine is based on the church’s distinctive knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the double attestation in scripture to Christ’s resurrection as a part of that event, and the privileged place of the church in the Spirit’s mission to the nations. Yeago hopes that such a doctrine might lead to renewed ecclesial practices of interpretation and lays out three rules for reading scripture based on the Spirit’s use of scripture as text and discourse: Pay meticulous attention to the text; don’t stop paying attention until you understand all of scripture as pertaining to Jesus Christ; and, in my own words, don’t stop listening until you have discerned what the Spirit is saying to your church as a part the one church across time in the continuum of divine purpose.

Willimon has argued that a cultural-linguistic approach to preaching, despite its intentions, is too anthropologically grounded, muting God’s voice because the Spirit’s agency has been replaced by descriptions of human language and cultures. Here I have argued that David Yeago’s doctrine of the inspiration of scripture shows how the Spirit

31 Ibid., 90.
takes as its own the human constructs of language and culture, here scripture and the
curch, and makes them divine discourse, and public witness, to the nations of Jesus
Christ, son of the God of Israel.

*An Anglican Understanding of the Church and Scripture:*

*Believing is Belonging*

The concerns raised by Willimon and Lose about the dangers of focusing on the
language and practices of the faith as the expense of personal fidelity can easily be raised
as well about an Anglican approach to worship. The focus on the external form of
worship, as ordered by *The Book of Common Prayer*, is often interpreted as an emphasis
on external appearance and conformance in lieu of personal trust and fidelity. There is
some truth to this concern about the Anglican Church. In keeping with the characteristics
of a cultural-linguistic approach to religion, believing is understood as belonging and
participating in the worship and practices of the church.

In this section I briefly present the theological commitments which are the
foundation of the Anglican Church’s self-understanding. The Anglican Church is the
context for my own preaching and the context for my research into a preaching method.
Here I try to describe some of the hermeneutical and homiletical implications of an
Anglican understanding of the Spirit’s use of scripture in the church. In doing so I hope
to show that it shares many of the characteristics with Yeago’s work.

To read Yeago into an Anglican hermeneutic is not necessarily anachronistic. The
particular character of Anglican worship, belief and practices has its roots in the English
Reformation of the 16th century and Yeago is reaching back to a pre-modern
understanding of the church as the privileged location for scriptural interpretation and a renewed version of classical exegesis. In the Anglican Church believing is understood primarily as belonging to, and participating in, a community formed by the Holy Spirit according to the external word of God. That community is the body of Christ and corporate worship is an enactment of the unity the church is given through its participation in Jesus Christ. Liturgy proclaims the context in which to hear scripture, which is the resurrection, and our response to scripture is understood in terms of worship and enactment.

Richard Hooker and The Book of Common Prayer

It is not possible to describe an Anglican understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in scripture and the Church with which all Anglicans would agree. But the use of The Book of Common Prayer in corporate worship remains the defining element of Anglican worship across cultural and theological lines throughout the Anglican Communion. The descriptions in this section are grounded in the ordering of Anglican worship according to The Book of Common Prayer and Richard’s Hooker’s theological unveiling of its foundation in The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity.

---


The Anglican Church and the particular character of Anglican worship, beliefs, and practices has its roots in the English Reformation of the 16th century and the centrality of common worship according *The Book of Common Prayer*. *The Book of Common Prayer*, compiled by Thomas Cranmer, was first published in 1549 and its stable character was achieved in its second edition of 1559 under Queen Elizabeth I. It is the most important text, second only to the Bible, in the Anglican tradition. In 1593 Richard Hooker published the first four books of the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* as a defense of the practices of the Church of England. Book V, on Anglican Faith and Worship, published in 1597 is a defense, but more so an irenic explanation of Anglican faith and worship. To this day it is still considered the definitive articulation of the theology of Cranmer’s prayer book.34

Richard Hooker distinguishes between the invisible and visible church, focusing primarily on the latter since, though they are one, the invisible is known only to God. He describes the fundamental Anglican understanding of the relationship between church and scripture: believing is understood as belonging and participating in the worship and practices of the church. Hooker scholar, John Booty, notes that this is in accord with George Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic model.

“Hooker would, I believe, agree to the fundamentals of Lindbeck’s argument, the objective nature of the Christian message molding and shaping the self and its world, through the salvific story and through participation in common liturgy—the liturgy of the people themselves formed by the external word. Believing is

---

mainly belonging in a community formed by an external word—the theological/liturgical given.”

The Privileged Place of the Visible Church Formed by the External Word

Consistently, from the time of its origins in the English Reformation, the Anglican church has never defined itself as an assembly of the elect alone, or based membership on right belief or living. Just the opposite. It consciously defined itself to be an assembly of “the healthy and sick alike” “impious idolaters, wicked heritiques, personal excommunicable, yea and cast out for notorious improbitie.” What defines membership is baptism and the common outward profession of the one faith in the one Lord in whom there is one baptism.

“The healthy and sick alike should remain in the same body so long as each retain, by outward profession, that vital substance of truth that distinguishes the Christian religion from religions that do not acknowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ is the blessed Saviour of mankind, gives no credence to the glorious Gospel, and hold in derision His Sacraments, which are the guarantors of salvation.

This focus on outward or external forms—the forms laid out in Cranmer’s Prayer Book—is not about substituting practices for personal faith or manner of life. It is, in part, a confession of the church’s inability to judge. The church understands itself as always in need of correction, yet it also maintains that only God, not itself, can judge a person. “There are many things that can exclude us from God’s kingdom that do not

---

36 Laws, V.68.5
37 Laws, III.7
38 Laws, V.68
separate us from the Church." But more so this definition of the church is based on the belief, as Booty describes it, in the objective nature of the Christian message molding and shaping the self and its world, through the salvific story and through participation in common liturgy—the liturgy of the people themselves formed through the Holy Spirit by the external word. Here we begin to see an Anglican understanding of God’s agency within scripture and the church. This focus on outward forms and profession as the central character of Anglicanism is based on the conviction of Christ’s transforming presence in the Church, the mutual participation of the baptized in the communion of saints, and the power of the outward forms to conform us to Christ, because those forms are scripture’s own.

Hooker definition of the church is highly Christological. The church is those believers whose fellowship is both created and defined by their fellowship in God through Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. “For his Church he knoweth and loveth, so that they which are in the Church are thereby known to be in him.” This understanding of becoming a part of Christ in his Church is the foundation of Anglican ecclesiology. Our participation in the fellowship of the Trinity and the saints—the unity that is the Spirit’s testimony to the nations—is only made possible by Jesus Christ, who incorporates us into himself in his body.

We are in Christ only by our incorporation into the society that has Him as their head and, together with Him, makes a single body sharing a single name (Colossians 2:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12). By virtue of this mystical conjunction, we are of Him and in Him, just as if our very flesh and bones were an extension of His (Ephesians 5:30) (V.56.8)... God made Eve out of the rib of Adam. He formed His Church out of the flesh, the wounded and bleeding side of the Son of

---

39 Laws, V.68.6
40 Laws, V56.7 (my emphasis)
Man. . . In this sense the words of Adam might be suitably the words of Christ, when He speak of His Church as ‘flesh of my flesh and bones of my bones.’

Hooker describes this gathering of the baptized into Christ’s flesh, “the mystery of Christ’s coherence” or conjunction with us “by participation in the life of the only begotten Son of God, whose life is the well-spring and cause of our lives (John 14:19; Ephesians 5:23). This doctrine of coherence—the church is of him and in him—leads to the creedal affirmation of the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The naming of Cranmer’s prayer book as *The Book of Common Prayer* highlights the primacy given in the Anglican tradition to corporate worship: common rather than private or individual prayer; prayer or worship before teaching, exhortation, or confession. Corporate worship is an enactment of the unity the church is given through its participation in Jesus Christ.

Here we see an Anglican unveiling of the privileged place of the church in the economy of salvation, which is one of the three theological confessions on which Yeago’s doctrine of inspiration rests. The church is the Spirit’s witness to the nations, because in its common worship and life it witnesses to its participation in the unity of the God of Israel, his Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Its self-understanding is Christocentric: its telos, like that of all of creation, is conformity to Christ over time in the life he shares with the father of complete unity. Because the church is one in Christ, and through him all its members are one with one another, corporate worship is the fullest expression of, and witness to, the life we have received through Christ’s mystical conjunction. Our worship of God in Christ is lived out—enacted—in our relationships within the church and the world.

---

41 *Laws*, V.56.7
42 *Laws*, V.56.7
Hooker describes the difference between the church and other social groups or societies around these two marks: worship and enactment. Worship of God, “the organic complex of ministry, Word and sacrament”, transforms a natural society into a supernatural society that knows no spatial or temporal bonds. To be in Christ and in one another, in communion with God and with one another in God is to live as the redeemed people of God. Hooker described the church as both the new humanity and the locus of our redemption. “The privilege of the visible church of God is to be like the ark of Noah.”

_The Fallible and Corrupt Church_

Anglicans have historically rejected the notion of ecclesial infallibility. The 21st of the Articles of Religion notes the church’s ability to get things wrong. “And when [General Councils] be gathered together, (forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with Spirit and Word of God), they may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God.” The overall shape of The Articles of Religion makes clear that the mediating forms of divine life, revealed in Christ Jesus, through the Old and New Testaments, is the necessary response to Church’s innate fallibility and human corruption. Human corruption demands the intervention of divine

---

43 Booty, _Reflections on the Theology of Richard Hooker_, 74.
44 _Laws_, V.68.6
46 The 21st Article cited above enshrines coherence with “holy scripture” as the only authoritative template for the Church, and Articles 20 focus on this explicitly. Article 20, “The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed
form within human existence, whose self-giving in the flesh is the actual temporal expression of divine truth (cf. John 1:17f.). Hooker held to the notion of human corruption, the fallibility of the church, and the need for scripture’s cure. “How should our festered sores be cured, but that God hath delivered a law as sharp as the two-edged sword, piercing the very closest and most unreachable corners of the heart, which the law of Nature hardly, human laws by no means possible, reach unto?” 47

The scripture provides, among other things, “positive supernatural law” that actually tells an otherwise confused and blinded human mind and heart what is true. “The natural understanding of whole nations [has] been darkened, that they have not discerned […] gross iniquity to be sin” he writes, pointing out that whole peoples and cultures require the external guidance of God to recognize right and wrong. 48 Likewise the church. Scripture, according to Hooker, must be the final adjudicator of disputed questions within the church, even among “Fathers or councils.” 49

…that which we see with our eyes, is not thought so sure as that which the scripture of God teacheth; because we hold that his speech revealeth there what himself seeth, and therefore the strongest proof of all, and the most necessarily assented by us is the scripture.” 50

---

47 Laws, I:xi
48 Laws, II:vii.6
49 Laws, III: iii.3
50 Laws, II:vii

for the necessity of Salvation. Article 34, It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one and utterly alike; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men’s manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. Whosoever through his private judgment, willingly and purposely, doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, (that others may fear to do the like,) as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the Magistrate, and woundeth the consciences of the weak brethren.”
The origins of *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Anglican Church lie in a particular understanding of the Holy Spirit’s employment of scripture in the church which has much in common with Yeago’s doctrine of inspiration. The words of scripture are sacramental. The Holy Spirit uses the very words of scripture over time to conform us to Jesus Christ. But the Spirit also works to create a corporate culture within the Church that is shaped by scripture, so that the church is a place to guard the reading and hearing of scripture, and a community where the Spirit’s power to conform us to Christ is embodied in its practices and its mission. Thus the Spirit’s mission is always textually mediated and lived out in *profession* and *enactment*.

The articulation of a particular Anglican understanding of the Christian gospel began in response to the Puritans petition to the English Parliament to free them from the legal burden of using *The Book of Common Prayer* in their worship. Particularly offensive to them was the use of scripture in *The Book of Common Prayer*: the praying together of the words of scripture through Psalms, canticles, such as the Magnificat and Nunc Dimmitis, through versicles, responsorials and collects.

In response the Puritan objection to this use of scripture, Hooker articulated an Anglican understanding of the Spirit’s use of scripture. The emphasis is on the Spirit’s use of the words of scripture as God’s address, but also on our reception of them. As Christ incorporates the baptized into his own Body, the baptized incorporate the Spirit’s words into their own bodies. Hooker explained that scripture’s words were filled with the Holy Spirit in order to make these words, and the scriptural figures who spoke them,
our words and our form of being. To make them our words is to be touched by the Holy Spirit itself, to be shaped by the hand of God himself. The Puritans believed that scripture was to be taught. Anglicans believed it was to be prayed as well as taught.

Other people’s prayers’ are vehicles of transformation and salvation, if their ‘otherness’ is found in the scriptures of God. As we immerse our ‘selves in this Scriptural ‘otherness’, God change us. God saves through shaping us into the image of Jesus Christ, as it is given in the scriptures; and the very words of scripture are the primary tool of Jesus’ reshaping of our lives.\(^\text{51}\)

---

**An Anglican Hermeneutic and Homiletic**

Anglicanism is committed neither to a bare scripturalism nor to the reading of scripture through a particular doctrinal lens. Its hermeneutic is intratextual, located in an understanding—as described in scripture—of God’s purposes through his Son for creation. Just as all creation is groaning for its full redemption in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:10), so human destiny is oriented toward our conformity to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29, etc.) An Anglican hermeneutic is not simply oriented toward the revealing of the Good News of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, but in the explicit recognition of the purposes of the promises of the Gospel. The Spirit uses the words of scripture to the degree that they display and further this cosmic destiny.

---

George Sumner and Ephraim Radner outline several characteristics of Anglican scriptural commitments. These rules for reading scripture, coming out of an understanding of the Spirit’s use of it in the church, have much in common with Yeago’s ecclesial practice of interpretation: attend to scripture’s words; read scripture from its center, Jesus Christ and its providential character; and finally, read it by the rule of mutual subjection.

**Attend to Scripture’s Words**

The very words of scripture are sacramental. Because of the Anglican confidence in the Holy Spirit’s use of the scripture to conform us to Christ, Anglicanism is founded on a trust in the divine power to transform us as we immerse ourselves in the words of scripture over time. Rather than a simple sociological understanding of enculturation, this is Anglicanism’s central claim about the Spirit’s redemptive power and purpose. Thus, Radner and Sumner’s first mandate for interpreting scripture is similar to Yeago’s, “*Take the actual words of scripture seriously, all of them, even when they grate and hurt, as words intended by God for us* ‘on whom the end of the ages has come’.”

**Read from its Centre, Jesus Christ**

---

52 Ibid., 5–6.
53 Ibid., 10. My italics.
Secondly, all scripture is providentially ordered by God around the presentation and the form of Jesus Christ. Christ ‘appears’ in all the scriptures: in creation, in Israel’s life and law, in the fate of the nations, in the mission of the church and the end of the ages. It is in the reading and praying of all the scripture in their entirety and detail that we are conformed to Christ. Their second mandate is also similar to Yeago’s. “Step beyond the boundary limiting the historical critic’s range, and travel into that realm where by the power of the Holy Spirit, the whole scripture is received in its coherent focus and force as the revelation of Jesus’ form and figure.”

Read by the Rule of Mutual Subjection

The discipline of common worship is the root embodiment of the gospel’s aim, which is conformance to Jesus Christ’s life of self-giving and subjection as described in the Creeds and enacted in the Eucharist. Thus their third mandate, like their first and second, is similar to Yeago’s third. “Read all of scripture by the rule of mutual corporate subjection, which is the shape of Jesus’ own sacrifice of love.”

An Anglican Homiletic

There is not specifically an Anglican approach to preaching just as there is no set method of interpretation of scripture. But an Anglican conviction of the purpose, use, and telos of scripture within the church leads, at a minimum, to a clear commitment to

54 Ibid. My italics.
55 Ibid., 6.
biblical preaching for the building up of the corporate church, lived in its practices and
commom life of worship and service. Because of the Spirit’s use of the words of scripture
to conform us to Christ in his church, it is difficult to argue for an Anglican approach to
preaching that correlates Christ or the Christian message with human experience which
can be discerned apart from the words and story of scripture

Summary

Both Yeago’s doctrine of inspiration and an Anglican ecclesiology locate the
Spirit’s work *intra ecclesiam*—from within the church as a decisive cognitive context
for interpretation. Yeago argues that a faithful reading does not suppress the church’s
particular ecclesial knowledge. A faithful reading of scripture must be consistent with
what the church knows about scripture and the Spirit’s use of it within the economy of
salvation. Likewise in the Anglican Church scripture is sacramental. The Spirit uses the
words of scripture over time to conform us to Jesus Christ; and further, the Spirit works
to create a corporate culture within the Church that is shaped by scripture, and to create a
community where the Spirit’s power to conform us to Christ is embodied in its
practices and its mission. In other words, the Spirit’s mission is always textually
mediated and lived out in *profession* and *enactment*.

What does this shared locating of the Spirit’s working within the church, what we
might call an ecclesial pneumatology, offer to an approach to preaching? At a minimum,
as I will argue in the next chapter, it means that the hermeneutical and homiletical
implications of the ecclesial location in which the text and interpreter are located, the
ecclesial location of the Spirit’s work, are our primary business as preachers.
CHAPTER THREE

THE CHURCH AS HABITAT FOR HEARING JESUS

I had never thought about question five before (what do he say of us?)—that the scripture was about our corporate identity. That was new to me.
-- A Research participant.

In the last chapter I argued that an Anglican ecclesiology and approach to reading scripture are consonant with both Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic understanding of the church and Yeago’s renewed doctrine of inspiration and its interpretative consequences.

In this chapter I present my own argument for a cultural-linguistic homiletic method. I present that method, the Six Questions of the Sermon, in the following chapter. Here my argument is theological. My conversation partners are many. They are theologians and homileticians ranging from Augustine and Luther to Lucy Rose and Richard Hays, as well as the many to whom I have referred or described in the introduction and first two chapters.

My aim is similar to George Lindbeck’s though far more modest. His aim is to offer an alternative to a liberal method of correlation which is both rooted in scripture and the Christian tradition and deeply responsive to the genuine needs of the present age.¹ My aim is to offer an approach to preaching which is an alternative to a method of correlating the symbols of scripture with a universal human experience and is responsive to the needs of a post-modern world. Like Lindbeck, I turn to the Christian sources themselves to articulate those needs; in doing so I retrieve an understanding of the shared identity of the preacher and people coming from the writings of St. Augustine. I am

proposing a method for the practice of preaching which is built on specific theological commitments. Because the focus is on practice, however, and not the descriptive task of theology per se, I carefully sidestep some of the metaphysical debates Lindbeck’s approach and the post-modern age has engendered.²

One of the needs of the post-modern world to which I am trying to respond is the erosion of confidence in the Gospel. The erosion is due in part to the decreasing confidence in first order Christian language and practices (see Introduction), but also to the lack of practice in carefully reading and listening to scripture. Our ability to know how to receive this God-given divine discourse and our ability to know what to do with scripture’s textual particularity are both in need of remediation. Our perceptive powers to see, as Augustine claims, that what is written in the scriptures is better and truer—even if its meaning is hidden—than anything we could think of by ourselves are weakened indeed.³ Thus, to take as a starting point an intratextual reading of scripture is both a theological commitment and a homiletical strategy. I hope that my homiletic method will offer one way to strengthen the preacher’s perceptive power to see the possible wisdom of Augustine’s claim.

My argument is this. The hermeneutical and homiletical implications of the ecclesial location in which text and interpreters are situated are our primary business as preachers. The church is the natural habitat for hearing God’s word and within this context our many social locations are rooted. My hope is that exploring the hermeneutical

---

² I find helpful David Lose’s use of Donna Haraway’s idea of “situated knowledge.” It is distinguished from objective knowledge by its acknowledgement of its socio-cultural position. It professes to describe the real without appeal to foundationally guaranteed objectivity. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003), 2–55.

³ Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 142.
and homiletical implications of this habitat offers fruitful ways to preach in a post-
modern world. My homiletic method shifts the focus in preaching away from trying to
correlate scripture with a universal human experience to hearing scripture as God’s
address of us and claiming the identity God offers us in Jesus Christ in the church. Our
identities are enacted in response to Christ’s address in and for the world.

In order to develop my argument for a homiletic method which focuses on
scripture as God’s address to us and the identity offered to us in Jesus Christ, I turn to the
ecclesial location of scripture as the decisive cognitive context for its interpretation. I
will argue that because the Word is God’s constitutive relationship with the world we can
locate our identities first as hearers of God’s Word, through God’s action in Jesus Christ,
and then through anthropological or existential claims. Because scripture is the single
voice or address of a living God, our primary and shared identity—across various social
locations—is as hearers of the Word. As I develop the homiletical implications of our
common identity as hearers of God’s address in Jesus Christ, I hope to show that this
provides one possible way to preach in a post-modern world.

