FAITH SEEKING CREATIVE UNDERSTANDING:
FROM PROPOSITIONAL
TO AESTHETIC AND DRAMATIC PREACHING

by

Yohwan Heo

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Emmanuel College
and the Department of Pastoral Theology of the Toronto School of Theology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology
Awarded by Emmanuel College and the University of Toronto

© Copyright by Yohwan Heo 2013
Faith Seeking Creative Understanding:
From Propositional to Aesthetic and Dramatic Preaching

Yohwan Heo
Doctor of Theology
Emmanuel College and the University of Toronto
2013

Abstract
The aim of this project is to investigate how to do homiletics as a theological-aesthetic task that is faithful to the Scripture, yet creative to the new situation. This project takes seriously the seeming polarity of theology and aesthetics in preaching. Some homiletic theories seem to polarize theological dependence on God and aesthetics (rhetoric) for communication. The goal here is to combine theology and aesthetics (rhetoric) without denying the power of God on the one hand, and without ignoring human persuasiveness on the other. That is, how might one fully affirm a dependence on God in preaching and yet call for the full use of all human aesthetic resources? That is the question to be studied. In this sense, the project seeks to illumine the dramatic nature of preaching as a means of faith seeking creative understanding. Put another way, dramatic theory links between theology and aesthetics. Theological aesthetics, which is on behalf of God, might be developed as theological drama.

The thesis assumes that the gospel is foremost understood as divine speech and action revealed through the Scripture as well as living and creative communication between God and people. Likewise, the ministry of preaching is a faithful and creative performance based on the Scripture for humanity’s participation in the drama of God. Moving from a study of metaphor to
the studies about John’s Gospel and the New Homiletic, and employing the theologies of Horace Bushnell and Kevin Vanhoozer, this project argues that preaching as a theological-aesthetic task is intrinsically dramatic. It is a means of formation of faith that seeks creative understanding. That is, dramatic preaching regards Scripture as the divine Script and responds to our new situation by combining the best of the New Homiletic.
Acknowledgments

Many people have influenced the direction and creation of this dissertation. Without the continued support and guidance, this dissertation could not have been written. I would like to acknowledge my director, Dr. Paul Scott Wilson. His guidance and encouragement were invaluable. It is doubtful that I would have completed this project without his generous dedication to my work, and I have benefited tremendously from his depth as a theologian, his expertise as an adviser and editor, and his fidelity to the gospel. Thank you for always being a mentor throughout my graduate training. I greatly admire you and respect your dedication to helping others; your willingness to assist me in accomplishing my goals is deeply appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge my committee members and teachers, Dr. Dorcas Gordon of Knox College, Dr. William Kervin of Emmanuel College, Dr. Rebekah Smick of ICS, and Dr. David Schnasa Jacobsen of Boston University. Their support and feedback enabled me to get through the doctoral process. Thank you for always being so approachable and for your excellent guidance.

I also want to acknowledge my love to the parishioners of the three congregations I have served, Suncheon Presbyterian Church in Suncheon, Korea; Hansomang Presbyterian Church in Goyang, Korea; and Milal Presbyterian Church in Toronto, ON. They have listened to me preach, taught me what it means to be a preacher, and supported me in prayer and financial assistance.

Finally, this dissertation would not have been possible without the love and encouragement of my family. This humble thesis is, therefore, offered with thanksgiving to God for my children, Naeun (Betty) and Jeongjun (Jun), and it is dedicated to my beloved wife and friend, Seunghye (Joy) Lee. She has been a constant source of inspiration, help, and strength. Her love and her patience have been unfailing. No one believed more, hoped more, and endured more
than YOU. “Give her a share in the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the city gates.” (Proverbs 31:31, NRSV)

Thanks be to God for His indescribable grace and love!
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................... vi

INTRODUCTION

1. Problem .......................................................................................................................... 1
2. The Purpose ................................................................................................................... 2
3. Thesis Statement .......................................................................................................... 3
4. Methodology and Chapter Outline ............................................................................. 6

CHAPTER ONE: AESTHETIC CONCERN AND METAPHOR

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 9
I. Aesthetic Concern in Philosophy and Theology ............................................................. 11
   1. Aesthetic Concern in philosophy ................................................................................. 11
   2. Aesthetic Turn in Theology ......................................................................................... 15
   3. Rhetoric and Theology in Preaching ......................................................................... 18
II. A History of Thought on Metaphor .............................................................................. 21
   1. A Short History of Thought on Metaphor ................................................................. 21
   2. Metaphor and Metonymy .............................................................................................. 27
   3. Paul Ricoeur’s Critique on Roman Jacobsen .............................................................. 29
III. Metaphor and Projection of Worlds ............................................................................ 32
   1. Aesthetics in Tensive Metaphor ...................................................................................... 32
CHAPTER TWO: JOHN’S GOSPEL – THE UNFOLDING DRAMA: AN EXPLORATION OF THE SITUATION OF JOHN’S COMMUNITY AND HOW JOHN GIVES DIRECTION

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 47

I. The Exploration of Johannine Community .................................................................................. 48
   1. The Possibility of Finding a Specific Community behind the Gospel Texts ...................... 48
   2. Judaism in the Gospel of John ............................................................................................... 51
   3. Assumption of the Fourth Gospel as a Two-Level Drama .................................................. 54
   4. The Characteristics of Johannine Community ...................................................................... 62

II. The Imagery in the Gospel of John ............................................................................................. 65
   1. How John Gives Direction for the Sectarian Community in Conflict ................................. 65
   2. The Christological Meaning of the Images ............................................................................ 68
   3. Ecclesiology ........................................................................................................................ 70

III. A Case Study: Christological and Ecclesial Image in the Prologue ........................................ 72
   1. The Structure ........................................................................................................................ 72
   2. The Word and Wisdom ........................................................................................................ 76
   3. Dwelling Place of the Word .................................................................................................. 77
   4. Temple Imagery in the Prologue ........................................................................................... 79

IV. Summary ................................................................................................................................... 81

CHAPTER THREE: HORACE BUSHNELL AND THE ROOTS OF CONTEMPORARY AESTHETIC THEOLOGY

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 83
I. The Language Theory of Bushnell ................................................................. 85
   1. The Context ........................................................................................................ 85
   2. The Centrality of Language for Human Experience .......................................... 88
II. Two Kinds of Theological Methods .................................................................. 95
   1. The Rationalistic Method of Theology .............................................................. 95
   2. The Imaginative Theological Method ................................................................ 98
   3. Divine Life in Theologian and the Receptive Imaginative Hermeneutics .......... 100
   4. Comprehensiveness in Theology ...................................................................... 104
   5. Comprehensive Understanding on the Work of Christ ..................................... 106
   6. Homiletic Appropriation of Bushnell’s Theology .............................................. 108
III. Bushnell’s Legacy and Interpretation Theory .................................................... 110
   1. The Biblical Theology Movement .................................................................... 112
   2. Contemporary Aesthetic Theologies .................................................................. 115
   3. The Necessity of Dramatic Method .................................................................... 118
   4. Bushnell and Dramatic Theology for Today ..................................................... 120
IV. Summary ............................................................................................................. 126

CHAPTER FOUR: THE NEW HOMILETIC - IDEAS OF IMAGE, METAPHOR, AND
IMAGINATION

Introduction .............................................................................................................. 129
I. The Development of the New Homiletic ............................................................. 130
   1. Organic Form: H. Grady Davis – Design for Preaching ..................................... 130
   2. Eventfulness of Language: New Hermeneutic and Word of God as Event ........ 139
   3. How Jesus Preached: Parable and Narrative Studies ......................................... 145
II. The New Homiletic and Loss of Theology: Event as Experience ....................... 158
   1. The Turn to the Listener: Naming God and Human Experience ....................... 160
2. The Need to Recover God........................................................................................................ 166

III. Summary .................................................................................................................................. 170

CHAPTER FIVE: FAITH SEEKING CREATIVE UNDERSTANDING – KEVIN VANHOOZER

Introduction....................................................................................................................................... 172

I. Theology as Divine Communicative Action .................................................................................. 175

1. The Return of the Author: Speech Act Theory ........................................................................... 175

2. Special Hermeneutics vs. General Hermeneutics ..................................................................... 178

3. The Gospel as Divine Speech and Action .................................................................................... 181

II. Christian Life as Faithful and Creative Performance .................................................................. 192

1. Theology as an Exegetical Scientia: the Form of Christ and the Literary Genres of the Bible ............................................................................................................................................. 193

2. Theology as Practical Wisdom: Improvisation and Creative Understanding .......................... 196

III. Summary .................................................................................................................................. 207

CHAPTER SIX: DRAMATIC PREACHING – COMBINING BEST OF THE NEW HOMILETIC WITH ORGANIC FORM, MOVEMENT, AND GOD

Introduction....................................................................................................................................... 209

I. Dramatic Preaching as a Faithful and Creative Performance ....................................................... 210

1. Formation of Christian Identity for Participation ..................................................................... 211

2. Faithfulness to the Scripture ...................................................................................................... 215

3. Creativity and Contemporary Listeners ..................................................................................... 218

II. The Practice of Dramatic Preaching ............................................................................................. 221

1. Theological Genres: Teaching and Proclamation ..................................................................... 221

2. Theological Structure as Plot: Trouble and Grace .................................................................... 225

III. A Sermon Example & Pedagogical Suggestion ........................................................................... 231
1. A Sermon Evaluation ................................................................................................................. 231
2. Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice ........................................................................... 234
IV. Summary .................................................................................................................................... 241
CONCLUDING REFLECTION ........................................................................................................ 243
BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................................ 245
INTRODUCTION

1. Problem

This project originally comes from my personal experience of preaching. I grew up listening to my father’s preaching on Sundays. Up to this day, my father is a pastor ministering a local church in southern Korea. His preaching is logical and informational. As a director of the local Christian retreat center, he also invited many famous revivalists across the nation for seasonal events. As far as I can remember, the revivalists’ preaching was significantly different from that of my father. While the revivalists’ preaching touched my heart by evoking emotion and sensitive responses, my father helped me experience the gospel with my head. I loved both different styles of preaching but felt that each style was not enough. I felt a need of a holistic preaching that is not only logical but also emotional. This initial experience led me to conduct this project.

As an interdisciplinary work, this dissertation explores the seeming polarity of theology and aesthetics in preaching. It is an attempt to examine how to do homiletics as a theological-aesthetic task that is faithful to the Scripture, yet creative to the new situation. The ministry of preaching can be understood to have an aesthetic appeal to the listeners. Unlike other kinds of aesthetic appeal, it is on behalf of God. Thus, preaching is a theological-aesthetic task that not only forms the listener’s faith but also seeks creative understanding. Some homiletic theories seem to polarize theological dependence on God and aesthetics (rhetoric) for communication. The goal here is to combine theology and aesthetics (rhetoric) without denying the power of God on the one hand, and without ignoring human persuasiveness on the other. That is, how might
one fully affirm a dependence on God in preaching and yet call for the full use of all human aesthetic resources? That is the question to be studied.

Preachers may find a role model within the Bible for preaching that incorporates both aesthetics and theology for its readers. The author of John’s Gospel gives a theological direction to his community members by using a variety of images. Homiletical theorists traditionally assume the significance of imagery and imagination; however, do not seem to adequately articulate how both aesthetics and theology are concretely at work in the preaching event. I will argue that the relation between theology and aesthetics in preaching can be discerned through language, content, form, and structure of a sermon with the aid of an analogy to drama.

2. The Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the dramatic nature of preaching as a means of faith seeking creative understanding. Put another way, dramatic theory can link theology and aesthetics. Theological aesthetics, which is on behalf of God, might be developed as theological drama. The dramatic nature of theology encourages the use of drama for preaching. This dissertation is predicated on the assumption that preaching should be faithful to the Bible, yet creative towards the new situation of the listeners. It affirms that as divine revelation the Bible is the paramount source of theology and as well as the provenance of aesthetics. To accept the Scripture as paramount for homiletical investigation and insight is to accept that God communicates creatively through the variety of genres of the Bible with a great many people of all ages. The gospel is foremost understood as divine speech and action revealed through the Scripture and as living and creative communication of God with people. Likewise, the ministry of preaching is a faithful and creative performance based on the Scripture. Preachers, thus, interpret the Bible and preach the gospel faithfully and creatively to help the listeners answer
God faithfully and creatively. This study develops the nature and practice of preaching as a dramatic performance.

Another underlying precept upon which this dissertation is based is that preaching at its best synthesizes the epic and the lyric modes described by German theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar. He distinguishes the epic, the lyric, and the dramatic perspective and argues the priority of the dramatic mode in theology. In the ministry of preaching, the dramatic perspective must also have priority. Each of the epic and the lyric perspectives is important but each is incomplete without the other being present. Homiletics is also dramatic since the gospel is the triune “theo-drama” of redemption, which is God’s communicative action in Jesus Christ. That is, as drama, preaching balances the dogmatic propositions of the epic and the creativity of the lyric. As such, dramatic preaching has both propositional and poetic characteristics.

3. Thesis Statement

*Preaching is intrinsically dramatic. It is a means of formation of faith that seeks creative understanding. That is, dramatic preaching is faithful to the Scripture, yet creative to the new situation. In dramatic preaching, both poetic and propositional language is employed to generate the Word-event of the gospel that, in turn, transforms human beings in the encounter. Two theological genres, both teaching and proclamation, have important value. Moreover, the encounter of the Word is best formed dramatically by a theological structure that employs plot and moves in the manner of Christian story, from trouble to grace. I will argue that dramatic*


form without theological language can be blind, and theological language without dramatic form can be empty.