In *Preaching and the Other* Ronald Allen writes, “to be postmodern is to respect
difference and otherness, to appreciate pluralism and particularity, and to recognize the
social conditioning and relativity of all awareness.”⁴ How can my homiletic method,
which is based on a received, universal identity, be of use in a world which has as a chief
hallmark the appreciation of particularity and the social conditioning of all awareness and
the otherness of our neighbor? I am suggesting that Jesus Christ’s embrace of

---

⁴ Ronald Allen, *Preaching and the Other: The Other, Deconstruction: Themes for the Pulpit in a
Postmodern Setting* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2009), 15.
particularity, as rendered in scripture and embodied in the practices of the church, offers us a way forward in this post-modern world. Christ’s embrace of human particularity suggests that it is possible to neither capitulate to a universalized or abstracted understanding of the other, or to reduce otherness to a struggle for dominance.

This reframing of our shared identity as hearers of God’s Word does not negate the importance of the social locations of the preacher and people in hearing, interpreting, and preaching scripture. It does not negate or devalue the need to exegete scripture and one’s congregation in the task of preaching. Preaching is local and quotidian. Rather, I will argue that this reframing enhances the ability to hear God’s address to us, because it claims the distinctive context of the church as the primary location for hearing God’s address in the context of our many particular social locations.

I will argue that to claim the church as the primary location for hearing God’s address in the context of our many particular social locations enhances the ability to hear that address. To support this claim I turn to three characteristics of the church, which arise from its distinctive knowledge about God and scripture (See Chapter Two). The three characteristics are first, that the church, Christ’s body, is poised to listen to God’s address. Second, the church provides the necessary context for hearing and receiving God’s address. Third, the practices of the church are the embodiment of both the one who addresses us, Jesus Christ, and our response.

Do I put too much confidence in the church? Am I underestimating the power of the church to silence certain voices, to hear and speak falsely about God, and to act with

---

5 To claim the church as the primary location for hearing God’s address is not to assert that the church is infallible or has not been an instrument of injustice or harm. It has repeatedly failed to live into its vocation.
violence and injustice in God’s name? The answer to both questions is, perhaps. The Anglican Church is no stranger to institutional injustice and contested doctrine. The church, as Dr. George Sumner, the Principal of Wycliffe College, has described it, is a place of “faith and holiness mixed with human confusion and grasping, like those wheat and tares in Jesus’ parable”. Yet, in the face of this flawed reality, Sumner goes on to say, that “Even in the chapel of the Kingdom of heaven, the Church is a cracked clay pot in which the jewel of the Gospel is found.” With Sumner I have confidence that the Gospel is found there, even as our Reformation roots remind us that the Church both proclaims and distorts the Gospel. This distortion reminds us of the eschatological character of all we do—“we are pilgrims, sinners, redeemed, all at once, and so is the Church we inhabit.”

The third and final point of my argument is that the ecclesial location of preaching has implications in several areas of concern to homileticians. I will address three areas of homiletic concern in some detail later in the chapter. They are the authority of the preacher, narrative and inductive preaching, and questions of correlation. Here let me address two additional concerns very briefly: the goal of preaching and the form of the sermon. Within a post-liberal homiletic an additional goal of preaching is to build the church and to situate the practice of preaching within the web of church practices. David Lose writes that because preaching is a part of a web of practices it does not have

---

6 The history of abuse in residential schools run by the Anglican Church in Canada between 1820 and 1969 and the current debates and divisions over the of marriage and the ordination of homosexual bishops are two examples of the fallibility of the church. For a brief overview of the abuse in residential schools see the historical sketch on the Mission and Justice page of the Anglican Church of Canada website. For an overview of the doctrinal divisions in the Anglican Communion see “The Windsor Report”, The Lambeth Commission on Communion, (Lambeth, England, 2004).

7 George Sumner, Wycliffe College Handbook, (Toronto: Wycliffe), 2010-11, 6.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 It is not primarily to recreate the experience of the text for the listener, a goal of the New Homiletic.
to shoulder the whole conversation of a church. The focus is on preaching as a cumulative practice within the context of the many practices in the church, rather than on preaching as an event; and, in part, because of preaching’s cumulative character this approach leaves open questions of form.

We Are All Hearer’s of God’s Word

Because the Word is God’s constitutive relationship with the world we can locate our identity as hearers of God’s Word through God’s action in Jesus Christ, as well as through anthropological or existential claims. It is God, not us, who is capable of making us hearers of his Word; scripture testifies and the church claims that God has done just that. The Psalmist says of God, “You have given us ears to hear you” (Psalm 40:7, Isaiah 50:1).

In his lectures on Genesis, Luther works out this fundamental aspect of the divine human relationship. The Word is God’s essential and constitutive element in his relationship with the world. Jaroslav Pelikan, in his introduction to Luther’s expository works, writes, “Luther contended that whatever God might be in and of himself apart from the created world, in the creation He had put relations between Himself and the world upon the foundations of the Word of God.”

Luther writes,

---

11 Lose, Confessing Jesus Christ, 109.
He does not speak grammatical words; He speaks true and existent realities. Accordingly, that which among us has the sound of a word is a reality with God. Thus, sun, moon, heaven, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you, etc.—we are all words of God, in only one single syllable or letter by comparison with the entire creation. We too speak, but according to the rules of language; that is, we assign names to objects that have already been created. But the divine rule of language is different, namely, when He says: “Sun, shine,” the sun is there at once and shines. Thus the words of God are realities, not bare words.”…He created the world and all things with the greatest of ease, namely, by speaking. There is no more effort for God in His creation than there is for us in the mention of it.  

This fundamental aspect of the divine human relationship is seen in creation, in God’s relationship to Israel, and in Jesus Christ. Jesus is both the proclaimer of the Word and the Word itself. At the beginning of the Gospels Jesus’ arrival is marked by his proclamation of the Word: “the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk 1:15). The Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, as Charles Campbell points out, is the only sword Jesus will raise against the powers of this violent world (Eph. 6:7). He takes up this divine sword—the Word spoken and in the flesh—both in his proclamation and as he is lifted high on the cross. As Barth says, “The word of God is the act of God. …There is no point in looking about for a related act.”

Both Ezekiel’s preaching to the dry bones of the house of Israel and Jesus’ raising of Lazarus testify to the claim that it is God, not us, who is capable of making us hearers of the Word. In both, the ability to hear God does not come through any anthropological, political, or existential claim. The Lord commands Ezekiel to preach to the dry bones of Israel. “Prophesy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord” (37: 4). Ezekiel does so and through his preaching the house of Israel hears God’s

---

promise, “I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves. O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel” (37:12). In John’s Gospel Jesus stands before another set of dry bones—the dead body of Lazarus. Here Jesus speaks directly to the dead man. “Lazarus, come out.” An obvious point in both stories is that bones have no ears and dead men cannot hear. Only God can make the bones of Israel and the corpse of Lazarus capable of hearing him speak. The witness of scripture is that God has done just this. Returning to Luther’s lectures on Genesis, he writes, “as the private Word spoken into the unformed mass of heaven and earth creates life out of nothing, so too God’s public Word as Gospel spoken into the hearts of humans creates faith in them.”¹⁶ Luther writes in his sermon on the opening of John’s prologue, “In the end only the Holy Spirit from above can create listeners.”¹⁷

In God’s constitutive relationship with the world, God gives us a common identity despite our differences and divisions. God has made all of us listeners of his Word. I am only arguing that God’s Word, as his constitutive relationship with the world, creates the fundamental condition for faith, which is the capacity to hear God. A homiletic method based on the common identity we share as hearers of the Word does not negate our various social locations and identities. It precedes them epistemologically, but it does not negate them. Our creation as listeners of God’s word is the soil in which all our particularities take root.

---

¹⁷ *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 22, 8
In this first point I am making an argument about identity which is similar to Yeago’s about contextuality.\(^\text{18}\) Yeago argues that the “contextuality” of understanding requires two crucial contexts. It requires the context of the interpreter’s social location, but only as it is embedded within the “context” of the interpreter’s beliefs about the world at large, the historical situation, and the text to be interpreted. It is this context of belief that sets the interpreter, the text, and the social-historical situation into concerted relations with one another, and brings them to bear on one another. In other words, the Spirit’s work is textually mediated both within the particular context of the believer and the context of belief.

Yeago gives the example of the poor reading the Bible to demonstrate the necessity of understanding the need for two crucial contexts. To talk only of the interests of the poor due to their economic location is to yield to the postmodern temptation to reduce the interpretation of texts to a series of moves in a struggle for dominance. Yeago reminds us that the Christian poor read the Bible to do more than figure out which parts are in their own interest. To appeal to the two interpretative contexts of the poor is to recognize that their interpretative practices reflect and embody deeply held beliefs about what is the case in the universe at large as well as their own situation. The Bible is read by the Christian poor not simply because they are poor, but because of what they hold to be true about God, the world, poverty, the biblical texts themselves, and God’s future. “If they read the scriptures as bearing immediately on their own situation, it is because they believe that the whole world is presided over by one ‘who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry’ (Psalm 146:7)—one to whom tyranny and

hungrers are matters of pressing concern.”¹⁹ Thus the Spirit’s work is textually mediated both within the particular context of the believer and the context of belief.

Yeago’s point is that there is no neat distinction between one’s social location and the context of beliefs. “Traffic runs both ways.”²⁰ Our beliefs shape the kind of significance we give to social locations and our own self-interests. He offers the example of the middle class or wealthy person of belief, for whom scripture is the word of a God to illustrate the two-way traffic between social context and the context of belief. For such persons of faith, for whom the execution of justice and the lifting up of the down trodden is of urgency, it takes not complex hermeneutic technique to interpret this as bearing directly on both the lives of the poor and the not poor.²¹

Here I extend Yeago’s argument, about the necessity of claiming both the particular context of the believer and the context of belief, to my argument that our various social located are rooted in scripture’s natural habitat, the church. While we are called to exegete our congregations, I argue that our primary task is to listen to scripture’s proclamation, to listen to the text as God’s address, and to help our congregations in their various social locations to become hearers of that address.

The emphasis on our common identity as hearers of the Word is a retrieval of an earlier homiletic understanding of the shared identity of people and preacher. A brief look at St. Augustine’s approach to preaching reveals his emphasis on his diverse congregations as a community of hearers. Immediately after his ordination as a priest, Augustine wrote a letter to his bishop, Valerius, asking for some time to study the scriptures. Valerius had asked Augustine to preach regularly, even though at that time

---

¹⁹ Ibid., 53.
²⁰ Ibid., 54, note 3.
²¹ Ibid., 54.
preaching was primarily limited to bishops. Augustine felt he needed to study the scriptures with an ear for how they speak not to one man in the privacy of his garden, but to the whole church.\(^\text{22}\) How could he preach to and pastor all of his flock, both the classically trained as well as the uneducated and pagans? How could he preach as their pastor? This is what he needed time to figure out. This dilemma has not passed with time. How do we preach today to those who are suspicious of scripture or do not know its basic story? How do we preach to such a wide range of needs, situations, and starting places?

Augustine understood his task as both priest and bishop as inviting inquirers to become a part of Christian community and teaching them how to become an interpreter of the text. He told those who came to hear him that in spite of the fact he was preaching, “we are all hearers.”\(^\text{23}\) In *De Doctrina Christiana* he acknowledges the “diversity” of his congregations and the need to teach and preach accordingly. But this diverse group is all in the same school with him: they all are hearers in the school of the Lord. Thus he saw the task of preaching as helping the congregation learn to listen to scripture speaking.

Paul Kolbet, in *Augustine and the Cure of the Soul*, writes of Augustine,

> His task is not to expound his own opinion but to interpret the scriptures. He gives the text itself a voice by saying, listen to the Holy scriptures preaching. It is Christ who is doing the teaching…His school is one earth, and his school is his own body. The head is teaching his members, the tongue talking to his feet.\(^\text{24}\)

In a sermon thought to be preached in his hometown of Thagaste on James 1:19-22, Augustine confesses this primary and shared identity, “Let me tell you something my brothers and sisters…I tell you that what gives me really solid satisfaction is listening. I repeat the time my satisfaction, my joy is really solid and unalloyed is when I am


\(^{23}\) Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*, 165.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 176.
listening, not when I’m preaching.” His goal was not to pass on for mere reception the authority of the biblical text, but to create a community of interpreters where all are hearers of God’s address. He was confident that the inquirer would have his or her perceptions shaped by this on-going task of listening to Christ speak in scriptures, as his own perceptions had been.

St. Augustine’s declaration—we are all hearers—and the hermeneutical and homiletical implications of helping a congregation learn to listen to scripture speak is central to my homiletic method. Can it be responsive to the concerns addressed by many contemporary homileticians and the challenges of preaching in a post-modern context?

I want to suggest that that an emphasis on our common identity as hearers of the word continues the long-standing and wide-ranging conversation about the authority of both the preacher and the congregation. The primary goal of the homiletic approaches of John McClure and Lucy Atkinson Rose is to close the gap between preacher and congregation. In Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church, Rose articulates a feminist ecclesiology in which she locates the purpose and function of preaching and preacher. Preaching is “communal, heuristic and non-hierarchical whose

25 Augustine, Essential Sermons. Edited by Daniel E. Doyle (Hyde Park, NY. New City Press, 2007), 236. Stanley Fish first coined this phrase in Fish, Stanley, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980). It is used in current preaching literature. Charles Campbell argues that Frei changed his hermeneutical position from a general, literary approach based on the genre of realistic narrative to a particular ‘communal hermeneutic’ focused on the church’s tradition of literal reading. His key categories become not text and interpreter, but scripture and community. This is akin to Augustine’s means of interpreting scripture. See Charles Campbell, Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). See also William Shepherd, “A Rickety Bridge: Biblical Preaching in Crisis,” Anglican Theological Review 80, no. 2 (1998): 186-204.

27 The Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is, in part, an affirmation of the authority of the laity to proclaim the Gospel. It is one of Six Founding Principles of Wycliffe College, “The sufficiency and perfection of Christ’s sacrifice once made upon the cross and the priesthood in Christ of the whole Church, of which the ordained ministry is representative.” See Wycliffe College Handbook, 2010-11 6

purpose form, and content have as its goal the closing of this gap between congregation and preacher. The aim of David Lose in *Confessing Christ* is to offer a way of preaching Jesus as Lord which is not coercive.

Without denying both the power of the pulpit and the history of its abuse, I relocate the gap between preacher and people. The primary gap or chasm scripture describes is between God and God’s creation, and it is within this chasm that our inability to love across the dynamics of otherness is located. In other words, because of human sin preacher and people are on the same side of the gap between God and creation. But because of God’s constitutive relationship with the world, the chasm between preacher and people and across social location has been bridged. Both preacher and people—and all people across their various social locations—are hearers of the Word.

I am suggesting that to take scripture as our starting point for preaching, rather than our fractured post-modern identities, offers a way forward across the chasms of otherness. Within scripture we find our common and individual identities: neither slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, male nor female but joint heirs of Christ. We are offered a kind of freedom which comes from rooting our social contexts in our shared identity as a part of participating in God’s plan to bring all creation together in Jesus Christ. The logic or movement of the narrative of Jesus Christ is the movement from slavery to freedom; it is this movement we embody in worship, in the practices of the church, and try to pattern our particular lives around.

---

29 To this end, Rose defines preaching as the work of the church, whose cornerstone is the experience of solidarity and togetherness, See Rose, *Conversational Preaching*, 89.
30 He does so by trying to maintain a critical distance in preaching, in “which a lively encounter between and hearer can take place through the power of the Holy Spirit,” Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ*, 109.
31 This in contrast to Lowry who begins with the human condition, determined independently of scripture’s description. “The question of the human condition is, I believe, the most fundamental and consequential question of all.” As quoted in Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 164.
Stanley Saunders and Charles Campbell point to some of the implications of our movement in Christ from slavery to freedom in an article, “Anything but Ordinary: Worship and Preaching in Ordinary Time.” They argue that to see the long liturgical season of ordinary time, (which runs from on the Sunday of the Pentecost Sunday until the first Sunday of Advent), in the church as defined by the Christian narrative of eschatological time is to compel us to ask the question, “what is ordinary for Christians?” Worship, they write, provides the answer.

“When we worship it is not important that, for example, we are bankers or teachers, or housewives, that we are males or females, or that we are poor, rich or middle class. Nor does it matter what part of the world we come from, or what color our skin is. During worship we enter into space where the phones (usually!) do not ring, where there is not television or radio on, and where the assumptions and relationships that govern our lives in the business world or at the shopping mall or in the home do no prevail. Rather what defines us during our worship—and this alone—is our common relationship to the God of Jesus Christ.”

Preaching in ordinary time, Saunders and Campbell argue, helps the congregation move into this eschatological time. Because worship “redescribes the world” preaching in this season of eschatological hope helps the church to see the world not solely through its normal social structures, but through this new reality which we share with Jesus Christ and one another.

Thus the first point of my argument is that a cultural-linguistic homiletic defines the listener through God’s constitutive relationship with the world. We are all hearers of God’s Word because God has made us so. The task of preaching is, in part, to help all learn to hear scripture as God addresses us across our social locations. The recognition of our identity in God’s action repositions the gap between preacher and people, and

---

suggests a way forward in this post-modern world of otherness. I now turn to the second point of my argument, which is that the church is the natural habitat for hearing God’s word and within this habitat our social locations are rooted.

The Church’s Distinctive Knowledge for Hearing Jesus

As the article by Saunders and Campbell points out the church is more than a theatre or public gathering place for a group of disparate individuals to hear a sermon or participate in worship. It is a locus of the Spirit’s work. This claim has been made consistently through this thesis that a “pneumatological ecclesiology” is the corner stone of a cultural-linguistic approach to preaching. The Spirit uses words as a medium but also the life of a people formed by the words which are the power and wisdom of God present in the crucified Messiah. As Charles Campbell writes in Preaching Jesus, the integrity of the biblical narrative is inseparably related to a particular community of interpretation.

Here I describe three constitutive characteristics of the church in support of my argument that a cultural-linguistic homiletic enhances the ability to hear God’s voice. They are: The church is a community which is poised to hear God’s address; the church provides the necessary context for beginning to recognize what we are hearing; finally, the practices of the church embody the Word, Jesus Christ, because their form is his own.

33 Hütter argues that Luther, in his description of the core practices of the church, in “On the Councils and the Church” opens the way for a “pneumatological ecclesiology: the church is to be understood as a web of core practices which at the same time mark and constitute the church. These practices are the Spirit’s works through which the Holy Spirit enacts his sanctifying mission in the triune economy of salvation.” Hütter, Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdman’s Pub., 2000), 35. “On the Councils and the Church: in Luther’s Works, vol. 41 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996), 143-78.
34 Campbell, Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology, 181.
As a part of my exploration of these three constitutive characteristics I will turn to
scripture and particularly the annunciation and birth of Jesus from Luke’s Gospel.

*The Church is a Community which is Poised to Hear God’s Address*

Listening to God’s address is hard. Eli and Samuel in the temple tell us at least
this. If it was easy the church would not have developed the discipline of *lectio divinia*
and Cramner would not have created the structure of the daily offices to protect the
reading and hearing of “the very pure Word of God, the holy scriptures.”35

Unfortunately little in western culture encourages people to cultivate the skills
needed to listen. It now takes only portions of seconds to elicit impatience from the users
of iPhones, apps, and Google. If the elimination of any need for patience is a marketing
device in the competitive field of electronic communication, how and where we can be
encouraged to develop and practice the skills, patience, and perseverance needed to
listen to the strange words of scripture, which Augustine calls, “words and deeds rolled
up and concealed in the fleshly coverings”?36 Kolbet, in his retrieval of Augustine’s
classical idea of the cure of the soul aptly writes, “The world of signification we live in
today is one where we are impatient with signification that does not refer to ourselves.”37
“Religions,” Lindbeck writes, “have become foreign texts that are much easier to
translate into current popular categories than to read in terms of their intrinsic sense.”38 It

---

35 “…nothing is ordained to be read, but the very pure Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, or that which is
agreeable to the same; and that in such a Language and Order as it is most easy and plain for the
understanding both of the Readers and Hearers.” The Original Preface (1549) To *the Book of Common
36 Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*, 158.
37 Ibid., 186.
is easy to see the Schleiermacherian appeal of asking what these words mean to me or what they express about me.

In this context of eroding skills and declining patience for hearing the strange voice of scripture the church claims that it is a community poised to hear God’s voice. To situate the strange task of listening to God’s address within community, in and of itself, as Augustine says, speaks of the social nature of sin and grace. He observed that Adam’s sin had to do with joining a community turned toward itself, bounded off from God. At its most basic level the church functions as a community for hearing—albeit imperfectly and often not at all—because it is turned outward toward Christ and its neighbor.\(^{39}\)

Anne Lamott, in her spiritual autobiography, gives a similar, though far more colloquial, description of the church as an outward facing community. She does so in the context of negotiating with her 14 year old son how often he has to come to church. Her son is the only one of his friends who has to spend Sunday morning in church. She explains to her reader the reasons for her insistence on making him come to church with her (though she has compromised on the frequency).