Distinctive about this thesis are the following assumptions:

(1) Preaching is dramatic because it concerns what God has said and done through Jesus Christ as seen in the Scripture. The interpretive task of preachers is to access the authorial meaning through forms or images given by the biblical texts. It is crucial for the individual to make an adequate position when interpreting the text. As Horace Bushnell proposes, the wise reader is a “sympathetic” interpreter who will be open and receptive to the impressions coming from the text. The interpreter will refrain from any hasty judgments, admit the many-sidedness of a text, and celebrate a multiplicity of antagonistic symbols.³

(2) To be significant for contemporary life, “the Bible must yield its meaning within the horizon of the present.”⁴ That is, in dramatic preaching preachers need to distinguish between divine authorial meaning, to the degree that can be determined, and its significance in the present. This distinction is similar to Bushnell’s distinction between explication and application, E. D. Hirsch’s meaning and significance,⁵ C. S. Lewis’ contrast between receiving and using texts,⁶ and Vanhoozer’s contrast between performance I interpretation and performance II interpretation.⁷

---


⁷ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 165-68.
(3) Preaching is a dramatic event of the Word of God and is not considered as a mere human experiential event. It implies that dramatic preaching has a formative power with the aid of the Holy Spirit to form us in the image of Jesus Christ. Dramatic preaching has an ethical dimension in which both preachers and the listeners are requested to answer God faithfully and creatively. Thus, the proper end of dramatic preaching is not scientific theory but wisdom: lived knowledge, a performance of truth.

(4) In order to help preachers in the practice of preaching dramatically, this thesis proposes two theological dimensions of preaching: theological genres and theological structure. First, the ministry of preaching needs to have not just propositional but also emotional character. Two theological genres of preaching, proclamation and teaching, might be employed for dramatic preaching. They need to be present in a sermon. Teaching is akin to the epic, proclamation is akin to the lyric. Preaching can be a theological and aesthetic task because the two genres of preaching, proclamation and teaching, organically stem from the Scripture itself, manifest the theological essence of the gospel to be preached, and are interwoven in each other to appeal to the listeners rhetorically and theologically. In and through both proclamation and teaching, preachers can do justice to the “objectivity which proceeds from the subject” as well as to “subjectivity which gains portrayal in its objective realization and validity.”\(^8\) That is, preaching requires cognitive-poetic imagination\(^9\), in which the cognition in the question makes full use of not only the intellect but also the imagination.

---


\(^9\) Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 278.
(5) This thesis also proposes theological structure as plot for dramatic preaching. The *form* of preaching is a medium through which the *substance* of preaching is delivered. In one perspective, the form of preaching is synonymous with the theological structure of the gospel since it concerns a word addressed by God to human listeners and the people’s response. That is, when preachers consider sermon form, theological structure as theological plot is reflected in the form. Thus, although there may be lots of diversity in preaching forms, preachers have to solidify the theological groundwork to hold the whole body of preaching. The theological frame that I find helpful is called “trouble” and “grace.”

4. Methodology and Chapter Outline

This study will follow a method of exposition, comparative analysis, evaluation and correlation in six chapters. The notion of dramatic preaching will be examined through how metaphor became central to human understanding and knowledge; the role of imagery in John’s Gospel; Horace Bushnell’s language theory as a foundation of theology and preaching; the New Homiletic’s use of image, metaphor, and imagination for the ministry of preaching; why contemporary preaching more and more puts emphasis on human experience; and then a theology of preaching based on the dramatic nature of theology, especially with the theory of Kevin Vanhoozer.

With the ultimate aim for my study stated in the thesis above, the following is how this dissertation will unfold in the following chapters:

Chapter 1 provides a philosophical and literary understanding on aesthetics and metaphor, in particular. After briefly examining aesthetic concern in philosophy and theology, as a foundation of theory, the chapter will clarify the meaning and identify the basic concepts of
metaphor as the central issue of human knowledge. Metaphor and metaphoric process are deeply related to theology as a theological-aesthetic task.

Chapter 2 examines a biblical foundation for theological-aesthetic understanding in preaching. As a two-level drama, the Gospel of John can be a strong example for dramatic preaching that is faithful to the original event of Jesus Christ and creative in relation to new situations of the Johannine community. Moreover, the author of John’s Gospel employs various images to give a direction to his community members. Especially the imagery in the Gospel helps readers feel and understand their ecclesial identity on the basis of the identity of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3 then surveys Horace Bushnell’s language theory because he provides a strong case towards preaching as a theological-aesthetical task. Bushnell’s proposal of aesthetic theology is still influential today as an ancestor of dramatic theology that takes seriously the Scripture’s own claims, yet at the same time it creatively relates those claims to a contemporary setting.

Chapter 4 demonstrates the common elements of the New Homiletic. After examining the common elements of it, I evaluate the New Homiletic overall. As a result of examination, a means to recover God in preaching is suggested to be dramatic preaching as a theological-aesthetic task.

Chapter 5 presents the work of Kevin Vanhoozer as a founding theologian of TheoDrama. His aesthetic sensitive theology is built on a solid foundation of the Scripture by using the analogy of drama. Moreover, since theology is living wisdom and not a speculative science, his dramatic proposal is deeply related to right judgment (orthokrisis). If the nature of theology is dramatic, preaching is also dramatic and dramatic preaching has a formative power to conform the listeners to the form of Jesus Christ.
Chapter 6, lastly, concludes this study with the relationship between theology and aesthetics for the field of homiletics with the argument of dramatic preaching as a theological and aesthetical task. In this chapter, I incorporate the role of imagery in John’s Gospel, the works of Horace Bushnell, Kevin Vanhoozer, and the values of the New Homiletic as essential elements for preaching dramatically. Dramatic preaching as faithful and creative performance will be discussed in two ways: theological genres and theological structure as plot. Consequently, I believe that we can combine the New Homiletic’s values (organic form, eventfulness of language and the Word, and transformative power of the Word) with theological dimensions.
CHAPTER ONE: AESTHETIC CONCERN AND METAPHOR

Introduction

It is a great challenge for all preachers to make sermons more relevant and yet remain faithful to the message of the Bible. This means taking a passage of Scripture and presenting it in such a way that is faithful to the essence of the gospel, while at the same time, making it relevant to the lives of present day listeners is a great challenge for all preachers. It takes a great amount of effort to preach biblically, faithfully, and in ways that are culturally relevant; however, this is required for authentic preaching. The Word of God inspired through the Holy Spirit long ago is still God’s message for the Christian church today. A renowned homiletician, Fred Craddock writes as follows:

Preaching is both words and the Word. To deny any relationship between one’s own words and the Word of God, whether due to one’s notion of proper humility or to an abdication of the authority and responsibility of ministry, is to rob preaching of its place and purpose. From such a perspective, a silent pulpit would be the logical and honest conclusion. On the one hand, to identify one’s own words with the Word of God is to assume for ourselves God’s role in preaching. Neither one’s own strong convictions on a matter nor the scaffolding of many verses of Scripture can justify the claim. Nor is it the case that a changed tone of voice provides the flag by which the Word of God can be identified among many human words. Rather, the preacher takes the words provided by culture and tradition, selects from among them those that have the qualities of clarity, vitality, and appropriateness, arranges them so as to convey the truth and evoke interest, pronounces them according to the best accepted usage, and offers them to God in the sermon. It is God who fashions words into the Word.¹⁰

For those who have been called to preach, there is an operative question how to relate “the Word” and “words” in the ministry of preaching. The relation can be understood as the tension between theology and aesthetics in preaching. Here my interest is not theologies (or aesthetics) of preaching but theology (or aesthetics) in preaching. Theologies of preaching may vary on a variety of issues: the authority of the Bible; the sources of theology (the Scripture, tradition, human experience, and etc.); the relationship of theology to other disciplines of knowledge and to other religions; the role of the Church in society, and the like. Preachers may belong to orthodox, neoorthodox, liberal, black, feminist, womanist, post-colonialist, minjung, and many other camps. Any specific method that preachers may have in mind will affect their preaching. To some extent, it is true that we preach from a particular theological perspective and attempt to persuade listeners into following that perspective. Nevertheless, the most important purpose of preaching is beyond getting the listeners’ agreement. It seeks to foster actions and beliefs that conform to the form of Jesus Christ. That is, preaching is to lead people to “living a relationship with Jesus Christ.”

In a similar vein, by “theology in preaching,” I mean what God is doing and speaking in preaching as well as what God wants us (both preachers and listeners) to speak and do on behalf of His will. Thus, the phrase “theology in preaching” may help to keep God at the center of preaching. Likewise, aesthetics in preaching, closely akin to the term “rhetoric,” is understood as choosing “words” that convey dimensions of “the Word” and finding appropriate human expressions that relate aspects of divine intention.

In this chapter, I will first clarify the relation between aesthetics and theology in conceptual history. After that, the tension between rhetoric and theology in preaching will be followed by the study of metaphor that is essential to human understanding and knowledge.
I. Aesthetic Concern in Philosophy and Theology

1. Aesthetic Concern in philosophy

Generally, philosophers have speculated on beauty since Plato, but it was only in the eighteenth century that aesthetics, as the science of taste or beauty, was discussed in its own realm. German philosopher, Alexander Baumgarten coined the term “aesthetics” in 1750 through his *Aesthetica* that was concerned with the study of the sensible mode of knowledge. Before the appearance of Baumgarten’s work, however, Immanuel Kant is arguably the origin of the aesthetic study in philosophy. Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* is widely applauded as the first major work in aesthetics. In his third *Critique of Judgment*, Kant focuses on the possibility of aesthetic judgments. How are judgments about the beautiful possible? Are they distinct from moral and scientific judgments, and if so, how? Kant gives aesthetics its own *a priori* principle, thus setting aesthetics in an autonomous realm of its own. According to Kant, we cannot appeal to criteria of morality or social responsibility when discussing questions of beauty; there must be another standard. The unique principle in aesthetic judgment is that beautiful things manifest “purposiveness without purpose.” What does this mean? This refers to the beauty of an object derives from the sense of autonomous freedom that the imagination enjoys in beholding it. The goal of art is not to be found in an external or transcendent world, but within the artistic


13 In Kantian sense, *a priori* is said of that which is (logically, not temporally) prior to experience, independent of experience, and usually the condition of the possibility of something that is in question. Universality and necessity are features of the *a priori*. Not only judgments can be *a priori*, but so can principles, rules, and various elements of cognition, such as intuition and concepts. I am indebted to Dr. Rebekah Smick who taught the Western history of imagination in 2011.
experience itself. This is what Kant calls the “free play of imagination.” Thus freed from all external restrictions, the mind becomes auto-telic; it becomes its own means and its own end. This is the aesthetic condition that Kant describes in his famous phrase – “purposiveness without purpose.”

Kant establishes an autonomous aesthetic realm in order to distinguish aesthetic judgments from other types of judgments, and in order to have a means to speak about that which is beyond knowledge and experience. For Kant, there are two branches of knowledge – sensibility that provides the manifold of experience, and understanding that provides the formal categories for uniting this manifold. If sensory experience is what supplies the content of cognition, it is the faculty of understanding that supplies the form in which we grasp it. “Sensation without understanding is blind; understanding without sensation is empty.” Thus there must exist in us an active faculty for the synthesis of the manifold. This active faculty is what Kant calls “imagination.” His aesthetic theory favors the creative (or productive) imagination against the mimetic model of representation. In this aesthetic role, imagination is revealed as a productive activity of its own.

The Copernican Revolution made a decisive turning point in Western thinking for it essentially replaced the old onto-theological definitions of being as Divine Cause or First Principle with the typically modern definition of being as a projection of human subjectivity.

---


15 *Ibid.*, 169. Kant argued that what we call thought is really a synthesis of two forms of knowledge: sensibility and understanding. “Sensibility” may be taken roughly to mean what empiricists such as Locke or Hume assumed to be the sole basis of knowledge, the realm of physical sensation. And Kant’s use of “understanding” is roughly what rationalists, such as Leibniz, assumed to be the sole basis of knowledge, the realm of concepts in the mind.

This movement can be traced through the history of German Idealism and Romanticism to the present: Friedrich von Schiller, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and so on. Although the study of aesthetics appears less clear cut, in what follows, I will briefly attempt to clarify the definitions of some interrelated notions: “aestheticism,” “aesthetic attitude,” “aesthetic object,” and “aestheticism in theology.”

The term “aestheticism” was originally used in the early 19th century to give the sensuous elements of art more attention, disagreeing strongly with its social responsibilities. More famously, the slogan “art for art’s sake” was virtually an equivalent for the term in a literary, philosophical, and cultural movement of the later 19th century. From the movement, in the 20th century, the term referred to a cultural perspective that art is autonomous and self-sufficient, not susceptible to non-aesthetic standards, rules, or criteria and has intrinsic value.\(^\text{17}\) In this sense, “the aesthetic attitude” is to be strictly distinguished from the cognitive, moral, or practical attitude.

What are the implications of this aesthetic attitude? First, the artist treats language and literature as “aesthetic objects.” The aesthetic object is an autonomous entity that is to be judged by virtue of its beauty, form, or shape, not by its morality or utility. Furthermore, aesthetic judgment is more concerned with the present shape than with the origin of the text or work of art. The aesthetic object is to be contemplated in its organic wholeness, cut off from questions about its original situation and the circumstances of its production. Monroe Beardsley clarifies the aesthetic attitude as follows:

When we are considering aesthetic objects, we can ignore all their supposed side effects and consider only their aesthetic value. The critic’s concern is not with art for the sake of citizenship or patriotism or mysticism, or anything else, but with Art for Art’s Sake only. The slogan, “Art for Art’s Sake,” has, of course, meant a good many things, not always consistent and seldom very definite, but it does mark out, roughly, a general attitude.\(^{18}\)

The most important consequence of this aesthetic autonomy for theology is “aestheticism in theology.” That is, the text is cut off from its author, and from its author’s authority. In this sense, a theology that focuses on a similar autonomy of the Bible as text to the exclusion of the author and historical context is justified by “aestheticism.” The Bible is used and interpreted as an aesthetic object, for example in reader-response criticism or in Northrop Frye’s *The Great Code*,\(^{19}\) cut off from its original situation and from the authority of its divine Author.

The aesthetic concern is hugely beneficial for theology. For example, it heavily emphasizes the text as an organic unity. In directing attention to formal features of the text, the aesthetic approach helps us better grasp the structure and patterns of the Bible as a literary work. In this sense, contemporary biblical study moves away from historical criticism to literary criticism. Moreover, in leading our attention to the creative role of imagination in the interpretative process, the aesthetic approach offers a significant reminder that our interpretations remain tentative, limited by our situation. In short, the aesthetic turn gives readers the creative role to define theology in its own way. However, there can be a negative side to a purely aesthetic approach to the Bible and theology. It can make the author and history irrelevant for interpretive purposes. To separate the text from its original context and author is to set it freely


adrift, allowing it to have as many meanings as there are many aesthetic judgments on an artist’s work.  