We live in bewildering, drastic times, and a little spiritual guidance never killed anyone. I think it’s a fair compromise that every other week he has to come to the place that has been a tap for me: I want him to see the people who have loved me when I felt most unlovable who have loved him since I first told them I was pregnant, even though he might not want to be with them, I want him to see their faces. He gets the most valuable things I know through osmosis. And there are worse things for kids than to have to spend time with people who love God. Teenagers who do not go to church are adored by God, but they don’t get to meet some of the people who love God back. And learning to love back is the hardest part of being alive.\(^{40}\)

---

Lamott describes the church as a place where people try (and often fail) to love God back, frequently through trying to love their neighbor. Augustine describes the church not an island of holiness in a profane sea, but as a field spread throughout the world in which wheat and tares grow side by side awaiting the final threshing floor. In this vast field, the healthy and the sick gather, and together are pointed outward toward God and neighbor. The foundation stance of the church is outward: arms, hearts, mouths and ears open toward God and neighbor. Hear, O Israel, Listen, church, to what the Spirit is saying to you. There are few places where we listen together—take out our ear buds, put down our i-phones and listen together to words read aloud. The preacher takes her place within this outward facing community which is poised to help her learn to hear to listen to God along with her sisters and brothers.

The Church is the Context in which to Recognize What and Who We are Hearing

The second constitutive character of the church is that it the necessary context for beginning to recognize what we are hearing. That context is the textually mediated story of salvation and the practices of the church. This context—the textually mediated story of salvation and the practices of the church—is used by the Holy Spirit, as I have argued in Chapter Two, to give us the ears to recognize what we are hearing. Luke’s story of the annunciation and presentation in the temple witness to and describe the essential context of both the textually mediated story of salvation and the practices of the church.

In Luke’s telling of the nativity story the angel addresses Mary specially and directly. How could she not listen? But to focus primarily on Mary’s social context, her

41 Kolbet, Augustine and the Cure of Souls, 135.
youth or economic and marital status, or even her obedient assent to the angel’s message, is to miss the wider context of belief in which Mary’s hearing is rooted. The wider context is God’s promises to Israel and the practices of the temple. Mary and Joseph participate in the temple practices prescribed in Leviticus 12 for the birth of a child. Scripture tells little about Mary’s personal faith or participation in the corporate worship life of Israel; it is worth noting that Mary and Joseph knew, despite her youth, the practices of the temple and participated in them. Thus, Mary had, we can cautiously surmise, a wider context for hearing the angel’s very personal and strange message; and that context is a context of belief rooted in the textually mediated story of salvation and practices of the temple.

Her song indicates three ways she “heard” God’s address: personally, within God’s larger purposes for Israel, and within her economic or social context. Though it was a personal address—and she responded to it as such—God’s actions to Israel are the soil in which the personal address is heard and rooted. Mary interpreted and proclaimed the personal address in the context of God’s larger actions. The favor shown to a lowly handmaiden, the honoring of her name throughout the generations, the good things God has done for her do not stand alone. They are a part of the larger narrative of God’s remembering and fulfilling of his promises of help to Abraham and Sarah and their descendants by helping Israel. It is within the context of belief, here God’s help to Israel, that she names the actions of the lifting of the poor and the casting down of the rich, filling the hungry and sending the rich away empty (Luke 46:55).

Let me provide a brief example of how listening in preaching to the textually mediated story of salvation might enhance our ability to hear God’s address. To hear or
preach sermons which proclaim that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, is common. The season of Advent and the appointed lections in the RCL invite this, as does the doctrine of the incarnation. But how do we preach sermons which say more than “God with us” means that “you are not alone”? How do we avoid rendering the identity of Jesus as one who simply seems to keep us company? Here the question that begs an answer in proclamation is, what is Christ is doing when he is with us? The textually mediated story of salvation, as in Mary’s song, and the practices of the church tell us just that.

My point here rests on Frei’s claim that the narrative of scripture renders the identity of Jesus Christ. Our small lives and needs are simply not a large enough stage on which to hear God’s voice. To render God’s identity and our identities outside of scripture and the practices of the church diminishes our ability to hear God’s address. To bring to the common task of hearing that God is Emmanuel, God with us, the larger context of salvation history, as well as our own context, offers us a way to preach more than “you are not alone”.

_The Practices of the Church are the Embodiment of the One Who Addresses Us_

In review, the church as a community poised to hear Christ provides the necessary context, first, for employing the God’ given capacity to listen to God’s address, and second, for beginning to recognize who we are hearing in the context of the narrative of scripture. The third point of my argument that the church is the natural habitat for hearing God’s voice moves to the essential place of the practices of the church in such a habitat. Its practices are essential and constitutive because they are the embodiment of both the one who addresses us, Jesus Christ, and our response to him. Practices are a way in
which our response to the one who addresses us in the larger context of the economy of salvation is both one of personal trust in Jesus and the embodying of that trust in the public life of the church. The public life of the church is the Spirit’s witness to Jesus as the Son of the God of Israel before the nations.

My focus here is not on specific practices, such as Eucharist, baptism or forgiveness, but on the web of practices of the church as a whole, which are a part of the habitat for hearing and proclamation. My examination of the relationship of the web of church practices to proclamation is only tentative. But I hope to suggest that the practices of the church, as an essential context for hearing God’s voice, are a part of a cultural-linguistic response to preaching in a postmodern world. Why? Because the practices take their shape from Christ’s life, and Jesus’ particularity offers us a way to respond to the post-modern struggle with particularity.

A part of the nature of the practices of the church is their particularity; they are specific actions which are apostolic and public. They are, in a sense, not of our design. Because they take their form in all their particularity from Christ (Gal. 6:17) the specific practices are, in a sense, (as were Israel’s) an embodiment of the one we have heard. They echo and embody God’s textually mediated address. Our participation in them is both an internal embodiment and an external public proclamation of the particularity of

---

42 In Confessing Christ, Lose raises the concern that Campbell’s homiletic approach, coming out of Lindbeck, cannot lead to personal trust in Jesus Christ. Here I argue that the practices of the church embody acts of personal trust as well as public actions. See Lose, Confessing Christ, 126, and my overview of Campbell and Lose’s homiletic theory in Chapter One.

43 In addition, I suggest that the articulation of the centrality of the practices of the church in proclamation is, an important correction to some strands of the evangelical Anglican church (as well as other evangelical churches) which, given their emphasis on the preached Word, put little trust in the power of the practices of the church. In response to Luther’s question, “How will and how can a poor confused person tell where such holy Christian people are to be found in the world? Many would answer in the inner working of a believer’s heart and her personal acceptance of Christ as Savior. There is a sense that participation in baptism, Eucharist, confession and so on, is necessary but the real action of the Holy Spirit is elsewhere.
Jesus Christ from whose life our lives find their shape. Could this offer a possible way forward as we struggle with the particularity of the other in this post-modern world? Though Christ’s embrace of our problematic particularity he offers us a way not to negate the chasm between ourselves and the other but to love across it.

I turn to Luther’s marks of the church in his essay “On the Councils of the Church” as a way to describe the web of practices.\(^{45}\) There he asks, “Where can a confused person see the church in the world?”\(^{46}\) His answer is, wherever you see or hear the following practices taking place. Luther presents seven “marks” as constitutive of the church: the preaching and hearing of the Word, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the office of the keys, ordination, prayer/praise/catechism, and the way of the cross or Christian discipleship.\(^ {47}\) It is these practices which the Holy Spirit uses as a part of the church’s public witness.

The relationship between proclamation and specific practices, such as the Eucharist and baptism, has a long history.\(^ {48}\) Paul Scott Wilson in, “Preaching and the Sacrament of Holy Communion” provides a thorough review of that history from a Reformed perspective. Wilson wrestles with the question, “what is lost when preaching is unaccompanied by Holy Communion”?\(^ {49}\) He asks, for example, why in the reformed

---


\(^{47}\) Ibid.

\(^{48}\) In *Theology is for Proclamation* Gerhard Forde spells out the nature of proclamation (doing the text to the reader) in preaching, but in a brief essay in *Marks of the Body of Christ*, he points to its wider reach. “Whereas proclamation is particularly focused in the preaching, it takes place abundantly elsewhere. The liturgy of course, puts much proclamation on our lips and constrains us to do it even if we don’t want to. The mutual consolation of brothers and sisters, the private exercise of the office of the keys, and so forth are prominent instances in which proclamation is to take place. The church leaves its mark when it proclaims.” Braaten and Jenson, *Marks of the Body of Christ*, 7.

tradition did the strong tradition of preaching not negate the need for the Eucharistic or its
great prayer. Augustine states that these practices in liturgy are expressions of the
divine economy—scripture and preaching, baptism and Eucharist were all means by
which the Holy Spirit captivated the mind and healed the heart by reordering affections.

Both Reinhard Hütter and David Yeago write of the connection between the
practices of the church and its preaching. Both turn to Luther to do so. Hütter argues that
Luther’s account of the practices offers a way to conceive of the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying
work as concretely embodied in a web of core practices. Each practice takes its shape
from Christ’s life. Each is open to misunderstanding, distortion, and abuse. Each stands
in need of being corrected by the proclamation and teaching of the gospel. Here, Hütter
argues, Luther opens the way for a pneumatological ecclesiology: “the church is to be
understood as a web of core practices which at the same time mark and constitute the
church. The practices are the Spirit’s work through which the Holy Spirit enacts his
sanctifying mission in the triune economy of salvation.”

Yeago turns to Luther to advance his argument for a renewed doctrine of
inspiration located in the church (see Chapter Two). In response to Erasmus’s claim
about the obscurity of scripture, Luther insists that scripture has an inward and outward
clarity. The inward clarity is located in the heart’s understanding which is solely the
work of the Holy Spirit. The outward clarity is “located in the ministry of the word (in
verbi ministerio posita) in the network of ecclesial communicative practices within which

50 Ibid., 48.
51 Kolbert, 194.
52 Reinhard Hütter, “The Church,” in Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of
the Church. (Grand Rapids Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 37.
both text and interpreter are situated.” In other words the natural habitat for hearing scripture in the church is the core practices which constitute it, and in which both text and interpreter are located. “Scripture is outwardly clear insofar as we approach it within the context of the teaching, preaching, catechesis and liturgical celebration in which there has been set before us the *res* to which scripture’s *verba* pertains.” Because practices are open to misunderstanding, distortion and abuse they need to be described and corrected by the proclamation and teaching of the gospel and the proclamation of scripture needs the enactment of the practices of the church for its outward clarity.

Let me return to the narrative of the birth of Jesus from Luke’s Gospel in order to explore ways in which the practices of the church offer us a possible approach to preaching in this post-modern world. As I suggested above, the specific practices of the church take their form in all their particularity from Christ and thus they echo and embody God’s textually mediated address. As we continue with Luke’s story of the birth of Jesus we must wrestle with his description of the context in which Mary hears and receives this divine news. It is in the network of temple practices, including ritual cleansing and circumcision. Because many find these practices problematic, an examination of them provides an opportunity to explore the claim that the particularity of Jesus Christ, as rendered in scripture and embodied in the practices of the church, offers us a way to preach in a post-modern world. Through Christ’s embrace of our problematic particularity, he offers us a way not to negate the chasm between ourselves and the other, or to see it in terms of a struggle for dominance, but to love across it.

54 Yeago, “The Spirit, the Church and the Scriptures,” 57.
55 Ibid., 59.
The Magnificat gives voice to Mary’s ability to hear the things that have happened to her as a part of a larger narrative of God’s purposes and in the social location of her poverty. The practices in which Mary participates, the circumcision of Jesus and her ritual purification, difficult as they may be, deeply embody—perhaps in ways which words cannot—the news and promise the angel delivered. They are a deep embodiment of, and a kind of outward clarity of, Jesus’ incarnation and Mary’s identity as theotokos. Both are rooted in the reality of creaturely distinction which Christ embraces.

In order to explicate the practices of circumcision and ritual purification I turn to a theological commentary on Leviticus by Ephraim Radner, which is a part of the Brazos series of theological commentaries on scripture. Radner reflects on the centrality of Leviticus, chapter 12 to the Christian Gospel. Radner argues that the identity of the church as the Body of the circumcised Jesus is found within the practices of circumcision and ritual purification. In his circumcision Jesus does not shun the particularities and limitations of human flesh. His participation in this ritual practice leads us away from a retreat to a universalized or abstracted definition of the human as an idea or quality. Our primary identity, and thus our vocation in this fallen world, is found within Christ’s embrace of and redemption of creaturely differences and inequalities.

Radner tackles the implications of blood, semen, male, female, clean and unclean, as marks of the nature of our creation by God. We are creatures limited and marred by the inescapable reality of time and history. Blood, Radner observes, is tied up with the reality of a people who exist in time and whose relationship with God exists in time. Blood, he

---

57 *Leviticus: A Theological Commentary*. This series is based on of the conviction that dogma clarifies rather than obscures the interpretation of Scripture. it advances the assumption that the Nicene tradition, not as a formula but as a habit of mind is the proper context for interpreting Scripture. See the Series preface, Ephraim Radner, *Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 9–14.

58 Ibid., 120–134.
argues, is the history of our relationship with a merciful Creator: blood given for the continuance of life (childbirth), blood taken for its ending (Cain), blood shed for its redemption (Jesus).

Radner wonders if the uncleanness associated with childbirth—whose exact nature is explained nowhere in scripture—has to do with the ambivalence of blood’s historical character. “Blood contains in its passage into and through the world the whole history of freedom, choice, sin, oppression, forgiveness, suffering, sin’s outcome, and some kind of redemption through it. The woman’s childbirth is all of this at once and hence gives rise to and embodies the fullness of history.”

Finally, as Radner reminds his readers, Augustine, Origen and the entire Catholic tradition understood that Mary’s offering of two turtledoves or young pigeons (Lev. 12:8; Luke 2:24) established Jesus as a creature taking his place in a world of creaturely differences, here the case of material poverty. Thus, in God’s selection of Mary and Joseph, God sent his Son into a world of material inequality. From a historical perspective Jesus is not like all others. In his circumcision on the eight day Jesus participates in a practice which acknowledges human distinction and temporality which characterizes our creatureliness. In his circumcision Jesus fully takes up this world of distinctions. He is born of woman whose blood embodies the world which Jesus will not shun. His participation in circumcision, with the shedding of his own blood there, renders his identity because “it functions as an explication of who Jesus is and the nature

59 Ibid., 125.
60 Ibid., 127.
of his body as one who is in the world: Jesus assumes distinction, he does not abolish it.\(^{61}\)

How do we understand the differences inherent in our status as creatures, as embodied in the Levitical ritual practices and Jesus’ participation in them? Given the historical reality of these practices what is our vocation as Christian preachers who take their place within a community of hearers in and for a world of distinction and divisions? We begin with the church’s distinctive knowledge of such differences through, as Radner has modeled, a careful, deferential attentiveness to the text and the web of practices in which both the text and hearer are located.

Radner turns to a Talmudic exposition on Psalm 139 by the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas to further examine a Christian understanding of otherness, which is helpful for our conversation here. Rather than read Psalm 139 through the lens of the post-modern categories of otherness (which, Radner points out, Levinas helped to invent) Levinas’s attentiveness to the text leads him to conclusions that challenge post-modern notions of sexual differences.

Levinas writes of the ways sexual differences reflect the most profound element of human history. They do so because they are an encounter with otherness, an encounter that constitutes relatedness under God.\(^{62}\) However Levinas goes on to draw the conclusion, antithetical to postmodern sexual ethics, that lodged within created sexual differentiation is the historical reality of inequality. Why? Because human inequality is a particular expression of the distinction that underlies all creation as creation. Inequalities, such as material poverty, designate the reality of living within time’s

---

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 122.
\(^{62}\) Ibid., 126.
differences. In other words, inequality is the fruit, frequently bitter, of living in time with our created differences and varied experiences.

Levinas does not flee the textually mediated world of historical particularity. He neither capitulates to a universalized or abstracted understanding of otherness, nor reduces otherness to a struggle for power. Rather, he stresses that inequality elucidates a difference in time and time’s experience, not in value. Radner notes that the equal standing of women and men before God was commonplace in rabbinic teaching.  

Where does such attentiveness to a scriptural description of sexual, economic and other inequalities as a part of being created in time lead us? It presents enormous challenges to our self-understanding and ecclesial vocation; but in doing so, it offers us a possible way forward in our vocation to love God and neighbor and in the preaching of such love. This attentiveness to scripture, as seen in the expositions by Levinas and Radner, locates love within the chasm of creaturely givenness and incommensurability, and anchors it there in Christ’s own embrace of this strange world. Love does not negate or erase creaturely differences. “It is the nature of love that it be exposed to and embrace this incommensurability of otherness.”

Radner uses the example of the household code in Ephesians 5 to make this point. There the call to be subject to one another is not an expression of creaturely equivalence but just this love, “wherein what we are is constantly given up in the face of what we are not.” We are called to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (5:21). Our love takes its form from Christ’s, from “the one who initiates most sweepingly the

63 Ibid, 127.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
embrace of inequality itself as a divine action.” As Paul writes, “though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in the human likeness” (Philippians 2:5-7).

In summary, the vocation of the church is found within the practices of circumcision and ritual purification which mark Christ’s own birth. He is born of a woman whose blood embodies the world which he will not shun. Mary’s and Joseph’s offering of two turtledoves or young pigeons (Lev. 12:8; Luke 2:24) established Jesus as a creature taking his place in a world of creaturely differences, here in material poverty. His participation in the ritual practice of circumcision leads us away from a retreat to a universalized or abstracted definition of the human as an idea or quality. In summary, these two temple practices embody Jesus’ full embrace of a world marked by creaturely difference and inequality. Our primary identity is found within Christ’s embrace and redemption of creaturely differences and inequalities and thus we receive our vocation in this fallen world.

Though this embrace of creaturely differences and inequalities presents enormous challenges to our self-understanding and ecclesial vocation, it also offers us a way forward in our vocation to love God and neighbor and to preach, of that love. R. R. Reno has observed that the post-modern recognition of the social-conditioning and relativity of all awareness can leave one ill equipped to act. He has noticed the tendency in his university students to keep a “protective distance designed to fend off any power than might claim our loyalty.” Claiming the church as the natural habitat for the hearing of God’s address locates both text and interpreter within the body of the circumcised and

---

66 Ibid.
crucified Christ and anchors us and our world within the chasm of creaturely incommensurability. Christ becomes both the redemption and the way forward in the face of the incommensurability of creatureliness.

Our Identity within Christ’s Embrace: Implications for Preaching

Let me suggest three ways this emphasis on our identity within Christ’s embrace of human particularities has implications for preaching in a post-modern world. First, to wrestle with the textually mediated world of scripture, through our vocation of deferential attentiveness, is to participate in Christ’s embrace of creaturely differentiation and inequality. In this we find encouragement for the weekly challenge of avoiding abstract preaching, or turning to universal concepts such as love or hope.

Second, we participate in Christ’s embrace when we remember that preaching is a part of a web of Christian practices and does not shoulder the full weight of Christian proclamation. A part of our vocation as preachers is to cultivate coherent practices of reading and proclaiming scripture and coherent practices of the church. The church is both a school of Christ’s love and the spirit’s public witness to it. Here is encouragement to connect in preaching God’s address in scripture and our response of fidelity and trust through participation in Christ-shaped communal forms of life.

Third, we participate in Christ’s embrace of human temporality and particularity when we learn to hear God’s textually mediated address to us within the larger sweep of salvation history, and within the context of our particular, and often seemingly conflicting, social locations. This is, perhaps, what the final portion of the Luke birth
narrative points to. Both Simeon, who has been guided by the Spirit to the temple (Luke 2:27) and Anna, who never leaves the temple (Luke 2:37) can recognize in the circumcised Jesus the redemption and consolation of Israel. Through the blood of his circumcision and the offering of turtledoves or pigeons—God’s embrace of historical particularity—they can recognize God’s eternal purposes fulfilled. What do we have to learn about our vocation as preachers from this scene in the temple? Luke writes that “at that moment she [Anna] came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). The angels announce the birth to shepherds in the fields and kings from afar. Anna announces it to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Somehow we too must try to preach about the Christ who is recognized in the practices of concrete particularity to all who are seeking some kind of redemption, “those of high degree and low, rich and poor together” (Ps 49:1). Here is encouragement for binding ourselves in love to both God’s Word and to the people God has given us in our particular congregations.

Summary

I have tried to argue that a cultural-linguistic homiletic, in which the subject is defined by God’s constitutive relationship with the world, offers possibilities for preaching in a post-modern world. We are all hearers of the Word because God has given us ears to hear him. This reframing does not negate the importance of the subjects’ social locations in hearing and interpreting scripture. Rather, it roots our many social locations within the distinctive soil of the church, the Body of the circumcised and
crucified Jesus. My homiletic method, the Six Questions of the Sermon, attempts to lay out concretely what such an approach to preaching might look like.

Areas of Homiletic Concern within a Cultural-Linguistic Framework

The final point in my argument that the ecclesial location in which both scripture and the community of interpreters is located is our primary business as preachers, is that this location has implications in many area of concern to homileticians. In other words, this location has both hermeneutical and homiletical consequences. Here I explore some possible implications of my approach on the understanding of the authority of the preacher, a focus on narrative and inductive preaching, and the use of stories in sermons.