2. Aesthetic Turn in Theology

According to Kevin Vanhoozer, roughly speaking, the history of modern theology may be construed as a “progressive reading” of Immanuel Kant’s three *Critiques*: theology has passed through a speculative (eighteenth century) and a moral (nineteenth century) phase, and now in the midst of an “aesthetic” stage that corresponds to Kant’s third *Critique*, the critique of aesthetic judgment.  

It is true that notions such as “imagination,” “metaphor,” “beauty,” and “art” are increasingly popular in the titles of theological books. In biblical study, the turning away from historical criticism to literary criticism, especially the attention on Jesus’ parables, is also an example of aesthetic turn in theology.

Then, why did and do many contemporary theologians turn to aesthetics? To some extent the turn to aesthetics in theology is a reaction against the scientific theological method that objectified the reality of God and failed to accept the mysteriousness of God. The major concern

---

20 For example, Roland Barthes, in his essay “The Death of the Author,” praises “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.” For him, the text is an aesthetic playground only when no author is there to control the play. Refer to Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 148.


of theology can be nothing but God, and the mysterious reality of God vanishes like smoke if it remains merely as abstract propositions. A renowned Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner argues as follows:

God, and what is meant by God, can only be grasped when we surrender our own conceptual understanding to the ineffable and holy mystery which lays hold on us as the mystery which is near to us and which embraces us in love. The theologian is not the purely intellectual expositor but the one who thrusts all duly explained earthly realities into the incomprehensible mystery of God. The theologian is the one who shows that no human proposition… is ultimately really understood unless it is released into the blessed incomprehensibility of God.23

Drawing on the intrinsically mysterious nature of theology, Rahner also calls for a poetic element of theology:

We must admit that it is a consequence as well as a defect of a theology that is rationalistic and proceeds only “scientifically” that the poetic touch is missing. Nowadays we demand from theology something which, although not new, has been neglected during the last few centuries: theology must somehow be “mystagogical,” that is, it should not merely speak about objects in abstract concepts, but it must encourage people really to experience that which is expressed in such concepts. To that extent we might understand poetic theology as one method of a mystagogical theology.24

Then, how to incorporate such a poetic element in theology is becoming an important question. The danger of “aestheticism,” however, makes theologians reluctant to do theology in terms of aesthetics. Arguing that theology is a beautiful science because of the beauty of its object – God – and method, Karl Barth writes that whoever misses the beauty of God “has good cause for repentance.”25 Nevertheless, he insists that “reflection and discussion of the aesthetics


of theology can hardly be counted a legitimate and certainly not a necessary task of theology.”

For Barth, “While the statement that God is beautiful must not be neglected, since it is instructive in its own place, it cannot claim to have any independent significance.” This means that a theologian should be careful of accepting the premise of the aesthetic turn in modern thought that dissociates the work of art or a text from its author. In the biblical view, an interpretation that ignores the Creator as the Author of the Scripture is absurd because this Author is the Creator of the world.

Then what can theologians say about the Bible in terms of being a beautiful literature positively and aesthetically? As Hans Urs von Balthasar eagerly contends, “it is not necessary that […] theology renounce aesthetics […] For if it were, theology would have to give up a good part – if not the best part – of itself.” It is not a matter of choosing either theology or aesthetics. We need to attend to both theology and aesthetics. The question is how to do it in spite of the negative influence of aestheticism. I argue that aesthetic theology should be faithful to an interpretative process in which God as the Author of the Bible plays a pivotal role, but also aesthetically creative to the new situation. In speaking of “aesthetic theology” or “theological aesthetics,” as a combination of theology and aesthetics, it is a form of theology that depends

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 666.


29 Hans Urs von Balthasar distinguishes the two terms, “theological aesthetics” and “aesthetic theology.” According to von Balthasar, the former is to seek the glory of God, the most beautiful One, and is governed by Jesus Christ who is the primal form of divine revelation, whereas the latter is arbitrarily to reduce theology in aestheticism. In my view, doing theology with regard to art and beauty should be theological aesthetics, not aesthetic theology. Refer to von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 9; 25; 38. In this thesis, however, I will use the two terms as synonyms to avoid confusing usage of the terms. That is, when I use “theological aesthetics” or “aesthetic theology,” it refers to “theological aesthetics” in von Balthasar’s way. Otherwise, I will provide some explanation.
on the aesthetic realm for its language, content, method, and theory. That is, it is the linking of theology with the practice of imaginative and beautiful discourse. This type of theology is not only to “examine the aesthetic embodiment of religious experience” but also to “adopt narrative and metaphorical discourse as its own primary mode of communication […] emphasizing the way in which stories and images have the power to shape communities of experience and practice.”

For this reason, I will turn to the idea of metaphor as a key element of “theological aesthetics.” Before the examination of metaphor, it will be helpful to briefly explore the conjunction of rhetoric and theology in preaching.

3. Rhetoric and Theology in Preaching

When we look into the history of preaching, it is obvious that there have been two preeminent attitudes about rhetoric: rhetoric-friendly homileticians and anti-rhetoric homileticians. Within his classic treatise on Christian rhetoric, *On Christian Doctrine*, St. Augustine draws upon the tradition of Cicero and Aristotle to define the three essential goals of preaching: to teach, to delight, and to persuade the listener. For St. Augustine and many contemporary homileticians who accept rhetoric to help invoke the listener’s concern, rhetoric is a good partner for preachers. On the contrary, some preachers are against rhetoric. As a reformed theologian, Karl Barth is opposed to rhetoric because “revelation is a closed system in which God is the subject, the object, and the middle term.” In preaching, according to Barth,

“God alone must speak.” He worries about preaching falling into aestheticism by reliance upon rhetoric. Among the three goals of preaching mentioned by St. Augustine, for example, if a preacher is content with delighting the listeners sensitively or superficially, delighting the listeners would be considered as a mere human discourse. Hence, rhetoric-friendly homileticians admit the importance of the human element and take their listeners seriously. Conversely, anti-rhetoric homileticians tend to emphasize the freedom and power of God and the Word, thereby avoiding making faith and salvation human works. The tension between theology and rhetoric in preaching is greatly akin to the debate between theology and aesthetics in general.

Drawing on James E. Loder, André Resner articulates that the problem between theology and rhetoric in preaching is “a kind of reductionism which occurs when one discipline pejoratively declares of its cognate counterpart, whether theology or one of the human sciences, that it is in effect ‘nothing but’ a subcategory of its own structure, and, consequently, the


34 In classic rhetoric, Plato regards rhetorical pleasure as flattery because it instigates the crowd to fall into the low desires such as money-loving. However, he does not deny the importance of learning and spiritual pleasure, especially as a way to the truth, saying “then if one turns it around and says how far the king is removed from the tyrant in truth of pleasure, he will find at the end of the multiplication that he lives 729 times more pleasantly, while the tyrant lives more disagreeably by the same distance.” Plato, The Republic, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), Book IX, 587e, 270. Thus Plato argues philosophical (or true) rhetoric is required for the public to experience the spiritual elevation which operates solely logically without emotional pleasure. However, his rhetoric seems to fail to persuade the public. Instead, Aristotle tries to reconcile the high virtue and emotional pleasure in his Rhetoric. For him, happiness cannot be separated from pleasure in his Ethics. Aristotle, Rhetoric, in The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. II, edited Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), Book I, Chapter 2, 1357a, 2157. Consequently, for both Plato and Aristotle, pleasure in rhetoric (or dialectic) is not just sensitive but communal-valuable.

fundamental claims of the other discipline are explained away.”36 Then how can we set up the relationship between theology and rhetoric in preaching without any reductionism? By taking an example of the apostle Paul as preacher who uses rhetoric in delivering the gospel, Resner suggests that we preachers do not have to separate between theology and rhetoric and we can do homiletics to attempt to describe what I name “the gospel-driven rhetoric” that is rooted in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.37 In a similar vein, James F. Kay writes as follows:

The cross does not mean we forsake the language of human beings or of our culture for that of the angels. The word of the cross always retains a human form. Nevertheless, what the crucified Christ reveals is that no creaturely form has in itself the power to render the identity or the reality of the new creation. Moreover, the rupture between the old and the new, revealed in and caused by God’s apocalyptic deconstruction of kata-sarka norms for the word, means that rhetoric (and poetics) cannot be unquestionably baptized for Christian use in some version of “pulpit eloquence” or “sacred rhetoric” or “communication theory.” Rather, the word of the cross overturns reigning rhetorical strategies, “taking them captive” (2 Cor. 10:5) in the service of its message.38

As a specific example of von Balthasar’s “theological aesthetics,” the gospel-driven rhetoric in homiletics is “reverse-rhetoric.”39 As the gospel of the cross and resurrection is the reverse or ironic event of God, in preaching all is dependent on God. According to Resner, however, Paul in his writings does not denounce rhetoric as unimportant or unnecessary. Rather Paul reframes it through the new epistemology of the gospel of the cross and resurrection.40

---

37 Resner Jr., Preacher and Cross, 138-41.
40 Ibid.
Therefore, preachers need to pay more attention to both the rhetorical and theological dimensions of preaching equally and to keep them in critical conversation with each other. Like theological aesthetics, “the gospel-driven rhetoric” or “reverse-rhetoric” is one of the right ways to link theology with rhetoric in preaching. While Resner’s study is excellent, he stops short of providing how to prepare a sermon reflecting the reverse-rhetoric or the gospel-driven rhetoric. To propose a practical way of sermon preparation at the end, I will explore the world of metaphor in the next section.

II. A History of Thought on Metaphor

1. A Short History of Thought on Metaphor

   Generally, since the semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure, the flow of language study has changed from the interest of relationship between language and the object to intra-linguistic relationships. That is, before Saussure, the semantic view referred to the relationship between language and the object as not an erratic one but a symbolic one; it is implied that there is basically something adequate when they are connected initially with each other. However, the semiotics of Saussure accentuates the arbitrary relation of ‘the signifier’ and ‘the signified’ instead of the inseparable connection between language and reality. It eliminates “the myth of a natural language” and blocks the examination of reality beyond the sign.\(^{41}\) Therefore, between the sign in the Structuralism and the Romantic symbol, there is what we may call an ugly ditch of

\(^{41}\) Here by symbol we mean that the relationship between naming and its object is deeply and relatively stable from the perspective of the Romanticism. On the contrary, Saussure’s definition of the sign runs as following: “The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and an acoustic image,” the latter terms being then replaced by a new set, the signified and the signifier. The point is made further that the sign is wholly arbitrary, that its meaning rests entirely on social convention and acceptation and that it has no “natural” fitness in and of itself. See Fredric Jameson, The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 30-31.
recognizing reality.\textsuperscript{42} Thus the task of literature (and philosophy) in the postmodern era seems necessary to fill the hole.

The importance of the problem had been partly recognized by various philosophers. According to Philip Wheelwright, the oldest clear expression of this basic semantic insight on record is Tao Ten Ching saying “The Tao that can be spoken is not the real Tao.”\textsuperscript{43} This phrase seems to imply that the connection between language and reality cannot be fixed by the symbolic stable nature but also cannot be excluded by the arbitrariness of the sign. In other words, the relationship cannot be explained as a simple correspondence theory or as an intra-linguistic Structuralism. The key issue here may be the referential nature of language. Is language a closed system (semiotics would say yes) or is it open to truths beyond itself (e.g. revelation)? To articulate this issue, we will take metaphor as a key indicator. As the etymological meaning of the word shows, ‘change’ (meta) and ‘motion’ (phora), so the function of metaphor is the change and movement of linguistic meaning.\textsuperscript{44} Metaphor is not dead but organically living. This full vitality becomes the foundation of human reality. What poetry makes us recognize our being is also the power of metaphor it has. Now let us consider a thumbnail sketch on the history of metaphor.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{42} By using the notion of “willing suspension of disbelief,” Samuel Taylor Coleridge argues that “Images and Thoughts possess a power in and of themselves, independent of that act of the Judgement or Understanding by which we affirm or deny the existence of a reality correspondent to them.” See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, \textit{Biographia Literaria}, volume II, edited James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (London and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 6. On the contrary, pointing to the idea that the symbol has held a dominant position against the allegory by “this tenacious self-mystification,” Paul de Man asserts that the symbolic style will not be permitted to exist in serenity, and instead he wants to stay the category of the sign by taking the allegory. Paul de Man, \textit{Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 207-08.

\textsuperscript{43} Philip Wheelwright, \textit{Metaphor and Reality} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), 22.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.}, 69.
\end{flushleft}
In philosophical and literary history, the concept of metaphor concretely starts from the Poetics of Aristotle. Before him, Plato is concerned about misusing poetry:

We shall say the imitative poet produces a bad regime in the soul of each private man by making phantoms that are very far removed from the truth and by gratifying the soul's foolish part, which doesn't distinguish big from little, but believes the same things are at one time big and at another little.\footnote{Plato, The Republic, Book X, 605 b-c, 289.}

We are, at all events, aware that such poetry mustn’t be taken seriously as a serious thing laying hold of truth, but that the man who hears it must be careful, fearing for the regime in himself, and must hold what we have said about poetry.\footnote{Ibid, Book X, 608 a-b, 291.}

Plato’s anxiety about poetry can be understood because he felt the negative influence of the poem, especially the metaphor in it. Aristotle, on the other hand, praises metaphor as a sign of genius: “The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others.”\footnote{Aristotle, Poetics, in The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. II, edited Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), Chapter 22 1459a, 2334-335.}

However, Aristotle understands the nature of metaphor as a departure from the ordinary modes of language as it runs through all his writings on the subject. It is clear that in Aristotle’s thinking the difference between the ‘ordinary’ or ‘prose’ use of words and the ‘distinctive’ or ‘poetic’ use of them is inherent, and for him, metaphor is regarded as a decorative addition to language.\footnote{Ibid., Chapter 21 1457b, 2332; Terence Hawkes, Metaphor (London and New York: Methuen, 1972), 7.} It should be used properly and decoratively for clarity. For Aristotle, the arts of language cannot help having a small but real importance, whatever it is we have to expound to others: the way in which a thing is said does affect its intelligibility. But he also argues it is not as important as people think. “All such arts are fanciful and meant to charm the listener. Nobody
uses fine language when teaching geometry.\textsuperscript{49} Terence Hawkes explains that behind this view of the metaphor there may be discerned two fundamental ideas about language and its relationship to the ‘real’ world:

First, that language and reality, words and the objective world to which they refer, are quite separate entities; and second, that the manner in which something is said does not significantly condition or alter what is said. [...] That is to say, there are ‘bare facts’, and there are various ways of talking about them which are separable from them. [...] Language is a means of describing reality, but it cannot change it.\textsuperscript{50}

However, a new thought on metaphor emerges from the Romantic view, with individuals such as Samuel T. Coleridge and William Wordsworth. For them, the metaphor is not fanciful knitting of the facts. It is a way of experiencing the facts. It is a way of thinking and of living; an imaginative projection of the truth. Metaphor is not just a tool used in language, it is the way humans think, and it is how language works. Especially what Coleridge calls imagination in \textit{Biographia Literaria} is akin to our metaphor:

There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is once both active and passive. In philosophical language, we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION.\textsuperscript{51}

For Coleridge, imagination sets up and retains a dynamic relationship between the two opposite forces. He connects imagination with generating new meaning and experience, beyond identifying something that already exists out there. That is, language is utterance: it utters the inner reality and, by imagination, imposes this on the world beyond. By this means language and

\textsuperscript{49} Aristotle, Rhetoric, Book III, Chapter 1, 1404a, 2238.

\textsuperscript{50} Hawkes, \textit{Metaphor}, 9-10.

reality are intimately related. Imagination, thus, is the shaping spirit that projects human’s mind onto the world, making it interact with the world, as the elements of metaphor interact with each other. Reality is thus the product of the imagination and that upon which it plays. Given this, metaphor cannot be thought of as simply a cloak for a pre-existing thought. A metaphor is a thought in its own right. Therefore, we live in a world of metaphors of the world, out of which myths are constructed.52

Since the Romantic view on metaphor and language, many scholars followed it in various ways. I. A. Richards sets forth his central understanding of metaphor in his book, The Philosophy of Rhetoric. As the title indicates, Richards is principally concerned with rhetoric. He defines rhetoric as a “study of misunderstanding and its remedies.”53 Richards contended that through examination of language and its use we can comprehend the nature of communication and improve communicative enterprises. He hoped to decrease misunderstanding by an analysis of meaning and how it changes as discourse occurs.

Richards’ definition of metaphor has impacted all succeeding treatments of metaphor: “In the simplest formulation, when we use a metaphor, we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction.” One of the ways Richards suggests for communicators to work at preventing misunderstanding is the use of metaphor. He sees the usage of metaphors as the heart of our language systems. The metaphor “is a borrowing between and intercourse of thoughts, a transaction between contexts. Thought is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison, and the

52 Ibid., 54-55.
54 Ibid., 93.
metaphors of language derive there-from.” Thus, for him, language is naturally metaphoric. And this notion has been accepted as a widespread view although it is faced some critiques later and developed variously.

Hawkes summarizes, using the theories of Richards and some other critics, that in a broad sense, there are two modern views of a metaphor: (1) the neo-classical linguistic approach that recognizes the validity of the romantic view to the extent that it allows for a vitally metaphorical sort of background to language, but that proposes an investigation of the processes whereby metaphor may be inculcated in language as foreground; (2) the neo-romantic anthropological view that recognizes the extent to which metaphors create reality for us, but that points out that it is not a new reality, so much as the reinforcement and restatement of an older one that our total way of life presupposes. Consequently, since the beginning of twentieth century, we have witnessed an increasing philosophical interest in metaphor. Philosophers have explored the nature, the definition, the pragmatics, and the cognitive status of metaphors from mainly the

55 Ibid., 94.

56 For example, Philip Wheelwright attacks the “semantic positivism” of I. A. Richards, arguing that it is simplistic to contrast scientific (or referential) language with emotive language only. According to Wheelwright, there are four modes of discourse: referential and non-emotive (literal); referential and emotive (expressive); non-referential and emotive (ejaculative); non-referential and non-emotive (phatic). Donald Davidson disagree with many writers like Richards, Max Black, Nelson Goodman, Monroe Beardsley and so on, asserting the idea that a metaphor has, in addition to its literal sense or meaning, no another sense or meaning. Davidson makes the distinction between what words mean and what they are used to do, and he thinks metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use. Refer to Philip Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), 30-51; Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” In On Metaphor edited Sheldon Sacks (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 30-31.

Moreover, the essential problem with Richards and most of his interpreters is that they think Coleridge meant a literal reconciliation of opposites when he spoke of imagination (our metaphor) bringing together two separate identities. He did not, it was a dynamic, tensive affair that generated a third something or meaning in addition to the two ideas that are initially brought together, but the initial two are not lost, as Richards and others imply. Deconstructionists tend to view metaphor as simple polarity in language without acknowledging the dynamic spark. I am indebted to Paul Scott Wilson on this insight. Paul Scott Wilson, “Coherence in Biographia Literaria: God, Self, and Coleridge’s “Seminal Principle.”” in Philological Quarterly, 72. 4, (September 1993): 451-69.

57 Hawkes, Metaphor, 92-93.
perspective of Romanticism with supplement from linguistics and anthropology. The result is that while metaphor was often studied as an aspect of the expressive function of language in the past, it is actually one of the essential conditions of speech. Thus, the study of metaphors is becoming important as it is being realized that language does not simply reflect reality but helps to constitute it. Language is radically metaphorical in character. Metaphors in many ways depict how humans think.

2. Metaphor and Metonymy

If we argue language is metaphoric and metaphors have an aesthetic power, how can the nature of a metaphor be explained? The concern here is to analyze aesthetical elements of the metaphor and then to discern this metaphorical aesthetics’ relation to reality. To put it concretely, it will be good to start with Roman Jakobson’s work, *Fundamentals of Language*. Then, we will see Paul Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor as the critique of Jakobson. This work consequently is to suggest an alternative to overcome the dichotomy between metaphysical “symbol” and anti-metaphysical Deconstructive “sign.”

In his essay, *Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances*, Jakobson illustrates the complexity of relationships that may exist between the areas of psychological linguistics and literary criticism. Jakobson has knowledge of both fields. He begins with a discussion of two modes of arrangement of linguistic sign: ‘combination’ and

\[ \text{combination} \]

58 This seems to me important for homiletical implication. In contemporary homiletics, the language of preaching seems to be in turmoil. That is, some scholars in more conservative school appear to maintain the language can become the Word of God automatically in the pulpit, while the other radical pole who gives a skeptical response to the position argues the language of preaching is just human experiential outcomes. The relationship will be examined later more thoroughly in Chapter Four.