The Authority of the Preacher

I briefly addressed the authority of the preacher earlier in this chapter when I suggested that both preacher and people receive a shared identity as listeners or hearers of the Word through God’s constitutive relationship with the world. This shared identity does not erase distinctions, as discussed above, between preacher and people. Through Jesus’ embrace of human particularity and inequality, we assume distinction and locate love within the chasm of creaturely differences. This shared identity in the midst of our particularity is expressed in our mutual deferential attentiveness to the Word, and service and love for one another across differences.
To try to lift up the shared identity of preacher and people is not to imply that it is easily within reach. The misuse, abuse, and neglect of the authority of the preacher, the misuse, and neglect of the authority of the congregation is common. The church which receives its life and form from Jesus Christ, is, as Hooker reminds us, is an assembly of “the healthy and sick alike, idolaters, heritiques and improbitites.”

Homileticians have tried to address the gap between the authority of the preacher and congregation. In the New Homiletic this gap was bridged by claiming the universal nature of the narrative quality of human experience. As Charles Rice asserted, the preacher could confidently and best serve the Gospel with her own story and experiences. Lucy Atkinson Rose’s model of conversational preaching also has as its goal the closing of the gap between congregation and preacher. She tries to do so by emphasizing the equality of all who gather around the Word. The role of the preacher is to gather around the Word the community of faith who, as God’s people, are equal explorers, a priesthood of all believers.

Both these approaches attempt to close the gap between preacher and congregation (and for Rose, the many different people within a congregation) by an appeal to human experience. I follow in their steps in that, like them, I have raised up what is shared between preacher and people. In contrast, I have tried to redefine what is shared between people and preacher according to God’s constitutive relationship with his creation, as set forth in scripture. A concern I have about an appeal to universal experience is that the preacher’s experience or interpretation of experience is unwittingly privileged. She tells stories about her life; she chooses vignettes from films or books to

68 Richard Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, the Fifth Book, 111.7.
70 Rose, Sharing the Word, 4, 93.
represent the common human experience. For Rose, the preacher—not Christ—becomes the one who gathers community around the table in an effort to equalize the varied human experiences of her congregation. A concern in Rose’s approach is that preacher becomes a kind of divine facilitator or arbitrator of the many voices around the table.

My hope is that to root preaching in the identity we receive through God’s constitutive relationship with the world might be one way to bridge the divide between clergy and people. All stand together—people, preacher, indigent, educated, sinner and saint—listeners in need of his life-giving word. We stand as those whom God has not abandoned; in grace God has given us ears to hear him. This shared identity does not erase distinctions, as discussed above, including that between preacher and people, but reframes that relationship and the vocation of the preacher. Both preacher and congregation stand together under the Word. The vocation of the preacher is to be first a hearer of the Word, along with, through and for her people.

Augustine claimed this vocation for himself along with his people. “You cannot despise the remedy offered to others and not yourself.”71 Rather than being a spokesperson for a shared human experience the preacher engages in the particular task of helping her congregation learn to listen attentively with her to scripture and to listen attentively within a particular social location. Though such an understanding of a shared identity as listeners can be used to exclude those who are different, the raising up of our common identity as listeners can help to mitigate the preacher’s exclusive authority to be a hearer and interpreter of the Word, and the passivity of some parishioners to engage scripture themselves. All are called to attentive listening and interpretation within our own particular location.

71 Kolbet, Augustine and the Cure of Souls, 160.
Several of the post-liberal homileticians described in Chapter One have addressed the necessity for preachers to take their place, with their people, under the Word. Breidenthal focuses on the need for the preacher to put herself in a position to be addressed by the Word. This, he claims is a moral practice that lies at the heart of preaching, “placing oneself as preacher in a position to be addressed, probed, and dissected by a scriptural text, so that through one’s own preaching on it, the text can intrude upon God’s people with grace and power.”

Shepherd, like many others, describes the congregation as a kind of interpretative community of which the preacher is a part. He further defines the interpretative community as not only the specific congregation of people, contexts, situations, but the community we hope to participate in creating. “The preacher must go onto preach the gospel and the implied listener of that gospel is one who is not mired in sin, but liberated by God.” Eslinger’s states the dual function of the biblical narratives is both to create a people with an identity disclosed to them in the narrative and to form them as people capable of hearing that story.

Understanding the congregation as an interpretive community of which the preacher is a part helps to situate preaching within the web of practices of the church. Preaching is not the only practice through which people listen to and learn to interpret scripture within its ecclesial and social locations. Situating the preacher within this web of practices further locates the authority of the preacher in the task of equipping all.

---

74 Shepherd, *No Deed Greater Than a Word*, 55.
including herself, to hear Christ address the church. Augustine likened himself to a hired hand who cultivates trees from the outside but lacks all ability to make them grow or produce fruit. He was not the physician of their souls; he is looking to be cured along with them.  

He begins Homily 32 by providing hearers with instructions on how to participate in the homily; he invites readers to join him in a shared inquiry into the meaning of the scripture, which leads to self-knowledge and personal transformation. He structures his homily around inquiry into specific biblical texts. “I am prompted by the Lord to tackle together with you this text that has been read and find out what it means. If you have seen the question, you have seen no small thing.”  

To claim a distinct role for the preacher is not, as discussed above, a distinction of value. It is a distinction of time, experience, training, office, and practice. The role of the preacher is to participate in, lead, and be formed by the shared vocation of attentively listening to the text, and in doing so open the listeners to the path scripture provides. Augustine models for us what this might look like. He ask his congregation, “Join in with me”; “help me knock at the door”; “I am your fellow worker”…”let us both listen together, both learn together.”  

The Role of Narrative

---

76 Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*, 177.
77 Ibid., 184.
78 Ibid., 184–5.
Let me move onto the place of narrative in a cultural-linguistic homiletic, which will lead to a final point about inductive preaching.\(^79\) In *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, Thomas Long provides a thorough review of the rise of criticism of narrative preaching.\(^80\) “The power in preaching comes not only from narration but also from proclamation.”\(^81\) Within a cultural-linguistic framework the key to the use of narrative is not the genre per se, but the function of narrative, specifically the function of the biblical narrative. In *Preaching Jesus*, Charles Campbell discusses Frei’s understanding of the function of narrative. Though Frei attended to the literary form of the biblical narrative, he did not link the narrative form of the text with the narrative form of the sermon.\(^82\) Narrative is central because it both constitutes and reveals the identity of Jesus Christ. Employing an intratextual reading and a communal hermeneutic to scripture’s ascriptive logic invites one to read all of scripture as a single complex testimony to Christ.

**Inductive Preaching and the Use of Stories**

One of the vestiges of the linking of the form of the sermon with the narrative form of scripture is seen in the common use of stories in sermons, whether they are personal or downloaded from the web. Just as there is no consensus on the role of correlation in preaching (see Chapter One), I suspect there is no consensus on the use and

---

79 For a recent analysis of the limits of narrative theology see Francesca Aran Murphy, *God Is Not a Story Realism Revisited* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
82 See Campbell’s discussion of Frei’s understanding of the function of narrative. *Preaching Jesus*, 54–62.
function of stories in sermons.\textsuperscript{83} Frequently stories end up, perhaps unwittingly by the
tired preacher, being a way to bypass the particularity of the biblical text, which can seem
inaccessible to a congregation, or offensive. The preacher walks out of scripture’s world
into the more familiar landscape of stories, in part because of their narrative power.

A cultural-linguistic homiletic tries to provide the preacher with guidelines that
invite her to linger attentively in the world of scripture. Yeago’s rules of interpretation,
for example, function as a kind of compass for the preacher with which to navigate
scripture’s vast landscape: \textit{Seek within scripture’s diversity the unity of the Spirit’s
witness to Jesus Christ for the Church}. No easy task as Yeago has pointed out, “\textit{Do not
suppose that you have understood these signs, in their employment by the Spirit, until you
have grasped how they pertain to Christ and his messianic domination}.”\textsuperscript{84}

One of the purposes of such a compass is to help the preacher to avoid being
blown off course—by the demands of her week, by fatigue, and, perhaps, the pull of
pleasing her congregation. To pay attention to the ascriptive logic of the gospels invites
her to focus on Jesus’ unsubstitutable identity for us, not only his significance for
contemporary hearers. As I have listened to sermons and struggle with my own
preaching, I have noticed that too easily Jesus falls out of sight. His temptations become
our temptations; Mary’s yes to the angel becomes encouragement to take risks in life. To
enter the pulpit without such a compass for attending to scripture places a burden on the
preacher to find the bridge between these strange texts and her congregation. Yeago goes
so far as to argue that the attempt to make them meaningful, based on the perceived and
felt needs of the congregation, commodifies the scripture; it becomes something the

\textsuperscript{83} See discussion of the overuse of stories in Chappell, “When Narrative Is Not Enough.” Presybterion.
No.22/1 91996), 3-16.

\textsuperscript{84} Yeago, “The Spirit, the Church and the Scriptures,” 72.
This text speaks to you! That’s a hard sell today and preachers know it. Thus we turn the more marketable realm of stories and anecdotes.

My argument is, in part, that such an exit from scripture’s world is unnecessary; to attend to it, to linger in it for a while, with rules for its navigation is far less of a burden on the preacher than trying to erect one rickety bridge of meaning after another. Reading scripture intratextually, paying attention to its ascriptive logic, employing a communal hermeneutic offers the possibility of yielding rich results for the preacher. Relevance is not established by correlating the text with the expectations, perceptions, and felt needs of the hearers, but by inviting hearers to join you as you stand under the Word, the same Word which addresses Israel, Mary, Paul, the Corinthian believers, and the contemporary church.

An Example of Attending to Scripture’s Ascriptive Logic

Let me offer an example of trying to attend to scripture’s ascriptive logic. On the sixth Sunday of Epiphany, 2012, The Revised Common Lectionary paired the story of Jesus healing the leper (Mark 1: 40-45) with Paul’s description of himself as an athlete in training to win an imperishable prize (I Cor. 9: 24-27). It would be easy to jump to stories of athletes, talk about Tim Tiebow or liken Paul’s effort to training for a triathlon. But to do so is to absorb the world of scripture into today’s world of professional and extreme sports, and to risk losing a focus on the un substitutable identity of Jesus. Trying

---

85 Ibid., 87.
86 *The Revised Common Lectionary Sunday Eucharistic Lectionary*, Year B, the sixth Sunday after the Epiphany. The other readings are: Ps. 30, 2Kings 5:1-14.
to attend carefully to scripture’s words and sticking with them until they yield the identity of Jesus offers one way to reverse this easy movement. We can try to define Paul as an athlete by the identity of Jesus, who, Paul says he imitates. Then we can make the move to the witness the church bears to the world and ourselves as we imitate Paul. The homiletical possibilities are many. What might that look like? Here is one possibility.

The gospel narrative begins as Jesus is proclaiming his message throughout Galilee (1:39). The leper says, “If you chose, you can make me clean.” Jesus so chooses stretches out his hand, the leprosy leaves the man, and Jesus sends him to the priest with the warning to say nothing to anyone. Of course the man does no such thing. As we keep reading attentively we notice that at the end of the story Jesus and the healed man have traded places. “But he went out and began to proclaim freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into town openly, but stayed out in the country…”(1:40). Jesus is now the one who cannot enter the town and the healed man is now the one who goes around proclaiming freely, as Jesus was doing just before he healed him (1:39).

This reading might lead to the preacher to ask, what does this narrative detail reveal about Jesus Christ, about the place he has assumed in his incarnation, about the cost of binding himself to humanity, about the place he will take on our behalf in his crucifixion? Reflections on questions such as these, on Jesus’ identity, can become a frame through which to understand Paul’s athletic training and our own as disciples. At a minimum this interpretation challenges the image of the athlete who pummels her body so she can out run all her competitors. One possible interpretation is that the discipline of

---

87 Because the lordship of Christ is the center which must guide critical value choices, so that we may be called to subordinate or even to reject those values which contradict Jesus hopefully this kind of reading will help to prevent the easy absorption of scripture and the church into the world of meaning and felt needs. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 11.
athletic training—as Jesus shows in his healing of the leper—is to prepare us to draw alongside our neighbors and walking with them.

Let me add a remark, which I have not stressed in my argument so far. I have been arguing that an approach to reading scripture based on the church’s distinctive knowledge has hermeneutical and homiletical consequences. I am not saying that the employment of this approach leads to a uniformity of belief. This approach rests on claiming the church as a decisive cognitive context for interpretation, based on the Spirit’s use of scripture, in the midst of the church’s fallibility and corruptibility. These claims about the authority of scripture and the place of the church can be argued, refuted, and rejected. But within this conversation this approach is compatible with a great diversity of interpretations and practices. Lindbeck makes just this point. Though he offered his cultural-linguistic model as an alternative to a liberal method of correlation, it is meant to be deeply responsive to the genuine needs of the present day. Lindbeck uses the Christian sources themselves to identify those needs; but he states that the interpretation of scripture will be neither static or implicitly conservative or liberal.88 Yeago attributes the possibility of multiple interpretations of scripture to its durability as a written and fixed text. “Textually fixed discourse endures into new situations and contests and can always be given new readings, display new implications, and so yield new understandings in new circumstances.”89

The final point in my argument is that a post-liberal approach to preaching continues the emphasis on inductive preaching, which began with the New Homiletic. In

---

89 Yeago, “The Spirit, the Church and the Scriptures,” 65.
a cultural-linguistic homiletic inductive preaching begins with the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth as rendered in scripture, his address of us, our response, and our identities received from him in the church, in and for the world. Rather than move from the particulars of human experience to general conclusions it begins with the particularities of the text and its movement (see my homiletic method, the Six Questions of the Sermon) to conclusions about identity and vocation. Meaning is found in our faithfulness, as we participate in the life of Christ depicted in the narrative.

*The Use of Stories*

The use of an inductive method, within a cultural-linguistic homiletic, which begins with the particularity of Jesus Christ and moves to the identity we are offered in him, has implications for how stories are used. Questions about the function of stories are a part of such a method. Any preacher or student of preaching might ask, what is the function of stories, example and illustrations in sermons? A cultural-linguistic approach to preaching approaches this questions from within its particular framework, which includes the movement from the identity of Jesus Christ to the identity we receive in him. If the function of the biblical narrative is to render the identity of Jesus Christ, what then is the function of the narrative of our stories? If there is an inductive movement from the identity of Jesus Christ to our personal and corporate identity in him, how does this movement play a role in our stories?

---

90 See Appendix I and II for guidelines on the use of stories in my Six Questions of the Sermon.
91 See the version of the Six Questions of the Sermon included in the Appendix where these three kinds of movements are explored.
I have noticed that frequently it is hard for people—including myself—to see what a life lived in Christ looks like. Our illustrations and examples offer the opportunity to communicate what it might look like. They offer an opportunity, in a sense, to move from hearing Christ’s address of us to seeing what it looks like to respond, personally and corporately.

Stories, examples, and anecdotes in sermons are not theologically neutral. Let me give an example. One of the clergy who participated in the sermon preparation group using my homiletic guidelines (see Chapter Four) told us of a sermon he had read online on the passage, Romans 7:14-2, which we were studying in the fifth week of our collaborative sermon preparation. In it the preacher, in an effort to communicate that he too shared in Paul’s despair, told a story about his failure to resist eating a cookie. He could have told a story about his failure to love his neighbor or family; he could have told a story about his congregation’s failure to be a part of their local neighborhood. In each of these three possibilities sin is defined, perhaps unconsciously, differently: as private and inward looking, in terms of a personal struggle to love neighbor, and, as the Body of Christ’s corporate struggle to love neighbor. The three stories offers different pictures of what sin looks like and, implicitly, what the struggle we share with Paul looks like.

My point about asking questions of the function of stories in sermons based on scripture’s ascriptive logic, has some parallels with Richard Hay’s argument about the narrative substructure of some of the theological portions of Galatians. In The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11 Hays develops the argument that the story of Jesus Christ is presupposed by Paul and his letters are an
attempt to reflect theologically on the meaning of that story. Hays develops his argument by examining the discourse in Galatians 3:1-4:11 to show that it is governed in decisive ways by Christ’s story, even though that story finds only fragmentary expression within the discourse. Hays makes the point that in Galatians the redemptive action of Christ (as analyzed in Chapter III) constitutes a topical sequence which has been successfully carried out by him. He has fulfilled his mandate “of bring deliverance and the Spirit to his people.” Hays argues that Paul sees the community as receivers of the topical sequence and receivers of a new mandate, “given to the community to stand fast in their new freedom.”

It is worth considering how Hay’s argument, that the place of the temporal sequence of the narrative of Christ is the substructure of portions of Galatians, can inform our preaching. I am suggesting that an implication of a cultural-linguistic homiletic on sermon form is to bring to our use of stories and examples a question something like this: Do our stories have as their “substructure” Christ’s address of us, our personal and corporate response, and the identity he offers us? Do they help to spark the imagination of the listeners to see what it means that we are now, to use Hay’s phrase, “receivers of Christ’s mandate”? Do our stories help our congregations to see, and thus become, communities in which Christ has overthrown the old and established the new? What might such a community look like in a particular context? Stories which do not have as their substructure the narrative of Jesus Christ might do a disservice to our proclamation.

94 Ibid., 223.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
A discussion of the role of imagination in preaching is beyond the scope of this thesis. Using stories in sermons assists the congregation to imagine what it looks like (or perhaps what it feels like) to live into the personal and corporate identity we receive in Jesus in our particular contexts. Augustine said the goal of his preaching was to keep the Christian congregation from being absorbed back into a world in which Christianity had by no means yet captured the cultural high ground. He used preaching as a medium to try to pass on both the critical skills required to form a Christian identity, and the constructive guidance necessary to sustain it. The use of stories in a post-liberal homiletic can be a form of the renewing of our minds in that stories engage the imagination, and help us to see ourselves in the light of the identity we are given in Jesus. They do more than illustrate this life. They help to form a community which takes up, again and again, training in learning to listen to and respond to Christ, as the Spirit re-awakens and re-orders love.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have tried to argue that the hermeneutical and homiletical implications of the ecclesial location in which both scripture and the community of interpreters is located are our primary business as preachers. I have presented my own argument for a cultural linguistic approach to preaching, and I have suggested some of the homiletical implications of this ecclesial location. I have tried to show that such an approach offers rich homiletical possibilities, because it gives the preacher a set of tools with which to try to listen attentively to God’s address in scripture in her particular

---

context, and to invite her congregation into such listening. I have explored in this final section some of the implications for an understanding of the authority of the preacher, the function of narrative, inductive preaching, and guidelines for the possible use of stories in sermons.

In the following chapter I lay out possible homiletical guidelines for a cultural-linguistic approach to preaching, what I have called the Six Questions of the Sermon. I present the six questions in summary form and then describe the research project, which took place in the summer of 2011, in which a group of Anglican clergy used these six questions in sermon preparation over the course of six weeks.
CHAPTER FOUR

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: A RESEARCH PROJECT USING THE SIX QUESTIONS OF THE SERMON

*How can we apply a method or template to studying the scripture without letting the method/template get in the way of God’s address?*—A Research Participant

*From Theory to Practice*

Throughout this project my aim has been to develop a simple method of sermon preparation which is accessible and theologically coherent. Both characteristics—accessibility and theological coherence—I am equally important to me. As I said in the introduction, I took as a model for my work the homiletic method of Paul Scott Wilson, the four pages of the sermon. Two things appeal to me about his approach. First, a single method provides students with both a way to read scripture and as a way to move from scripture to sermon text. Second, his method is simple and accessible. It works pedagogically.

In this chapter I describe the hands-on research project, where Anglican clergy and I used these questions for six consecutive weeks of collaborative sermon preparation. My method, which I have consistently called the Six Questions of the Sermon, was not in question form in its initial draft. It was in the form of five imperative statements. These five imperative statements, dated May, 2011, (Appendix I), are the guidelines which the Kingston clergy and I began to use in our collaborative sermon preparation, in the summer of 2011. By the end of our work we had produced a revised set of guidelines, which are dated July, 2011 (Appendix II). Both the May and July guidelines are listed below only in summary form. It is important to note that both sets of guidelines contain
descriptive material for each step or question. This supplementary material serves as an essential aid to completing each step. The abbreviated form stands as an easy-to-remember, shorthand form of the longer guidelines. The completed guidelines are found in Appendix I and II. The improvements, clarity and amplification reflected in the July guidelines are due to the fine collegial work of the clergy who were willing to work with me on them.

The Six Questions of the Sermon receive their order from the theological commitments about scripture and the church described in the first three chapters. The questions move from the particularity of the text of scripture, to its centre and telos, Jesus Christ, to listening to the living Christ who, through the Spirit’s use of the text, addresses us both personally and corporately, and, finally, to living into the identities we are offered in Christ, (and through participation in his Body), in the midst of and for a radically disobedient world. Because our identity is given to us by God (we do not construct it) the movement of the question is from Christ’s personal and corporate address of us to our personal and corporate identity is his Body. As the evaluation at the end of this chapter indicates, the relationship between address and identity became a rich topic of conversation among participants.

Here are the steps of sermon preparation in summary form.

**Original Steps given to Participants, May, 2011.**

1. **Linger & Look:** Attentive reading.

2. **Listen & Identify:** What do we hear about the identity of Jesus Christ? Can we summarize the attended scripture and articulate God’s address to the church in it?

3. **Hear & Receive:** Hear as God addresses to each of us personally (two-edged sword) and receive God’s grace and judgment.
4. Interpret: Move from text as a word to the preacher to text as a word to the church.

5. Preach & Proclaim: what is God saying to the church?

Second Set of Guidelines, revised, July 2011.

Here are the steps in summary form:

1. What do I see?
   Main action: Linger & Look: Attentive reading of the appointed scripture.

2. Who do I see?
   Main action: Look & Identify: How does this text render the identity of Jesus Christ?

3. What is Christ’s word to me in this text?
   Main action: Hear & Receive. Hear as God’s addresses to each of us as his follower (God’s two-edged sword, Hebrews 4:12) and receive God’s grace & judgment.

4. What is Christ’s word to us in this text?
   Main action: Hear and interpret contextually and theologically. Move from text as a word to the preacher to text as a word to one’s particular congregation, as a part of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:4, 5)

5. What is Christ’s word of us in this text?
   Main action: Hear and discern. How does this text render the identity of the church and the disciple?

6. How do I proclaim God’s word to God’s people?
   Main action: Pray and proclaim.

Shorthand Form of Second Set of Guidelines

1. What do I see?

2. Who do I see?

3. What does he say to me?

4. What does he say to us?

5. What does he say of us?
6. How do I proclaim this?

**Collaborative Sermon Preparation**

In this section I describe the hands-on research project into a cultural-linguistic approach to preaching, which I conducted in the summer and fall of 2011. It involved working with a group of Anglican clergy in the Kingston, Ontario area on sermon preparation, using the draft questions of the sermon I had devised. The methodology I used for this research project is a bounded case-study, with participant action research (PAR). A description of the methodology, including the limitations of this research project, is found in Appendix III.

I based my research project on the collaborative work of a group of ordained Anglican clergy for three reasons. First, a collaborative model of investigation comes out of my commitment to a communal hermeneutic of the church, a collegial understanding of the fellowship we are given in the church, and an Anglican conciliar model of decision making. Second, because my research is an investigation into the relationship between practice and theory, I turned to practitioners who work weekly in the organic web of church practices and clerical roles. Third, Anglicans preach within the specific ecclesial context of the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy, using the Revised Common Lectionary. It is the official lectionary of the Anglican Church of Canada. I have limited my project to working with Anglican clergy because of this shared liturgical and lectionary-based, scriptural framework.

The Kingston clergy and I met for eight, two-hour meetings, which were all held in Kingston. Our first meeting was introductory, followed by six consecutive weeks of
collaborative sermon preparation, using the draft questions of the sermon. The final meeting was devoted to evaluation. In this chapter I offer a selective description of these meetings, highlighting the progression of the groups’ use of, and response to, the guidelines; I describe some specific conversations and I offer some initial observations. ¹ Throughout the remainder of this chapter, the comments of participants are italicized.

May, 25, 2011, Orientation Meeting.

The orientation meeting took place on 25 May, 2011 in Kingston, Ontario. The goal of the orientation meeting was to provide an overview of a theological-interpretation of scripture, a cultural-linguistic approach to preaching, the specific research project, and, finally, to begin to get to know each other. In preparation for this meeting the participants read a packet of articles which contained:²

1. A summary of my project and an historical overview of the relationship between preaching theory and theology.

2. Four articles which explore the crisis in biblical preaching, interpreting texts for preaching, a theological interpretation of scripture and a method for preaching which follows the logic of the text. Two of the articles are by homileticians reviewed in Chapter One.

3. A sample sermon.

Observations of the Orientation Meeting

¹ These observations are based on notes from my personal journal and the field notes of the student note taker.
The clergy were enthusiastic about participating in this project and said they saw the need for it. All had read the packet and some had taken notes on the readings. Some were familiar with Lindbeck’s taxonomy and the general idea of a theological interpretation of scripture. We reviewed and discussed the material in the orientation packet and discussed the sample sermon, in light of the material in the packet. Most said that they used many stories in their sermons—which parishioners liked—though, they weren’t sure if their use of stories was a good idea.

The conversation focused on the role personal experience in that task of preaching and possible dangers of using a homiletic method. One participant asked the group, *what are the “spheres of listening”, or, where do we turn our attention when studying scripture for the purpose of preaching?* To this question another replied, *There’s a complex dialectic between our experience or context and the disruption of it by the Word of God. Reading scripture canonically and according to the rule of faith are checks so that we are not overwhelming the text with our experience in a way that fails to do justice to the text.*

Some participants were concerned about the potential pitfalls of using a homiletic method such as The Six Questions of the Sermon. One summed up the concerns expressed: *how can we apply a method or template to studying the scripture without letting the method/template get in the way of God’s address?* We would come back to this question of using a method of template in the final evaluation meeting. Finally, the

---

3 We discussed the following questions about the sample sermon: 1. How is scripture being used in this sermon? 2. Does it use fit with a cultural-linguistic model (intratextual, ascriptive, communal hermeneutic constitutive of the church) and/or a theological interpretation of scripture? 3. What description of the church in explicit or implicit in this sermon? 4. How does it address the individual listener? The corporate Body of Christ? How are illustrations, stories, anecdotes etc. being used?
participants had questions about the project. *How will the success of this project be measured? What will I do with the results?*

*An Overview of the Six Weeks of Collaborative Sermon Preparation*

The participants and I met for six consecutive Wednesdays, from June 1 through July 6, 2011, from 1 to 3 p.m. Throughout the six weeks I lead the group through the draft questions and facilitated the conversation. Each week we practiced using the questions of the sermon I had drafted, focusing on only one of the readings from the Revised Common Lectionary appointed for the upcoming Sunday. We did not try to tackle more than one reading in the allotted two hour period, but over the course of the six weeks, we worked on sermon preparation on the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel readings.

This six week period spanned the 7th Sunday after Easter through the fourth Sunday after the Pentecost, in the liturgical calendar. It included the day of Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. The latter feast day was to play prominently in our conversation about and evaluation of question two, *Who do I see? Does scripture render the identity of Jesus Christ?* The order of the six weekly meetings was the same:

1. Gather having completed background exegetical work on selected Sunday scripture.
2. Pray, and check in with one another.
3. Read aloud the selected scripture in a two or three English translations.
4. Begin to work through the Six Questions of the Sermon as a group.

---

4 I made a few notes on my handouts during the meetings and journal entries after the meetings, when I was back in Toronto. Each week the note taker sent me his notes by Wednesday evening, which I then reviewed.
5. End in prayer.

Selective Description of the Six Weeks of Collegial Sermon Preparation

What follows is a selective description of the six weeks of collegial sermon preparation. I first provide selective responses to Six Questions of the Sermon. I then provide selective observations of the participants’ questions, conversation, and responses to working with the draft questions of the sermon, as well as any changes we made in them. Participants comments are in italics; the comments of multiple participants are separated by ellipses.


The participants arrived, having completed their customary background work for sermon preparation—exegesis, word study, use of commentaries—on the appointed Gospel. At this point the steps were in imperative statements. We worked through the steps in order:

1) Linger and look.
2) Listen and identify.
3) Hear and receive.
4) Hear again and interpret.
5) Preach and proclaim.

Linger and look:

This description derives from the data collected in the four ways listed Methodology Appendix: 1) Detailed field notes by a trained student note taker, 2) Digital audio recordings, 3) A personal journal, 4) Documents collected over the course of the research.
There is the repetition of ‘glory’ (need for word study... this prayer summarizes what Jesus has said and done since chapter 12); Keeping His word (v.6) and keeping/protecting (v.11) have the same Greek root... Jesus notes that the hour has come, which echoes woman in childbirth in 16:21...What didn’t Jesus pray for? Success, the things we pray for, etc.; emphasis on ‘the world’ (17:11)... What is His joy? Having His joy relates to being taken up into His relationship with/address to the Father—What does being in this relationship mean for us and for the church?

Listen and identify:

Jesus’ identity is bound both to his relationship with the Father and the church (totus Christus)... Jesus as High Priest making intercession for the church... Jesus as the possessor of the disciples (17:6) – in what way has the Father given the disciples to Jesus? Jesus’ as the possessor of God’s name, ‘the name which you have given me’ (17:11)

Receive (How is Jesus addressing us personally?):

There is good news in being treasured as Jesus’ joy, for which he gave up everything; the completion of his joy is for us to live in the knowledge and appreciation of that; ‘become what you have received’ – what are the implications of this for us personally and for the church?...In our failure to know that the Father has given us to Jesus we are tempted to try to create unity on our own terms...We seek our affirmation elsewhere, having been deceived by the evil one...We seek it by being of the world and seeking our unity there, and not in God.

Hear again and interpret (Hear as God’s address to the body)

In popular spirituality, it is up to us to find joy, etc. But in this text, it is given to us by Christ. Jesus tells them that they are caught up in His unity with the Godhead and are his joy....God sent Jesus into the world and now Jesus has sent us; He never lost his identity while in the world and the same goes for us.

Preach and proclaim:

I like the passport/citizenship analogy. Can we use stories about acting out of the unity we have already been given in Jesus? What stories from scripture illustrate this point?

Observations on the Use of the Sermon Guidelines

In this first meeting the clergy began to play with, reword, and organically translate the imperative statements into question form. This process continued throughout
all our meetings. In the first meeting the clergy transformed statements three and four into question form:

3) Hear and receive became, how is Jesus addressing me personally?
4) Hear and interpret became, how is God addressing the body?

In this first session, as we moved from one question to the next, participants already were focusing on the kinds of movement the sequence of questions asked of us; the movement from attentiveness to address to identity. Consistently throughout the study, participants found the movement from question three to question four the most difficult. One participant focused on the movement from one to three, that is from the objective meaning of the text to the text as address of the living voice of God. What’s the difference between the objective meaning of the text and how God is addressing the church?


1) Linger and look;
2) Listen and Identify;
3) Hear and receive became, How is Jesus addressing me personally?
4) Hear and interpret became, How is God addressing the body?
5) Preach and proclaim.

The participants asked to begin our meeting with a continuation of the conversation from the previous week, about what that movement in The Six Questions of the Sermon asks of the preacher. They focused both on the movement from question two to three—the difference between the objective meanings of the text and God’s address e
of us—and the movement from question three to four—from hearing it personally to hearing it corporately.

Participant 1: Hearing the scripture personally is delicate because people personalize things in very unpredictable ways. This must be disciplined.

Brownlee: The move from step 3 to 4 is supposed to do this by putting our own experience in a bigger context.

Participant 2: We are called to testify to the way God works in our lives, but we must be careful in sharing our own experience.

Participant 3: We are seeking to hear God’s word to the church. This addresses all members personally, but not as individuals. We must also be aware of all the ‘counter-sermons’ that the people are hearing.

Participant 3: We must be careful not to preach sermons that are biblically faithful, but opaque. The terms, themes, imagery of scripture are well outside the bounds of contemporary thought.

Participant 5: If we truly understand and absorb a passage, we’ll be able to communicate it clearly.

Participant 4: Does step 3 really accomplish or capture the enterprise of this?

Participant 1: There is a hermeneutical chasm between the world of the Bible and us. The process of translation is long, difficult work

Participant 5: It is the preacher’s responsibility to unpack the language of scripture. For Augustine, reading scripture is not about following guidelines, but about cultivating virtues.

Participant 4: In Lindbeck what matters is not language, but reality.

Linger and look:

Jesus didn’t condemn them or call them to repentance for not being there at his Crucifixion, but says ‘Peace be with you.’… There is a progression from fear to peace to joy… Jesus does not give them a detailed blueprint of what to do… The statements in verse 23 are indicative, not consequential. Jesus always sends those whom he encounters after he heals, comforts, challenges, etc. them…Jesus breathes the Spirit into the disciples, just as God breathed into Adam.

Listen and identify:

Jesus still has to show a sign that it is him – he desires to keep coming and show himself. Also, he somehow enters through a locked door. Locks can’t keep him out. Would the disciples have opened the door if Jesus hadn’t knocked?…The identifying features of Christ are the wounds of his passion. The crucifixion is not erased by the resurrection… Jesus showing his hands and side reveals him as the paschal lamb, which may relate to the door, when the blood of the lamb was spread.

Hear and receive: How is Jesus addressing me personally?
'Peace be with you’ is good and comforting news and I must take notice of it, though it is not about my initiative. Why do we hold onto things that he let go of? ...Given that Jesus entered the room himself and proclaimed peace, this peace simply exists as a reality and is not dependent on us... The brevity of this passage is important in the context of John’s Gospel, which is wordy... There is a contrast between fear and peace; The former is so much a part of life. Also, Jesus gives the disciples the Spirit upon sending them to do the messy and difficult work that he did.

Hear and interpret. How is God addressing the church?

The fact that we know we are going to be preaching on this passage already impacts the way in which we are reading this text. A thick’ description of this as word to the church is God is with us in this midst of our frantic lives. Jesus is standing right with me with his wounds, wounds that I inflicted. ... It is important to do step 3 consciously so that our own experience does not come out unconsciously.... I have a question about this step. Are we trying to speak to everyone in the congregation via generic, universal themes or by going for specific targets? It’s easy to slip back into the experiential-expressivist model.

Preach and proclaim:

It is not that God forgives people through us and we take up his authority to forgive. This is about proclaiming Christ’s forgiveness and affirming what Christ has done. The binding of sins has to do with binding them to the sinner. If we don’t tell people about the forgiveness of sins, they are bound to them.

Observations of Working with the Sermon Guidelines

In the second week of sermon preparation, I observed that the group had a good grasp of each of the five steps, as evidenced by their ability easily to talk about them and move from step to step. That takes us back to step two, or that seems to fall more under step four than three. Quickly we had developed a shared vocabulary for the project.

As the conversation at the beginning of this session indicates, steps three and four proved to be the most difficult in this second week, and throughout the process.
three asks the participant to try to listen to God address him or her personally.\textsuperscript{6} However, many of the participant’s responses to this third step were not about how the text addressed him or her personally. \textit{This is not about letting Jesus in. He lets himself in.}

Another said, \textit{Jesus gives the disciples the Spirit upon sending them to do the messy and difficult work that he did.}

Our conversation about responses to this third step helped to further discriminate between the actions each of five steps tries to elicit. For example, in response one participant’s comment, this \textit{is not about letting Jesus in. He lets himself in}, a second participant said, \textit{that sounds more like listen and identify}. In response to one participant’s comment, \textit{Jesus gives the disciples the Spirit upon sending them to do the messy and difficult work that he did}, another participant said, \textit{that sounds more like preach and proclaim}.

The group observed that the challenge to answering question three was not primarily due to a misunderstanding of what the question tries to elicit. They all agreed that we were not used to, skilled at, or comfortable listening to the appointed scripture as speaking directly to us. One of the clergy modeled a response to question three for us. \textit{Peace be with you is good and comforting news and I must take notice of it, though it is not about my initiative. Why do I hold onto things that Jesus lets go of?}

We worked on this third step intentionally in the remaining sessions. I would encourage participants to use their ‘I statements’, that is, to speak in the first person, when responding to question three. I hear Jesus saying… This phrase, “\textit{use your I statements}”, became a part of our common vocabulary.

\textsuperscript{6} This step comes as a response that a cultural-linguistic method mutes God’s voice. It is similar to a step in Breidenthal’s process of sermon preparation. See Root, \textit{Sharper Than a Two-Edged Sword}, 33
By the second week, the different theological inclinations of participants were becoming apparent, both in how they expressed themselves and how they approached scripture. Some were doctrinally oriented; some expressed themselves and their interpretation of scripture, using the language of systematic theology. A few explicitly focused on the role of the Holy Spirit in their preaching; another spoke experientially. There was enthusiasm and pleasure in working together, respect for differences, and a willingness to learn from one another. Because of the difficulties of completing all five questions adequately in the weekly time frame, we agreed to begin the following week with step three. Participants agreed to complete steps one and two before our group meeting.


As agreed at the end of the previous meeting we began with question three.

Question Three. Hear and receive. How is Jesus addressing me personally?

The preacher must know his or her congregation, esp. the difficulty many people have in sharing their faith...I focused on the word 'make disciples' and unpack it. How do I make (or fail to make) disciples?...What is it about the Trinity that is so important for mission?... This is Jesus’ mandate and method for discipleship; a call to a community of obedience. I am personally challenged to see my pastoral role as one of calling people to a community of obedience/submission under Christ’s lordship...The commission is based on Jesus Christ’s authority as Lord of heaven and earth and not on the strength of our faith (‘some doubted’)... Doubt can be connected with the reluctance to go. Our doubts do not excuse us from going out. They worshipped him, but some doubted.’ We have difficulty connecting worshipping and going. What does it mean really to worship? What does it mean that the disciples were worshipping Jesus as God? Also, the mention of those who ‘doubted’ seems to address the ongoing doubt in the church.

Question Four. Hear and interpret. How is God addressing the church?

It is to call the congregation to live out of who Jesus has made us: a community of disciples who draw our identity from that of God’s own person. This community is
intentionally open, drawing others into it. The act of discipling the nations grows out of our identity as those who have been drawn into the Triune life. Making disciples is an inherent part of being a disciple because of the nature of the Trinity. To make disciples is an action that grows out of our identity; this is a mission-minded ecclesiology...We can’t help but worship when we go out into the world under his authority.

Invite people to see what a significant step it was for the disciples to worship Jesus as God and making his name one with the Father. Who is this God? The essence of worship/prayer is to go from fitting God into our subjectivity to seeing ourselves as the product of God’s subjectivity – a complete surrender of our own choices, attitudes. The disciples were called to an enormous surrender of their theological convictions. Worship is a dynamic response to God’s self-initiating activity...

Question Five: Proclamation

What purpose do we want the sermon to accomplish?...It would be interesting to preach on what it means to worship the Trinity vs. other types of God...I look for the good news; be conscious of what the people in the pews believe and deconstruct/critically analyze it in light of the biblical message.

Observations of Working with the Sermon Guidelines

We began our discussion with question three, (What is God saying to me?). We continued to struggle with this third step. One participant asked, what is the purpose of reading this passage on Trinity Sunday? He criticized the methodology by stating that he saw no difference between step three (hear and receive), and step four (hear again and interpret). For this participant, Matthew 28:16-20 elicited a historical, rather than personal, question: how did the early Christian, who were firm monotheists, come to a Trinitarian understanding through the Lordship of the risen, and the giving of the Holy Spirit?

Other participants saw a distinction distinguish between what questions three and four asked of them. In response to question three, one participant said, because this is Jesus’ mandate and method for discipleship—this call to become a community of obedience—he was personally challenged to see his pastoral role as one of calling
people into a community of obedience/submission under Christ’s lordship. Another said, that his own doubts can be connected with the reluctance to go. He heard Jesus saying to him that our doubts do not excuse us from going out.

I observed that, in response to question three, participants heard a word spoken to them both as pastors and as Christian disciples. This happened organically and we did not discuss it. I also observed that, in response to question four, a participant spoke about the identity of the church: the act of discipling the nations grows out of our identity as those who have been drawn into the Triune life. This coupling of God’s address to the church, with the identity of the church, would come up again in the following weeks, and lead me to add to the methodology a specific question on the identity of the church.

Given that we were working on sermon preparation for Trinity Sunday, I wondered whether participants might voice questions about question two, that question asks how the text renders the identity of Jesus Christ, not the Trinity, God or the gospel. We discussed it briefly. We would discuss it extensively in week seven. We agreed to focus on the movement from question three to four for the following week.


We began with a conversation about the challenges of preaching difficult texts, such as the sacrifice of Isaac. The preacher must acknowledge how unacceptable this text is to us and not sugar-coat it. This names and gives permission to the responses of the congregation. This text brings many people into contact with a God in whom they don’t want to believe in. This text (and the cross) paints a picture of God that is destabilizing. A conversation followed about the difficult task of preaching to congregations who
seemed to want sermons that do not disrupt their level of comfort. Almost all of the participants expressed discouragement with and fatigue in the vocation of proclaiming the gospel. I let this conversation continue for a while because of its importance; because of it we had less time to spend on the sermon guidelines.

Question Three. Hear and receive. How is Jesus addressing me personally?

This text brings many people into contact with a God in whom they don’t want to believe in... We don’t want to imply that we should only obey God if there is something in it for us; but this text seems to suggest that we should obey God because he is God. The ‘getting something back’ is premised upon delighting in God.... The text begins by stating that God is testing Abraham, so the reader is not lead to think that the sacrifice will actually happen.

Question Four. Hear and interpret. How is God addressing the church?

Isaac is the child of the promise; everything that God has promised is invested in Isaac. What is at stake is the disappearance of the Abrahamic blessing/hope of salvation, so this test is more ominous than just child sacrifice (G. von Rad). The fact that Abraham’s emotional response is not mentioned points to the fact that obedience to God is what is important. On the cross, this goes even further and it still ends up in a place of even greater blessing... the walk with God is ongoing and it ends up being true to the character of God. You’re responsible to obey God simply because he is God – there is no further reality or point of reference. Obeying his requests will always end up in blessing.

This part of the liturgical year is about the Christian life and obedience. Last week, Christ told us to obey in the Great Commission.... This deconstructs a simple view of ‘obedience leads to blessing’ - this is basically true, but the pattern through which this happens is cruciform.

Question Five: Proclamation

It would be very easy to preach this text and focus only on obedience in the midst of struggle, etc., and not mention Jesus... It is easy to be sidetracked to either Marcionism or something banal like ‘God will be with us in our pain... Would it be possible to retell this story from God’s perspective? That way you would start with the end of the story... But we don’t have much to go on....: In this text, God is saying that his love is totally connected to his power and vice versa, which is also shown in his loving power to make good out of the Cross. God has the power to test us because he has the power to ensure that the outcome will be as he desires. What is going on in this passage is testing, not sacrifice. A human can’t test another in this way because they can’t ensure that the
test will come out right…. Here is a possible analogy. Our spouses have the power to kill us, betray us; they never lose this power, but we trust them because we believe in their vows to us.

Observations of Working with the Sermon Guidelines

Our goal was to continue to focus on the movement from question three to question four. As I observed in earlier weeks, some of the responses to question three seemed more appropriate to question one. I believe there are two reasons for this. The first is that when we complete the ‘work’ for the first two questions on our own, some of those responses enter into our conversation. But more importantly, participants find it difficult to hear the scripture as God’s personal address to them, what Breidenthal calls our moral obligation to stand under the text.7

Because we again began with question three, we did not have the opportunity to fully enter the complex discussion of how to preach—if at all—Jesus Christ from the Old Testament. That conversation is elicited by question Two, who do I see? How does this text render the identity of Jesus Christ? One participant said, it would be very easy to preach this text and focus only on obedience in the midst of struggle and not mention Jesus.


We had agreed to try to work through all five steps again. By this sixth meeting the organic revision of the steps has the form of five questions:8

---

7 Root, Sharper Than a Two-Edged Sword, 33.
8 I agreed to type out an expanded version of these guidelines, send them to the participants, who agreed to use them for the rest of the summer, (Appendix II).
1) What do I see?

2) Who do I see?

3) How does God address me personally in this text?

4) How does God address the congregation in this text?

5) How do I actually proclaim this text?

What do I see?

_This is the only place in Paul we find this notion of indwelling sin. Indwelling sin as parallel to the indwelling Spirit that he then goes on to contrast... Paul asks who will deliver me, not what will deliver me. There is no what, only who. In chapters 9-11, Paul addresses the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation. Thus the struggle Paul is dealing with in chapter 7 may be about moralism, i.e. between Paul’s former life as a Pharisee and his current life as a Christian._

Who do I see? How does this text render the identity of Jesus Christ?

_Paul emphasizes that Jesus is a bodily rescuer. This relates to the appointed Gospel: “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” We can rest securely knowing that Christ is our righteousness and then imitate him... We are trapped in ourselves and need to get out of ourselves. Jesus as the fulfiller and transcoder of the Law._

How is God addressing me personally in this text?

_Paul expresses my situation perfectly, but even non-Christians would have this experience (i.e. our behaviours not corresponding with our values/standards. We stand condemned by ourselves). This passage expresses the bondage of my will. I can’t rescue myself. How wonderful it is that we can be complete sinners (BCP, “there is no health in us.”) and thus humble, and yet also confident in our salvation in Christ (Luther: simul justus et peccator). It is freeing to go to the depths of our depravity in this confidence. I know many of my failings and can get overwhelmed by them, but I have been rescued by Christ in my inmost self from even those sins I don’t know or understand._

How is God addressing the congregation in this text?

_We can’t judge others because we are all in the same sinful state; yet we are all also covered by grace. We are the broken people that Christ gave his life for. Therefore we should be constantly on our knees._
How to proclaim it?

_preach about Christian freedom verses the burden of being a good person. Describe the burden of moralism in a way that is depressing and convicting to take the wind out of the sails of those in my congregation who try to be saved by their own efforts. We must talk about the struggle with sin without reducing it to eat too many cookies. When we preach grace, we preach God. When we preach sin, we preach ourselves. Who will rescue us from this body of death? Jesus saves us from a lot more than church gossip/judging others.

Observations of Working with the Sermon Guidelines

Perhaps because were working on a non-narrative text or perhaps because we were getting the hang of these guidelines, we moved along smoothly. For a second time I noticed that one of the participants responded to question four (How is God addressing the congregation in this text?) by speaking of the identity of the church. *We are the broken people that Christ gave his life for.* This interaction of corporate address and identity is what lead me to add an additional question to the series, about the identity of the church coming out of God’s address of it. This became question five, how does this text speak of the church?

We had more time to focus on the final question, how do I preach this? Our conversation was shaped by our response to the comment of one participant; we must talk about the struggle with sin without reducing it to eat too many cookies. He told us about a sermon on this passage he’d read on-line, in which the preacher had use the example of his inability to resist eating a cookie to illustrate Paul’s dilemma. A second participant asked, does this kind of example illustrate a biblical understanding of sin? No, someone said, I don’t think God cares about that. God cares about our relationship with our
neighbor. What followed was a rich discussion about the use of stories, illustration and anecdotes and their function in a sermon. The participants observed that stories are not theologically neutral. They concluded that a helpful use of stories in sermons is as an answer to the question, “what does the new life Jesus gives personally and corporately look like?


By the final meeting on 6 July, 2011 I had added a sixth question to the list, how does this text speak of the church? In the sequence of questions it became the fifth. The shorthand form of the six became:

1. What do I see?
2. Who do I see?
3. How does God address me personally in this text?
4. How does God address the congregation in this text?
5. How does this text speak of the church
6. How do I proclaim this text?

What do I see?

Notice the repetition of ‘Hear,’ ‘listen’. The Word is everywhere and is being scattered seemingly without care… This describes conditions under which the word is heard or not heard. Each condition gets progressively better.

Who do I see?

Jesus as the parabolic preacher; Jesus as the sower; Jesus as the multiplier of fruit; Jesus as the clarifier of the parable; Jesus as the seed?... What is it like to be the sower, with limited success rate? There is limited connectedness between the sower and the soil. The sower is willing for the seed to be snatched away, scorched, etc.... He gives himself for the whole world and witnesses to what the world doesn’t know. The last few chapters
talk about the rejection of the disciples. This passage leads to the cross and is a story of his earthly ministry.

How does God address me in this text?

*The cares of the worldly church are choking my fruitfulness….God is describing and confirming my vocation. Certain people simply are not going to receive my preaching, yet the Word should be scattered indiscriminately nonetheless... Where are those areas in which we’re being choked? I’m seduced by the riches of the material world, which effects the yield.*

How does God address the congregation in this text?

*Listen, receive, and seek to understand, but recognize that the church is a mixture of soils, all of whom are called to listen, but most of whom are not yet ready to bear fruit.... Within the church is a mix of the four soil conditions. We must be humble and recognize that we don’t have all the answers and that in many respects we are no different from those in the world.*

How does this text render the identity of the church?

*All four soils are in the church. Not about us trying to be a different soil; God transforms the soil and brings the growth. We must change our expectation of what the visible church is like. We must be more realistic... It doesn’t present the church as if it is the be-all-and-end-all, because it is both a human institution and spiritual community.*

*How do I preach this?*

*The good news is that Jesus is the seed; therefore we can preach with confidence. Then, the sower is the whole church and the soil is the evangelism field.*

What kinds of stories, etc. would be helpful in illustrating the above?

*The church as a team with players at all different levels of ability to hear, understand, etc. But the goal for all is the same and the soil can be transformed.*

*Observations of Working with the Sermon Guidelines*

*The inclusion of an additional question ,*(which became question five), *how does this text render the identity of the church?*—launched us into a conversation about corporate identity. Participants were unanimous that that most congregation members
don’t see the church as a distinct corporate entity. *It’s difficult to preach about the church as community that forms disciples if the preacher has never really experienced this himself. Scripture gives us much opportunity to talk about the church as the people of God, even in a post-modern Christian world.*

*Evaluation of the Research Project*

16 September 2011 Evaluation Session

On September 16, we met a last time, to evaluate the sermon guidelines. In the weeks since our final gathering for collaborative sermon preparation, July 4, the participants had continued to use the guidelines, when they were preaching. The method of evaluation was informal and open-ended, as recommended for qualitative research evaluation.9 I then followed up with an electronic evaluation which was based on the feedback from this group meeting, (see Appendix IV).

The research project was designed around the following question:

Can a series of questions be developed, building on a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church as a community formed by the story of Jesus Christ, which is simple enough to be used in weekly sermon preparation by Anglican clergy?

I asked the following questions in order to facilitate an open-ended evaluation of the guidelines. They are:

I. Ease of use

* Can you remember the six steps and their sequence?
* Do you understand what each step asks of you?

II. Ease of application

* Do you know how to complete what the steps ask of you?

---

• Do you have the theological and exegetical skills, and sufficient knowledge of your particular context and congregation, needed to complete each step?

III. Appropriateness of guidelines toward the goal of building on a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church, as a community formed by the story of Jesus Christ.

• Do these steps give primacy to the storied world of scripture?
• Do they focus on the identity of Jesus Christ?
• Do these steps build the church as a community formed by the story of Jesus?

The nature of the conversation was directed free flow. I reviewed the goal of the research, to create easy to use guidelines, which support preaching out a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church, as a community formed by the story of Jesus Christ. The two-hour conversation touched on many aspects of the guidelines. But the fact that we moved from question to question easily—and from conversation about a particular questions in the guidelines, to the relation between the six steps and the merits of the sequence, to discussion of the moves within particular steps—not only spoke to the engagement and perceptions of the participants, but to their grasp of what I am trying to do. They were engaged and demonstrated that the guidelines were in a easy to remember sequence.

We organized our evaluation, using the three categories mentioned above and evaluated the six questions in order. They are, in their final shorthand form:

1. What do I see?
2. Who do I see?
3. What does he say to me?
4. What does he say to us?
5. What does he say of us?
6. How do I proclaim this?
1. What do I see?
   Main action: Linger and Look: Attentive reading of the appointed scripture.

   We turned to the material that accompanies this first question of the guidelines. This material directs the preacher to focus on three kinds of movement in the passage: with a narrative, with in a sentence or phrase, and within the canon (See Appendix II). A participant asked, *is what you mean by movement synonymous with what I understood to be the logic of the text?* After conversation he decided that it was. Participants recommended that I flesh out more fully the guidelines on following the movement of the passage.

2. Who do I see?
   Main action: Look and identify. How does this text render the identity of Jesus Christ?

   All agreed that this question is essential toward the goal of building on a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church, as a community formed by the story of Jesus Christ. They were of various minds regarding the exclusive focus on the identity of Jesus. Some suggested that the focus on the identity of Jesus, (as rendered in the scripture), might be expanded.

   In other words, the question two could read,

   - How does the text render the identity of the Triune God?
   - How does it relate to the Gospel of Christ?

   The participants understood the hermeneutical commitment on which this question is based (scripture renders the identity of Jesus Christ) and the desire to emphasize divine agency at work in scripture as the bridge between the scripture and the congregation. They also acknowledged that the wording “Gospel of Christ” might invite
the preaching of a teaching or value—abstracted from the person of Jesus. They acknowledged that it is easy to extract a message, or teaching, from the scripture and leave behind the person of Jesus Christ. While acknowledging these tendencies, they were not of one mind about the wording of the second question. As the conversation continued I was able to identify three possible reasons for their concerns about the exclusive focus on the identity of Jesus Christ in the second question:

1. A desire to move away from a common evangelical focus on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Consistently I find myself stretched beyond the common 21st c. evangelical “what Jesus is showing/saying to me is…”

2. A reticence to move away from a focus on any doctrine which attentiveness to the text might yield. It is too big a step to go from the first question right to the identity of Jesus.

3. A desire to dwell on God in the community of the Trinity, who reveals the identity of the church community. I know we talked about the wording of this early on in our discussions, noting how people tend to relate more easily to God incarnate. Nevertheless, as I use this step, I keep encountering (seeing) ‘one’ or ‘more’ of God in Three Persons (especially when preparing for Trinity Sunday!). It maintains divine agency but focus on triune God. I cannot escape the experience of seeing ‘God’s Community’ (Father and/or Son and/or Spirit) reveal the divine identity to the ‘Church community’ (sometimes corporately and sometimes individually).

3. What is Christ’s word to me in this text?
   Main action: Hear & Receive. Hear as God’s address to each of us as his follower and receive God’s grace and judgment.

   All the participants agreed that this third question needs to be in the guidelines. They understood what it asked of them and stated that they had the skills necessary to do
They acknowledge that they were not used to articulating how the scripture addressed them personally; all confessed that they did a lousy job of “using their I statements” during our gathering!

4. What is Christ’s word to us in this text?
   Main action: Hear & interpret contextually and theologically. Move from text as a word to me to the text as a word to one’s own congregation as a part of the Body of Christ.

   All agreed that this was an essential question. They acknowledged that they did not know what to “do” with their personal reception of the text, (question three), and agreed that they needed help in knowing both what the question four of them and, dependent on that, they were not sure if they had the skills necessary to do it.

   The hardest question was often question IV. The movement from word to the preacher to word to the congregation continually had me asking how that should or should not differ from each other. In other words when and how does the word to me have a different substance than the word that is being spoken to the congregation and how do I bring about that difference in my actual preaching?

5. What is Christ’s word of us in this text?
   Main action: Hear & discern. How does the text render the identity of the church and the disciples?

   A participant surprised us when he said, I had never thought about question five before— that the scripture was about our corporate identity. That was new to me. All said the question challenged them to think of our identity as Christians in more than personal or private terms. Another referred back to a conversation we had had during our sermon preparation on Romans 7. At that time this participant had brought up an illustration of Paul’s inner battle with sin, from an on-line sermon. The example was a

---

A participant asked whether the preacher’s own faith and ability to hear and know God was considered a necessary skill. The group acknowledged that our own faith is foundational to preaching, but an exploration of the spiritual formation of the preacher was beyond the parameters of this research project.
man who ate a cookie when he did not want to. The cookie illustration had elicited a conversation about how different stories and illustrations differently define the Christian life. One participant observed that different stories present different definitions of human personhood and our relation to God. This led to this evaluation by one participant,

I need some more clarity for me as to how we use stories to create a community of listener’s that make a clear and consistent connection back to the text and to Christ. I am a story teller by nature and use lots of stories in my preaching, and yet I still have an uneasy feeling sometimes about that connection between the story and the scripture and making it more intentional.

6. How do I proclaim God’s word to God’s people?
   Main action: Pray and Proclaim

They all observed that we didn’t spend enough time on this final question. One participant asked me to describe the relationship I envisioned between questions one through five, and the final question or step, preach and proclaim. I explained that I envisioned questions one through five as similar to five essential ingredients I have in my kitchen, from which I make most of my meals. I based this analogy on the commitment to preaching as a cumulative practice of the church, (rather than each sermon standing on its own as transformative event), and the decoupling of the form of the sermon with the form of the text. Because preaching is a cumulative act, the preacher can vary her use of the five ingredients over the weeks of the church year. The participants said they found this analogy very helpful.

There was desire to spend more time on the final question and have more direction.

I still have some uncertainty around the final question. It almost seems too big. The other questions break the sequence of events into chunks. Each chunk takes you a step towards your goal but the last question almost seems to make too much
of a leap in comparison to the previous questions. This may be partly because we had such little time to deal with this question in the actual group work.

In our evaluation of the guidelines on the use of stories and examples, the participants found the material amplifying the use of stories in the preaching guidelines helpful. They acknowledged that we didn’t talk about them much or focus on them in practice sessions. They all agreed that it was helpful to frame some core questions around the use of stories and illustrations, *Simply asking ‘what’ are we illustrating helped me... I liked your suggestion that our stories or illustrations answer the questions, what does the new life God gives us in community look like?*

They were not sure they had the skills needed to use stories in this way. *One said,*

*Perhaps this comes from the fact that we were able to spend very little time on the final question but I need some more clarity for me as to how we use stories to create a community of listeners that make a clear and consistent connection back to the text and to Christ.>*

*Summary of Concrete Suggestions from the Evaluation of the Six Questions of the Sermon*

1. Flesh out more fully the directions for following the three kinds of movement of the passage under question one.

2. Consider changing the wording of question two, to expand the exclusive focus on the identity of Jesus to include the Trinity.

3. In question three, give more help in how to listen to and articulate God’s personal address to each of us in the text.

4. Help preachers to know what to “do” with their personal reception of text (question three), as they move into God’s corporate address.

5. Provide more clarity as to how to use stories to create a community of listeners, which make a clear and consistent connection back to the text and to Christ.

6. In question six, give more directions for creating the sermon and break down its creation into a series of steps.
Evaluation of the Sequence of Questions

We turned to an evaluation of the sequence of the six questions. They found the steps sufficiently few in number and clear enough, so they could move back and forth between the questions as needed.\(^{11}\) Except for one participant, who thought the move to the identity of Jesus Christ in the second question was too quick, most found the sequence logical.

*The sequence made sense to me as the gradual movement from text to self to community and I found it helpful. This helpfulness for me only continued if, as I progressed, I kept the previous question in my mind. For instance moving from self to community was not helpful if I left what the text was saying in itself behind.*

One participant shared a change he had made in the order of the questions. He reversed questions four and five.

*I wonder if perhaps Steps four and five should be reversed so that the order more closely matches the progression from two to three: from matters of identity to matters of address. Consequently, I find myself making a similar nominative translation to the summary questions in Steps three, four and five: What is God’s (read the Triune God’s) word...to me, to us, of us?*

A Summary of the Evaluation of the Sequence of the Six Questions of the Sermon:

1. The sequence of questions encourages participants to think about aspects of scripture and preaching, which they would not necessarily think about if they had not used the questions — how do God address me personally in the text, how does it address us and what does it reveal about our corporate identity?

2. The sequence made sense as the gradual movement from text to self to community.

3. The value of using this sequence of questions only works if the preacher holds onto the previous questions as she moves along.

---

\(^{11}\) In our meetings we fluidly moved back and forth between the questions. For example we realized we have moved back and forth between the first five steps—anticipating the fourth step (what is Christ’s word to us in this text?) moving back into number on (what do I see?) when we heard something that we then wanted to look at more clearly, back into the identity of Jesus (step two) and so on.
4. One participant suggested I consider reversing the order between address and identity.

A Response to Constructive Comments

on the Identity of Jesus Christ and our Identity in Him.

Here, I briefly respond to two specific suggestions made during the evaluation session, before I move into some more general observations of the research project. The two suggestions are: 1) expand question two, who do I see, so that it does not focus exclusively on Jesus Christ and 2) reverse the order of questions four and five, that is the relationship between address and identity.

These two recommendations address the intersection of theology and homiletic practice. The first suggestion draws us into a conversation about the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ and his identity as one with the Father and Holy Spirit. The second draws us into a conversation about the relationship between God’s address of us and our personal and corporate identity. Taken together, the two recommendations draw us to a conversation about the relationship between personal and corporate identity of the members of the church and the personal and corporate identity of the Godhead. I will respond to the two recommendations in order.

The Identity of Jesus Christ

In the evaluation session, participants were of various minds regarding the exclusive focus, in question two, on the identity of Jesus. Participants suggested that the second question be expanded, even though they understand the hermeneutical
commitment behind it, and they noted the temptation in preaching to reduce Jesus to a principal, doctrine or story. They offered the following rewordings: How does the text render the identity of the Triune God? Or, how does the text relate to the Gospel of Christ?

A focus of this series of sermon questions is on the complex dialectic between address and identity, as the above discussion indicates. To ask how a text renders the identity of Jesus Christ does not exclude the question of how it renders the identity of the Triune God. Christ’s identity is as a part of the Trinity. This constructive suggestion to expand question two, leads me to include some guidelines on how to render the identity of the Triune God.

Having said this, in the revised guidelines I maintain the original wording of the second question, “who do we see?” How does this text render the identity of Jesus Christ?” I do so for two reasons, the first, theological, the second, practical. I return to the discussions in Chapter Two about David’s Yeago’s renewed doctrine of inspiration and about an Anglican ecclesiology. This homiletic method is based on the premise that our personal and corporate identity, and the church’s role in the economy of salvation, is received, not constructed. Our participation in the fellowship of the Trinity and the church—the unity that is the Spirit’s testimony to the nations—is only made possible by Jesus Christ, who joins us to himself in his Body. Hooker describes this as the mystical conjunction of Christ and the Church.\textsuperscript{12} I argued in Chapter Three, that through the

\textsuperscript{12} We are in Christ only by our incorporation into the society that has Him as their head and, together with Him, makes a single body sharing a single name (Colossians 2:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12). By virtue of this mystical conjunction, we are of Him and in Him, just as if our very flesh and bones were an extension of His (Ephesians 5:30) (V.56.8) ... God made Eve out of the rib of Adam. He formed His Church out of the flesh, the wounded and bleeding side of the Son of Man. ...In this sense the words of Adam might be
practices of the church, Christ embodies the means God has given us to live into the unity which we have received in Him, in the midst of our contested otherness. In the practices of the church, God locates love within the chasm of creaturely givenness, and incommensurability, and anchors it in Christ’s own embrace of this strange world.

My second reason, for maintaining the focus on the identity of Jesus Christ in the second question, is strategic, given the hard work of preaching from scripture. Yeago has argued that scripture functions as a quasi-sacramental instrument of the Holy Spirit. Through scripture the Spirit makes known the mystery of Christ, in order to form the church that glorifies the Father and the Son before the nations, as a sign of Christ’s messianic domination. Yeago’s rules for reading scripture remind us that it takes perseverance and hard work to hear scripture’s single witness to Jesus Christ. He calls for reverential attention to the text. “Seek within Scripture’s diversity the unity of the Spirit’s witness to Jesus Christ for the Church.”

“I fear that any other wording might be interpreted as an invitation to dodge this hard work. This hard work, Augustine argues, is our life’s work. He urges his readers not to rest in their own interpretations of scripture, or their dismissal of its hard parts, but to give themselves over to the lifelong process of inquiry and discovery, that gives form to

---

14 Ibid., 72.
human knowing, longing, and suffering, without fully resolving them.\textsuperscript{15} The second question attempts to invite this lifelong process of inquiry.

\textit{Address and Identity}

A second recommendation made in the evaluation session of the research project was a suggested a revision of the order of the Six Questions of the Sermon. A participant recommended that the order of questions four and five be reversed. Here is a short-hand form of both the original order and the proposed revision:

\textbf{Original Order}

1. What do I see? (attentiveness to the text)
2. Who do I see? (identity of Jesus)
3. What does he say to me? (personal address)
4. What does he say to us? (corporate address)
5. What does he say of us? (corporate identity)
6. How do I preach it? (proclamation)

\textbf{Participant’s Revised Order:}

1. What do I see? (attentiveness)
2. Who do I see? (identity of Jesus)
3. What does he say to me? (personal address)
4. What does he say of us? (corporate Identity)

\textsuperscript{15} Kolbet, \textit{Augustine and the Cure of Souls}, 153.
5. What does he say to us? (corporate address)

6. How do I preach it? (proclamation)

In the proposed revised order of questions, this participant creates a parallel between the identity of Jesus and the identity of the church. In this proposed revised order identity precedes address. In the original order of questions I tried to create a parallel between personal and corporate address, (questions three and four), and not the identity of Christ and the church (questions two and five). The original order assumes that the specific, resurrected, and ascended Christ, pro nobis, who is revealed in the text speaks to us; and in his Word creates us to be a people capable of hearing and responding to his address. In other words, address precedes identity. In the original order there is an implied additional question, which fleshes out the parallel and pattern between address and identity. That implied question, (between questions three and four), is, what does Jesus say of me? This implicit pattern is explicitly repeated in questions four and five. Jesus’ corporate address offers us a corporate identity in the church.

Both the original, and the proposed revised sequence of questions, hold together the interplay of three identities: the unsubstitutable identity Jesus Christ, our identity as individual persons addressed by Christ, and our corporate personhood in the Body of Christ. Both orders of the sequences of six questions are fruitful for preaching. The fruitfulness of both point to the on-going, cumulative, dialectic between God’s on-going address of us and our on-going awareness of and living into the identity Jesus gives us.
Final Observations from the Evaluation of Collaborative Sermon Preparation
Experience and Identity in a Post-Modern World

In the conclusion to this thesis I will offer some final observations on the goal of offering a easy-to-use homiletic method based on a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church as a community formed by the story of Jesus Christ. Here, I offer some general observations which are one of the fruit of the fertile collaborative work of the Kingston clergy. The limitations of this study are listed in the methodology section in Appendix III. A limitation that is not listed there is the impossibility of measuring the value of collegial sermon preparation, working as sisters and brothers bound to one another through Christ, in prayer, friendship and common vocation. The community we shared as colleagues, bound to God’s Word and God’s people, in the daily round of pastoral ministry and preparation for preaching, was a gift gratefully received by all.

In listening to my colleagues weekly, and in the oral and written evaluations, I observe that they continually raised questions about the relationship between preaching, personal experience, individual and corporate address, and individual and corporate identity. These complex relationships, I suggest, are a part of both the gift and challenge of preaching in a post-modern world: Can we claim a universal identity, given in God’s constitutive Word, listen to scripture as God’s Word addressed to us personally, hear it also as a Word spoken to the church, receive the corporate identity given in it to the church, all the while acknowledging and respecting the otherness of our neighbor and

---

16 In the orientation meeting a participant noted the complex dialectic between our experience or context and the disruption of it by the Word of God. In the six weeks of sermon preparation participants struggled to move from question three (how is Jesus addressing me personally) to question four (how is Jesus address the church) and in the evaluation session identified this as the most difficult move.
sisters and brother in Christ? These guidelines are founded on the possibility of a positive response to that question. The Trinity is the source of our hope. As one participant eloquently said, *we is a personal pronoun.* The Six Questions of the Sermon invite us to move into that hope and ask, Okay, how do we do that and what does it look like? A participant summed up a part of this challenge in his evaluation of the guidelines:

*The hardest question was often question IV. The movement from God’s word to the preacher to word to the congregation continually had me asking how that should or should not differ from each other. In other words when and how does the word to me have a different substance than the word that is being spoken to the congregation and how do I bring about that difference in my actual preaching?*

I turn to the story of Mary meeting her risen Lord, as one description of how a disciple received Christ’s personal address to her and moved beyond it for the sake of proclamation (John 20: 11-18). In the relationship between Mary, the risen Jesus, and the disciples we see the dialectic of personal and corporate address, personal and corporate identity, and the tension between personal experience and the vocation of preaching. At the least, this story names as one vocation the privilege of being both hearers and preachers of God Word, among, and for, God’s people.

Mary does not recognize the risen Jesus until he addresses her personally. When he asks her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” she cannot recognize him. But when Jesus says to her, “Mary,” she turns and says to him, in Hebrew, “Rabboni.” In Jesus’ personal address of Mary, we see our vocation to listen for and to Jesus’ Word addressed to each of us. We also see the on-going dialectic between address and identity. This story turns on Jesus’ personal address of Mary. Her identity as friend and disciples has led her to his tomb this Easter morning, where, unwittingly, she puts herself in a position to be
addressed. Mary heard the risen Christ personally address her out of the context of faith, out of her identity as a follower and friend.

After Mary recognizes the risen Jesus, he tells her to go to his friends and tell them “I am ascending to my Father, and your Father, to my God and your God” (20:17). The relationship Jesus describes with the Father is both personal and shared with his followers: my Father, your Father. Across the biblically defined chasm of otherness—God and God’s creation—Jesus invites us into the identity he shares with his Father.

As the story concludes we see the call and challenge to hold onto our personal experience of the risen Lord’s address of us, and, at the same time, to move beyond it in the task of proclamation. In Jesus’ instructions to Mary, he does not send her to his friends to speak primarily of her personal experience of their conversation in the garden outside the empty tomb. “Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (20:17). He sends her to tell them of his ascension, of what he is doing, of his identity, so to speak. John writes that “Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord; and she told them that he had said these things to her.’”

John does not include Mary’s homily, as Luke includes Peter’s, in Acts 3. If John had included Mary’s words to her brothers perhaps we would have a model of what it looks like to move from God’s personal address to God’s word to the church. But we do have this story, in which Jesus addresses Mary personally and then sends her to her friends, and his, with a word of something more. It is encouragement for the task at hand

---

17 We can hear Jesus’ command to Mary, “do not hold onto me, Mary”, as the directive not to hold onto our personal experience of him exclusively.
CONCLUSION

LOVE AS THE HERMENEUTICAL CRITERION

Several years ago our daughter gave her father for Christmas a small book, *The Asian Grocery Store Demystified*. As the title suggests the book takes the reader through the many unfamiliar vegetables and fruits sold in an Asian market, and explains what they are and what to do with them in the kitchen. The gift was welcomed. We had recently moved to Toronto, and bought a house near little Chinatown, on the east side, a block from its overflowing markets of strange fruits, vegetables, sauces, and seafood. We used the book and, over time, moved from sautéing bok choy and Japanese eggplant to cooking amaranth and fuzzy melon. Both are delicious.

Though the analogy is limited, these guidelines for preaching are offered with the hope that they might help seminary students and preachers have more confidence in their knowledge of what to do in the strange world of scripture. My observation is that one of the reasons preachers sometimes skip over listening to the appointed scripture, with their congregations, is that they are not confident that they know how to listen to scripture and then serve it up in a sermon. Quickly they leave the world of scripture for the more familiar and accessible world of story and personal experience. In doing so they unwittingly shut the door behind them to scripture’s rich fruits.

I have argued that such a quick exit from scripture’s world is unnecessary. To remain within it, with a compass for its navigation is far less of a burden on the preacher than trying to erect one unsteady bridge of meaning after another. Returning scripture to its natural habitat, the church—in which both the text and listeners are rooted, and where the word is textually mediated, echoed and embodied in the church’s practices—can yield
rich results for the preacher. Reading scripture intratextually, paying attention to its ascriptive logic, and employing a communal hermeneutic, along with one’s exegetical work, offers a way to linger in scripture’s room, listen with and on behalf of one’s people and preach.

A cultural-linguistic homiletic shifts the focus in preaching away from an attempt to correlate the meaning of scripture with present concerns by correlating the symbols of scripture with contemporary experiences. It does not suggest that some kind of bridge is unnecessary. It offers a renewed description of the correlation of scriptural texts and the current world of its hearers, located in God’s continuous purposes for his creation, as known through the Spirit’s work in the economy of salvation. A cultural-linguistic homiletic tries to listen to the textually fixed discourse of scripture as God’s personal and corporate address to the church, heard and interpreted in one’s own context. Rather than a retreat into a kind of historical universalism, this approach seeks to root God’s continuous purposes for creation, as rendered in the Spirit’s use of scripture, in one’s particular time and context.

A major limitation of this project is that it does not focus on those who listen to sermons, the congregation, or the place of sermons amid the many practices of the church. It does not focus on the sermons the clergy in Kingston preached as a result of our weekly collaborative sermon preparation. The focus is solely on the task of sermon preparation. This limitation is not due only to the need to organize a manageable research project. It springs from two convictions, which are rooted in my own years of submitting to the rhythm of congregational life. The first is that the discipline of preaching, and all
that it entails, is a primary vehicle of God’s on-going formation of clergy. The second is that sermons have power to shape the church.

I have argued here, along with others, that scripture has a “double-movement.”¹ Through the Spirit’s use of it God creates a people with an identity disclosed to them in the Word, and also forms them into a people capable of hearing that Word. Could it not be also that the Holy Spirit uses the weekly task of sermon preparation for God’s on-going formation of his tired preachers, and through them the people with whom they live? St. Augustine also speaks of a kind of “double-movement” of scripture. In *On Christian Teaching*, he writes of the discipline of staying with the difficult parts of scripture. There he develops his thesis that the skills one needs to learn to read scripture properly are also the very ones needed to act morally. Love is the hermeneutical criterion in both overlapping spheres.² The skill needed to stick with both the textually mediated world of scripture and the fleshly limitations of the human condition is the same: an ability to see the redemption of both in Christ’s incarnation.

In this life God’s truth and transforming power is held *only* in transient wrappers—the difficult words of scripture, our feeble sermons, our broken people, our flawed church. But through the incarnation God has made these broken vessels our road to the telos to which they point, Jesus Christ. In the incarnation we find our vocation as preachers: to live within the fleshly limitations of the human condition with hope—and as Augustine equally claims—to embrace studying the scriptures, obscure and limited as they are, with a similar hope.

² Paul Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 150.
The second conviction which led me to limit this project to clergy’s sermon preparation is that sermons are constitutive of the church. In *No Deed Greater than a Word*, William Shepherd proposes a cultural-linguistic understanding of biblical preaching, in which the sermon is a kind of performative utterance, which creates the church. “Preaching shapes the world of its listeners by providing experiences, which produce a new community called the Church.” 3 Through the preacher the Holy Spirit uses scripture’s words to shape a new world.

In my moments of despair for the future of the church I lament that this is true. Could decades of sermons, which exit the world of textual particularity into a world of feelings and universal experience, be one of the reasons so many now claim a kind of general spirituality without, any need for it to be rooted in a particular story, people or set of practices? Could it be one reason for the eroding confidence in the Gospel and the decline of the church? However, in my discouragement I am reminded also of my own argument that preaching is one practice among many in the web of practices of the church, and does not shoulder the full weight of proclamation.

There is an enormous need for theologians and biblical scholars to join homileticians in sustained reflection on the church’s preaching. To ask questions about what various approaching to preaching express about Christology, ecclesiology, anthropology, discipleship, and scripture’s inspiration is central to the vocation of the theologian to serve the church. The development of guidelines for preaching, however, continues to be the task of homileticians. We need coherent, accessible guidelines on how to read scripture as the church’s book, how to incorporate exegetical work in sermon

---

preparation, how to listen to scripture with our congregations, how to interpret it theologically and how to move from interpretation to proclamation in our particular contexts. How do we help to change what is heard? The goal of my research is to offer a possible set of guidelines for sermon preparation, which aim to be both theologically coherent and pedagogically accessible. I have said throughout this thesis that both characteristics—accessibility and theological coherence—are equally important to me.

I suspect that my goal of holding theology and practice together is characteristically Anglican. An Anglican focus on external forms is based on the conviction of Christ’s transforming presence in them, when those forms—worship, prayer, the practices of the church—are scripture’s own. By asking a series of specific questions of the scripture, the Six Questions of the Sermon invite the preacher to read it with her congregation through a particular hermeneutic lens. This is no accident. If how we pray shapes how we believe, then, at the least, how we read scripture shapes how we preach.

I have tried to create a set of concrete guideline for preaching whose form, to some degree, is scripture’s own, Jesus Christ. I know of no other hope for the post-modern world than Jesus Christ, who willingly took the form of a slave. Christ’s embrace of creaturely differences and inequalities, while challenging, leads us away from a retreat into a universalized or abstracted definition of the human and from reducing otherness to a struggle for power. In the church our primary identity is found within Christ’s embrace of and redemption of creaturely differences and inequalities.⁴ Our identity in Christ leads us to embrace both scripture and our neighbor. As Augustine argues, the

particularity of our neighbor, like the textually mediated world of scripture, leads beyond itself to Jesus Christ, the external Word, from whom both receive their existence.

In the church our love takes its form from Christ’s love, the one who initiates the embrace of creaturely differences as a divine action. The form of our love is subjection to the incommensurability of the other, out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21). This is the identity Christ gives to the church. This is the unity Christ gives to the church. Through the Spirit, this is the church’s witness to the nations. Through the church Christ offers the world his form as its own.

My hope is that I have contributed to the building up of church, by adding my voice to the conversation about preaching in a post-modern world. These guidelines need to be expanded, refined, and made more accessible. I want to explore the role of imagination in a cultural-linguistic approach to preaching. I will have the opportunity to continue to work on them as I prepare an on-line preaching course for Wycliffe College. My colleagues in Kingston continue to be a source of encouragement and constructive criticism. I will begin my continued work on these guidelines with the constructive criticism they made in our evaluation session. Questions of form, the use of stories and the difficulty of moving from hearing scripture, as a word to the preacher, to hearing it as word to the congregation all need further attention and modeling. My affection for and gratitude to the clergy in Kingston who were willing to work with me last summer remains.

5 It will be offered in the Winter Term, 2013.
An ecclesial hermeneutic:

- In scripture God uses the medium of human words to address the church.
- There is one church across time and cultures.
- The canon reveals the identity of Jesus Christ.
- God uses the divine language of scripture in the church’s life to form us (cultural-linguistic) both as persons who follow Christ and as members of his Body.

A Methodology for moving from scripture text to sermon

Methodology as channel markers:
Because the living Christ is the primary agent in the proclamation of the Gospel, what follows is not a methodology but guidelines. Barth writes, “For an understanding of the Bible we need particular guidelines which like buoys of the sea mark off the channel, and sometimes detours as well, but always serve to protect us against running aground through ignorance or negligence.”¹ These guidelines hope to serve as a kind of buoys, to help to navigate a theological exposition of scripture and to keep preachers from either running aground or crashing into rocks, as Barth says, either from ignorance or discouragement. It offers a three-phrase process to from scripture text to sermon text.

7. Listen & Identify: Can we summarize the studied scripture and articulate God’s address to the church in it. What do we hear about the identity of Jesus Christ.
8. Hear & Receive: Hear as God addresses to each of us personally (two-edged sword) and receive his grace & judgment.
9. Interpret: Move from text as a word to the preacher to text as a word to the church.

I Lingering in scripture’s room.

For each galley of the Denver Art Museum the curators and educators have created educational kits for parents and children to use as they wander through the paintings, photographs, relics or sculptures that surround them. These kits are cloth bags and in each bag children pull out various aids to seeing the art appropriate to the exhibit and their ages. There are games, bits of colored paper, mosaic tiles, feathers, felt hats, reproductions, quizzes, stories. These education kits help them to see what surrounds them. Rather than

rush through the galleries, onto the next, they now sit on the floor, surrounded by beautiful art, look, gaze, study and, and linger, and most likely, see more than they could on their own. The guidelines in this first section are designed to help preachers linger and look at the beauty in the room of scripture’s longer than they might otherwise. The goal is to aid and encourage attentive listening and looking. The hope is to prevent preachers from leaving scripture’s room too quickly and stepping outside of it in order to explain it.

A. Use commentaries, exegetical guides and various background materials but not as a substitute for your own careful, attentive reading of the texts. *The careful reading of scripture is a spiritual discipline. The careful reading of scripture for sermon preparation will be a primary spiritual discipline in your life as parish pastors.*

B. Focus on movement. We focus on movement out of the conviction that God is the primary agent in scripture and is moving and active in the world and 2) language implies movement. The goal is a thick description that attends to stories, words, action and intent of scripture.

C. Three kinds of movement:
1. Narrative
2. Movement in a sentence (word by word) or phrase by phrase or sentence by sentence of an epistle, prose, psalm or other piece of poetry.
3. Movement within the canon, from one ‘piece ‘ (word, image, action, phrase etc.) of scripture to echoes elsewhere. Ex., the cup Jesus prays to pass by him in the garden of Gethsemane.

Questions for staying in scripture’s room

What is God doing or how is God acting in the scripture? For example, is God making, keeping or fulfilling a promise; displaying his power though a miracle, judgment, mercy, provision, patience or suffering, teaching his disciples, sending his apostles, exhorting and so on?

Is God describing the faithlessness of Israel and the church through a prophet, showing the church how it lives out the life of Christ’s death and resurrection in an epistle?

What does the order of words in a sentence or the progression of thoughts or an argument in prose describe about the divine-human relationship? God and Israel? God and the church? God and the follower? God and the wandered? God and the future?

What does looking at the echoes of the passage at hand elsewhere in the canon reveal to us that we could not know without these echoes?

II. Listen & Identify: God’s address. What do we hear about the identity of Jesus Christ. What does the scripture tell, show, reveal, describe about the identity of Jesus Christ? His nature? Relationship with Father? With disciples?
David Demon, on his book comparing Frei and Barth’s hermeneutic states that we listen to scripture through our identity as disciples and Christ’s identity as the appointment, calling and commissioning of prophets and apostles.²

II. Hear & Receive: We place ourselves in a position to be addressed by the living God through our attentive reading of the scripture text. (Hebrews 4:12).

As Ricoeur says, we let the text read us and speak a word addressed to me as a follower of Jesus Christ. This is the personal faith each of us is called to. Bridenthal says to let the text address us is a moment of challenge for me as a follower of Christ, but a moment of relief for me as a preacher. When the text judges us “we know a sermon is on its way and it’s going to be all right.”³

IV. Interpret: Movement from text as a word to preacher to text as a word to the church, so that all stand collectively exposed and healed by God’s address to us through the scripture. Movement is from text as a word to preacher to text as a word to the church

Breidenthal addresses this move. The Task to is to take how the word spoke to the preacher and arrange a collective encounter, using one’s own experience as a guide but not to point to one’s own experience explicitly. Instead one sounds the relevant notes of Christian teaching clearly and soon.⁴ The movement to text as a word to the church involves a theological interpretation of one’s own hearing of it.

A theological interpretation of scripture is shaped by the kinds of questions the preacher asks of the texts. They are questions that aid in hearing how God might be using the text today. We focus on interpretation, a form of retelling, and no so much on extracting meaning.

  A. We ask theological and ecclesial questions of the text based on our theological, ecclesial and hermeneutical convictions, questions about witness, discipleship, the vocation of the church, the identity of Jesus Christ, mission and so on.

  B. The purpose of such questions in not to extract the hidden kernel of truth, and once extracted, leave behind the texts, as if they are only a husk, only a vessel to contain such kernels. These questions are 1) to help to locate ourselves in Jesus’ identity of us as disciples and servants and 2) to help us to hear as the community of hearers in the creedal church of the apostles, constituted by the Spirit, through which God completes his plan of salvation to draw all creation to Christ.

Sample questions—incomplete.

  1. How is God using this scripture in the church to accomplish his purposes today? Not, what does it mean? Ex. Luke 10:1-16 & Gal. 6:71-16 God is using this passage to send us out and to describe the nature of the sending. Our sending takes the form of Christ’s sending, as Paul’s did, bearing one another, crucified in the flesh.

² Long, Preaching from Memory to Hope.
³ Root, Sharper Than a Two-Edged Sword: Preaching, Teaching, and Living the Bible, 40,41.
⁴ Ibid., 42.
2. How is God using this scripture to help locate the vocation of the church? Ex. Mark. Locates discipleship in context of the end, both tribulation and Jesus as end, who is victorious. Mission in apocalyptic context helps us to understand our world and church’s appointed place in it as sign. We are a community that tells the truth and lives by that truth.

3. How is God using this passage to communicate the identity of Jesus Christ (this could be either Old New Testament)? What does it show us about Christ’s character, nature, relationship with his disciples, or actions or the patterns by which God works in the world?

4. How does this passage describe the disciple’s relationship to Jesus? How is God using this description to locate and uphold our relationship to Him and to them?

5. How might our lives be organized in the church and in our families/world to reflect the reality the scripture show us?

III Crafting a sermon—very incomplete

We will keep the image of staying in scripture’s room when looking at the use of examples and stories in the crafting of a sermon. But we will also image to help navigate putting together a sermon. When a preacher stands in front of a congregation she is taking her from the beginning to the end of her sermon. She knows where she is going (hopefully). She has prayed about it, thought it out, crafted it, written it out, but her congregation knows nothing. All they have is her voice and words, which is very different than in a written text. There they have titles, subheadings, paragraphs, punctuation to help them know where they are going. They can reread sentences, jump up and down the page to get a sense of what is going on. The preacher must use her voices and words as the only map her listeners have. In other words she must lead them along in a helpful, though not infantilizing way.

A goal of these preaching guidelines is a kind of theological expository preaching that helps to create a community of hearers, which takes listeners on a journey and includes them intentionally in the preacher’s hearing of scripture with and through the church, this implies at least two things for the crafting of a sermon.

1. Re-narrating or retelling the movement within the text.
   Inviting the congregation to listen and hear movement by movement, in various rhetorical ways. Help them follow along through pauses, change in pace, intonations, asking questions. These also serve as turn signals, brakes.

2. Using examples: here we return to the image of scripture’s room. Stories, anecdotes take the listener out of scriptures room into the world of the story. Frequently listeners only remember the
story, not what it is mean to illustrate or exemplify. *If we leave the scripture too quickly or fail to explore it fully we will be tempted to jump into stories too readily.*

Stories and examples as witness:

1) We listen to Scriptural witnesses as a community of hearers likewise called, upheld and equipped for discipleship and apostleship and 2) scripture describes the real world and a challenge of preaching is to describe that world in such a way that people may recognize it as their home and take up residence in this trustworthy place. **A goal is to use examples and stories in a way that helps the scripture to shine without usurping it.**

1) What is the percentage of story to scripture in my homily?

2) Do I leave the scripture or the character of Christ it reveals to tell a story and fail to return to scripture or to Christ? In other words, do I walk out of scripture’s room and never return. What the last (and thus only) thing in my listeners’ ears?

3) How am I using stories or examples?

   i) Am I using the story to explain the scripture? Is this necessary? It may or may not be.
   ii) If I use stories to illustrate human failure (law, sin) what is their function within the movement of God’s action as witnessed to in the Scripture. Setting context? Setting specific situation to which God is responding?
   iii) Am I using a story to witness to the reality of the world as God’s own, as scripture depicts or describes. In other words, does the story describe a situation or person who sees the world and acts in it and the church through the lens of scripture and as Christ’s? Think about using stories as a witness to the reality the scripture shows us.
Summary of the Six Questions:

I. What do I see?
Main action: Linger & Look: Attentive reading of the appointed scripture.

II. Who do I see?
Main action: Look & Identify: How does this text render the identity of Jesus Christ?

III. What is Christ’s word to me in this text?
Main action: Hear & Receive. Hear as God’s addresses to each of us as his follower (God’s two-edged sword, Hebrews 4:12) and receive God’s grace & judgment.

IV. What is Christ word to us in this text?
Main action: Hear & interpret contextually and theologically. Move from text as a word to the preacher to text as a word to one’s own congregation as a part of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:4, 5).

V. What is Christ’s word of us in this text?
Main action: Hear & discern. How does this text render the identity of the church and the disciple?

VI. How do I proclaim God’s word to God’s people?
Main action: Pray and proclaim.

The Six Questions in more detail:

I. What do I see?
Main action: Linger & Look: Attentive reading of the appointed scripture.

Linger in scripture’s room.

For each galley of the Denver Art Museum, the curators and educators have created educational kits for parents and children to use as they wander through the paintings, photographs, relics or sculptures that surround them. These kits are cloth bags and in each bag children pull out various aids to seeing the art appropriate to the exhibit and their ages. There are games, bits of colored paper, mosaic tiles, feathers, felt hats, reproductions, quizzes, stories. These education kits help them to see what surrounds them. Rather than rush through the galleries, onto the next, they now sit on the floor, surrounded by beautiful art, look, gaze, study and, and linger, and most likely, see more than they could on their own.
The guidelines of the first question of the sermon are designed to help preachers linger and look at the beauty in the room of scripture’s longer than they might otherwise. The goal is to aid and encourage attentive listening and looking. The hope is to prevent preachers from leaving scripture’s room too quickly and stepping outside of it in order to explain it.

Use commentaries, exegetical guides and various background materials but not as a substitute for your own careful, attentive reading of the texts. *The careful reading of scripture is a spiritual discipline. The careful reading of scripture for sermon preparation will be a primary spiritual discipline in your life as parish pastors.*

Focus on movement. We focus on movement out of the conviction that 1) God is the primary agent in scripture and is moving and active in the world and 2) language implies movement. The goal is a thick description that attends to stories, words, action and intent of scripture.

Three kinds of movement:
- Narrative
- Movement in a sentence (word by word) or phrase by phrase or sentence by sentence of an epistle, prose, psalm or other piece of poetry.
- Movement within the canon, from one ‘piece ‘(word, image, action, phrase etc.) of scripture to echoes elsewhere. Ex. the cup Jesus prays to pass by him in the garden of Gethsemane.

More questions for staying in scripture’s room:

What is God doing or how is God acting in the scripture? For example, is God making, keeping or fulfilling a promise; displaying his power though a miracle, judgment, mercy, provision, patience or suffering, teaching his disciples, sending his apostles, exhorting and so on?

Is God describing the faithlessness of Israel and the church through a prophet, showing the church how it lives out the life of Christ’s death and resurrection in an epistle?

What does the order of words in a sentence or the progression of thoughts or an argument in prose describe about the divine-human relationship? God and Israel? God and the church? God and the follower? God and the wanderer? God and the future?

What does looking at the echoes of the passage at hand elsewhere in the canon reveal to us that we could not know without these echoes?

II. Who do I see?
Main action: Look & Identify: How does this text render the identity of Jesus Christ?
What does the scripture tell, show, reveal, describe about the identity of Jesus Christ? His nature? Relationship with his Father? With the disciples? How is God using this passage to communicate the identity of Jesus Christ (this could be either Old or New Testament)? What does it show us about Christ’s character, nature, and relationship with his disciples, actions or the patterns by which God works in the world? If it is an Old Testament passage, especially when interpreted figurally, what do we learn that we cannot learn in the NT. For example, compare the Passover in Exodus and assume it is a figure of Christ’s Passover, what do we learn from the first Passover about Jesus Christ’s that we cannot learn from the story of his passion and death?

III. What is Christ’s word to me in this text?

Main action: Hear & Receive: Hear as God’s addresses to each of us personally (God’s two-edged sword) and receive his grace & judgment.

In this third step we stand under scripture, that is, we place ourselves in a position to be addressed by the living God through our attentive reading of the scripture text. (Hebrews 4:12). As Ricoeur says, we let the text read us and speak a word addressed to me as a follower of Jesus Christ. This is the personal faith to which each of us is called. Breidenthal says that to let the text address us is a moment of challenge for me as a follower of Christ, but a moment of relief for me as a preacher. When the text judges us, “we know a sermon is on its way and it’s going to be all right.”

IV What is Christ word to us in this text?

Main action: Hear & interpret contextually and theologically: Move from text as a word to the preacher to text as a word to one’s own congregation as a part of the one Body of Christ (Eph. 4:4,5).

This question involves the movement from text as a word to preacher to text as a word to the church, so that all stand collectively exposed and healed by God’s address to us through the scripture. Breidenthal addresses this move. The task is to take how the word spoke to the preacher and arrange a collective encounter, using one’s own experience as a guide but not to point to one’s own experience explicitly. Instead, one sounds the relevant notes of Christian teaching clearly and soon. The movement to text as a word to the church involves a theological interpretation of one’s own hearing of it. The goal is to locate our own hearing of the scripture within the larger hearing of the creedal church of the apostolic church through the ages. In other words, we locate God’s address to us in the scripture within a theological articulation of the Christian faith.

A way to begin to do this is to use one’s own hearing of the text, question four, as a doorway into a theological interpretation of scripture. Into what room or rooms of

---

1 Ibid., 40, 41.
2 Ibid., 42.
theology does God’s address to you in this scripture lead? Does it lead into Christology, the end times, human personhood, apostleship, suffering, the cross, Christian hope etc. Does it lead to a deep description of grace, abiding in Christ, love of neighbor, divine justice etc. The goal is not to preach systematic theology, but to locate one’s own experience in the larger framework of the church, in order to help the congregation corporately stand under the scripture, rather than preaching our own experience.

Another way to approach this same task is to ask, how is God addressing me in this passage to accomplish his purposes for the church. Ex. Luke 10:1-16 & Gal. 6:71-16 God is using this passage to send us out and to describe the nature of the sending. Our sending takes the form of Christ’s sending, as Paul’s did, bearing one another, crucified in the flesh.

V. What is Christ’s word of us in this text?
Main action: Hear & discern. How does this text render the identity of the church and the disciple?

V David Demson, on his book comparing Frei and Barth’s hermeneutic, states that we listen to scripture through our identity as disciples and Christ’s identity as the appointment, calling and commissioning of prophets and apostles. How is God using this scripture to help locate, name and describe the vocation of the church and disciple? For example, Mark locates discipleship in context of the end, both tribulation and Jesus as end, who is victorious. Mission in apocalyptic context helps us to understand our world and church’s appointed place in it as sign. We are a community that tells the truth and lives by that truth. Or, to be a Christian means we take sin seriously.

Additional questions to help hear how God speaks of us in the appointed scripture:

6. How does this passage describe the disciples’ relationship to Jesus? How is God using this description to locate and uphold our relationship to Him and to them?

7. How might our lives be organized in the church and in our families/world to reflect the reality the scripture show me and us?

These questions are 1) to help to locate ourselves in Jesus’ identity of us as disciples and servants and

3 Long, Preaching from Memory to Hope.
VI. How do I proclaim God’s word to God’s people?
   Main action: Pray and proclaim.

   A goal of these preaching guidelines is a kind of theological expository preaching that helps to create a community of hearers. A way to help to create a community of listeners is to take them in the sermon on an inductive journey which includes them in the preacher’s own journey of hearing them with and through the church. This is not the same as preaching one’s own experience of scripture. It is including them as active participants in listening.

   This overall goal of preaching implies at least two things for the crafting of a sermon:
   1. Re-narrating or retelling the movement within the text:

      Inviting the congregation to listen and hear movement by movement, in various rhetorical ways. Asking questions, what does Jesus say next? Restating Jesus’ words as a direct proclamation to them, avoiding giving the point of the text and then fleshing it out, as in a deductive sermon. Help them follow along through pauses, change in pace, intonations, asking questions. These also serve as turn signals, brakes.

   2. Using stories.

      Here we return to the image of scripture’s room from the first question of the sermon: what do I see? Stories and anecdotes take the listener out of scripture’s room into the world of the listener. Frequently, listeners only remember the story, not what it is meant to illustrate or exemplify. If we leave the scripture too quickly or fail to explore it fully, we will be tempted to jump into stories too readily.

   Two theological convictions inform the use of stories and examples in these guidelines:
   1) We listen to Scriptural witnesses as a community of hearers likewise called, upheld and equipped for discipleship and apostleship and 2) Scripture describes the real world, and a challenge of preaching is to describe that world in such a way that people may recognize it as their home and take up residence in this trustworthy place. A goal is to use examples and stories in a way that illustrates our response to God’s transforming address. Stories should, at their best, answer this question: what does the Word of God in this scripture look like? What does grace look like in a disciple? Love of neighbor?

   4) What is the percentage of story to scripture in my homily?
   5) Do I leave the scripture or the character of Christ it reveals to tell a story and fail to return to scripture or to Christ? In other words, do I walk out of scripture’s room and never return? What is the last (and thus only) thing in my listeners’ ears?
   6) How am I using stories or examples?

      i) Am I using the story to explain the scripture? Is this necessary? It may or may not be.
      ii) If I use stories to illustrate human failure (law, sin), what is their function within the movement of God’s action as witnessed to in the scripture? Setting the context? Setting specific situation to which God is responding?
      iii) Am I using a story to witness to the reality of the world as God’s own, as scripture depicts or describes? In other words, does the story describe a
situation or person who sees the world and acts in it and the church through the lens of scripture and as Christ’s? Think about using stories as a witness to the reality the scripture shows us.

Using voice and timing as road signs for congregation:

When a preacher stands in front of members of a congregation she is taking them from the beginning to the end of her sermon. She knows where she is going (hopefully). She has prayed about it, thought it out, crafted it, written it out, but the members of her congregation know nothing. All they have is her voice and words, which is very different than in a written text. There they have titles, subheadings, paragraphs, punctuation to help them know where they are going. They can reread sentences, jump up and down the page to get a sense of what is going on. The preacher must use her voice and words as the only map her listeners have. In other words, she must lead them along in a helpful, though not infantilizing way.
Methodology Appendix

The methodology I used for this research project is a bounded case-study, with participant action, as described by John Creswell and Kristin G. Esterberg.\footnote{J Creswell, Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches., 2. ed. (Thousands Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002); Kristin G Esterberg, Qualitative Methods in Social Research (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002).} The data was collected in four ways: 1) detailed field notes by a trained student note taker, 2) Digital audio recordings made for the purpose of listening but transcription; 3) a personal journal, though not as detailed as the student’s since I am was an active participant; 4) various documents: sermons, articles, e-mail conversation, written evaluations, any written disciplines or method the group formulates.

Evaluation took place in two ways. The eight meeting was a group evaluation, which was then followed by a written evaluation. The questions on follow-up evaluation were based on the focus of the group conversation. Participants returned the written evaluations electronically. I analyzed the data using the four forms of data analysis and interpretation developed by Stake described in Creswell. Those forms are:

1. Categorical aggregation—where I will describe aspects of the case study that emerge over its course;
2. Direct interpretations, descriptions of single instances of something that happened during the case study.
3. I will analyze by looking for and describing any patterns that emerged
4. Naturalistic generalizations, observations that can be passed onto others.

The specific research question on which my research was based is:

Can a series of questions be developed, building on a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church as a community formed by the story of Jesus Christ, which is simple enough to be used in weekly sermon preparation by Anglican clergy?
I had two goals as outcomes of the research project. The first is an analytical thick description of the participant’s use of the preaching guidelines. The second is a revised set of preaching guidelines based on the work of the clergy in Kingston.

Collaborative Research Model.

I have chosen to work with clergy in the Kingston area for pragmatic reasons. Some clergy there expressed an interest in my work and encouraged me to locate my study there. I began with the names of interested clergy and used the process of snowballing to obtain additional potential participants. Finally, the selection of a location for this project was somewhat arbitrary. Clergy in every location undertake the weekly discipline of sermon preparation.

The criteria for participation were: a willingness to try these guidelines, an ability to participate, and regular preaching in a parish where the participant is also a pastor. Participants did not need to have familiarity with theological or homiletical literature nor did they need to know about or support a cultural-linguistic approach to preaching. This study did not investigate whether this specific approach is theologically credible, but whether questions can be designed that are useful. The group consisted of six clergy from the wider Kingston area, all of whom serve in local parishes, both rural and urban, of various sizes. There were two women and four men, besides myself. I knew two by name before I began. I did not gather any information on their denomination or academic

---

337 Based on overall patterns that became apparent in our collaborative work, as well as significant individual events. R. Stake, The Art of the Case Study Research (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995).
338 I have invited clergy in the Kingston area by a general e-mail letter, with follow-up e-mails and phone conversations. The clergy I invited were recommended to me by three people: a colleague in the D.Min. program from Kingston, Val Michaelson, the Bishop of Ontario, George Bruce and The Principal of Wycliffe College, George Sumner. I also invited clergy who had agreed to participate to invite others.
339 Consent to participate and ethic review board letter.
history or theological leanings before or during the study. Some of this became evident during the study by things they said, stories they told or self-identification.

The Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to an investigation of the research question, *Can a series of questions be developed, building on a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church as a community formed by the story of Jesus Christ, which is simple enough to be used in weekly sermon preparation by Anglican clergy?* It was not designed to investigate other aspects of the preaching act: the congregation’s response to the sermons, the long term use of the guidelines by participants, etc.

Steps in the Case-study

The five steps of the research in action case study are:

1. Gather participants, secure their consent, the approval of the Ethics Review Panel of the University of Toronto, and train the note taker.

2. Orient the clergy through the distribution of a reading packet of background material and a two-hour meeting in Kingston.

3. Participate for six consecutive weeks in group sermon preparation with clergy using the draft.

4. Conduct evaluation through a group evaluation session (the eight meeting), followed by a written evaluation.

5. Analyze data according to stated guidelines.
The Six questions of the sermon: Evaluation of Doctor of Ministry Research of Annette Brownlee
September 2011

My research question is:

*Can a series of questions be developed, building on a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church as a community formed by the story of Jesus Christ, which is simple enough to be used in weekly sermon preparation by Anglican clergy?*

The goal of the six questions of the sermon, which you all were kind enough to play with over the summer, is two-fold:

1) Questions for sermon development which spring from *on a cultural-linguistic understanding of the church as a community formed by the story of Jesus Christ as communicated in scripture.*

2) Guideline which are simple enough to be of actual use. Simple is not defined in the research question. Simple implies, at the least:
   a. Clear or understandable.
   b. The preacher or student knows what to do with the question, that is, what it asks of her and has enough ability to do so.
   c. Questions are helpful enough in the actual creation of a sermon as to be worth using.

Coming out of our evaluation on Sept. 22, here are some questions I ask you to reflect on and answer. Your answers can be long or short.

1. Which questions or words within particular questions were unclear or needed more of an explanation?

   *I still have some uncertainty around the final question. It almost seems to big. The other questions break the sequence of events into chunks. Each chunk takes you a step towards your goal but the fifth question almost seems to make too much of a leap in comparison to the previous questions. This may be partly because we had such little time to deal with this question in the actual group work.*

2. Did the sequence of the questions make sense or would a different ordering of the six questions be more helpful and user friendly?
The sequence made sense to me as the gradual movement from text to self to community I found helpful. This helpfulness for me only continued if as I progressed I kept the previous question in my mind. For instance moving from self to community was not helpful if I left what the text was saying in itself behind.

3. Do the six questions embody the theological convictions on which they are based? Are there questions you think should be included to this end? Or excluded or tweaked?

I liked the questions and would leave them as they are, with perhaps the one exception of somehow breaking up the last question. See my answer to number 1.

4. Did you feel equipped to do what each question asks of you in relationship to the scripture, yourself or the theological task? Which were the hardest? The easiest?

The hardest question was often question IV. The movement from word to the preacher to word to the congregation continually had me asking how that should or should not differ from each other. In other words when and how does the word to me have a different substance than the word that is being spoken to the congregation and how do I bring about that difference in my actual preaching.

5. Do any of these questions invite you to think about aspects of scripture of your preaching that had not occurred to you before?

Not so much that I had not thought of before but rather a good reminder of some things that in the rush of a week can easily get left behind.

6. Describe in your own words the usefulness of these questions in your own preach and whether or not you would consider them easy to use?

The usefulness was in the guiding of the questions. It slowed me down and made me question my immediate reactions to a text. In some ways that made sermon preparation more difficult as it was a switch from my normal patterns that had been developed over the last few years. With time the ease of use would become more apparent I believe and for someone starting out and using them from the beginning some of that change would be lessened.

7. What could improve them?
Perhaps this comes from the fact that we were able to spend very little time on the final question but some more clarity for me as to how we use stories to create a community of listeners that make a clear and consistent connection back to the text and to Christ. I am a story teller by nature and use lots of stories in my preaching and yet I still have an uneasy feeling sometimes about that connection and making it more intentional.

8. Anything else you want to add?

Just my thanks for the opportunity to be stretched and to continue to learn and grow.
Bibliography


Bibliography


———. “Performing the Scriptures: Preaching and Jesus’ ‘Third Way’.” *Journal for Preachers* 17, no 2 (Lent 1994).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fish, Stanley</td>
<td><em>Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities.</em></td>
<td>Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene-McCreight, Kathryn</td>
<td><em>Ad litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth read the “plain sense” of Genesis 1-3.</em></td>
<td>New York: P. Lang, 1999.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Kelsey, David. The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975


Seitz, Chris. “New Works in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture.” *The Living Church* (February 27, 2011): 8–11.