‘selection.’ The former is made up of constituent signs and/or occurs only in combination with other signs, whereas the latter, a selection between alternatives, means the possibility of substituting one for the other. In Jakobson’s view, combination has the function of contexture and selection is substitution. That is to say, in linguistic arrangement, selection (and substitution) deals with entities conjoined in the code but not in the given message, whereas, in the case of combination, the entities are conjoined in both or only in the actual message.60 Therefore, combination is linked with the dimension of contiguity or adjacency and selection with similarity. Jakobson then applies this idea to the relationship between metaphor and metonymy and the two polar types of aphasia, a brain disorder affecting speech. He distinguishes two basic types of aphasia: ‘similarity disorder’ and ‘contiguity disorder.’ The former affliction in which a patient may say ‘fork for knife’ involves a deterioration of meta-linguistic operations, while the latter in which a patient is able to express ‘fire for gaslight’ damages the capacity for maintaining the hierarchy of linguistic units. The relation of similarity is suppressed in the former, the relation of contiguity in the latter type of aphasia.61 Thus, metaphor is alien to the similarity disorder, and metonymy to the contiguity disorder. Jakobson says:

The development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or through their contiguity. The metaphoric way would be the most appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic way for the second, since they find their most condensed expression in metaphor and metonymy respectively.62

As a result, Jakobson felt able to propose that human language in fact operates in terms of two fundamental dimensions whose characteristics are crystallized in the rhetorical devices of

---


metaphor and metonymy. Thus messages are constructed by the interaction of a ‘horizontal’ movement, which combines words together, and a ‘vertical’ movement, which selects the particular words from the available inventory of the language. The combinative process manifests itself in contiguity and its mode is metonymic. The selective process manifests itself in similarity and its mode is metaphoric.

He then observes that the distinction between Romanticism and realism lies in the relative dominance of metaphor in Romanticism and metonymy in realism. He suggests that though there has been much discussion of metaphor, there has been little study of metonymy. For a consideration of the language of realism and prose, a theory of metonymy is a necessity.63

As shown above, Jakobson’s logical bipolar structure of selection-similarity-metaphor and combination-contiguity-metonymy suggests a touchstone for understanding literature, psychoanalysis, and even cultural expression like movies. Nevertheless, his theory is not enough to define the aesthetic foundation of metaphor. Paul Ricoeur’s critique on Jakobson will be helpful to compensate for the defect.64

3. Paul Ricoeur’s Critique on Roman Jacobsen

First of all, Ricoeur asserts that Jakobson’s work is semiological. That is, Jakobson’s analysis completely bypasses the distinction between semiotics and semantics, between signs and sentences. It has in common with all signs from the distinctive trait, through phonemes, words, sentences, and meanings. Nevertheless, this analysis does not sufficiently account for the distinction between signs and sentences. It is this distinction that Ricoeur seeks to address through his theory of metonymy.

63 Ibid., 78-82.

64 There are few homiletic literatures to concern with both metaphor and metonymy. Paul Scott Wilson is exceptional. In his first edition of The Practice of Preaching, Wilson attempts to show the necessity of both linear thought of metonymy and polar thought of metaphor for the ministry of preaching. See Paul Scott Wilson, The Practice of Preaching (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), especially chapters eleven (metonymy) and twelve (metaphor).
expressions, and sentences, even the text. However, Ricoeur raises a question whether the order of the sign is the same with that of discourse.\(^{65}\) He also argues that since contiguity stays in the order of the contingent at the level of objects themselves, where each thing forms a completely independent whole, metonymic contiguity appears to be quite different from syntactic connection.\(^{66}\)

In the case of the relation of selection-similarity-metaphor, another question is raised because selection-similarity cannot explain the predicative character of metaphor. Jakobson’s basic idea of the metaphor as a substitution of one term for another is problematic. For Ricoeur, metonymy can be also defined as “changes of names, or names for other names.”\(^{67}\) This is due to the fact that both metaphor and metonymy demonstrate substitution. Moreover, arguing that metaphor is a phenomenon of discourse, an unusual attribution, different from a phenomenon of language, Ricoeur says that Jakobson’s model cannot completely obliterate this difference because the difference between sign and discourse is itself minimized. In other words, “it is in the region of unusual syntagmatic liaisons, of new and purely contextual combinations, that the secret of metaphor is to be sought.”\(^{68}\) In this manner, the bipolarity of metaphor and metonymy is broken by Ricoeur. Metonymy – one name for another name - remains as a semiotic process, perhaps even the substitutive phenomenon par excellence in the realm of signs. Metaphor –

---


\(^{67}\) *Ibid*.

unusual attribution – is a semantic process, perhaps even the generic phenomenon par excellence in the realm of the instance of discourse.\textsuperscript{69}

In fact, the essential difference between Ricoeur and Jakobson is that they have a different definition of the metaphor. In case of Jakobson, the nature of the metaphor is aligned with the classical view, especially Aristotle: “Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy.”\textsuperscript{70} Here, Aristotle’s understanding of metaphor has two essential natures: ‘application by transference’ and ‘analogy’ (proportion or resemblance). Concerning analogy, Aristotle says “it [metaphor] is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilar.”\textsuperscript{71} And the two natures (transference and analogy) are expressed as ‘substitution’ and ‘similarity’ in Jakobson’s theory. Therefore, Jakobson’s metaphor emphasizes its substitutive essence based on similarity. Ricoeur schematizes this classical view of the metaphor is as follows: (1) metaphor is a trope of discourse that concerns denomination; (2) it is the extension of the meaning of a name through deviation from the literal meaning of words; (3) the reason of this deviation is resemblance; (4) the function of resemblance is to ground the substitution of the figurative meaning of a word in place of the literal meaning, which could have been used in the same place; (5) hence, the substituted signification does not represent any semantic innovation. We can translate a metaphor and

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 198.

\textsuperscript{70} Aristotle, \textit{Poetics}, Chapter 21, 1457b, 2332.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., Chapter 22, 1459a, 2335.
III. Metaphor and Projection of Worlds

1. Aesthetics in Tensive Metaphor

On the contrary, as shown earlier, Ricoeur takes notice of the predicative nature of the metaphor: “But we part ways with Jakobson in that what can be generalized in metaphor is not its substitutive essence but its predicative essence.” For example, in a metaphor, ‘A is B,’ while Aristotle and Jakobson (and the classical view) analyze the essence of metaphor through the relationship between A and B, Ricoeur finds the metaphorical character in the verb ‘is.’ That is to say, Ricoeur presents the predicative essence of metaphor attacking Jakobson’s theory of substitution. However, the more crucial point for which Ricoeur criticizes Jakobson is similarity which is to ground the substitution.

Furthermore, metaphor reveals the logical structure of ‘the similar’ because, in the metaphorical statement, ‘the similar’ is perceived despite difference, in spite of contradiction. Resemblance, therefore, is the logical category corresponding to the predicative operation in which ‘approximation’ (bringing close) meets the resistance of ‘being distant.’

Here, for Ricoeur, in the nature of the metaphor, the difference and contradiction co-exist with the resemblance. Metaphor displays the work of resemblance because the literal

---


contradiction preserves difference within the metaphorical statement. “‘Same’ and ‘different’ are not just mixed together, they also remain opposed. Through this specific trait, enigma lives on in the heart of metaphor. In metaphor, ‘the same’ operates in spite of ‘the different.’”

Ricoeur explains this coexistence in his essay, *The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling*:

> In order that a metaphor obtains, one must continue to identify the previous incompatibility through the new compatibility. The predicative assimilation involves, in that way, a specific kind of tension that is not so much between a subject and a predicate as between semantic incongruence and congruence. The insight into likeness is the perception of the conflict between the previous incompatibility and the new compatibility. “Remoteness” is preserved within “proximity.” To see the like is to see the same in spite of, and through, the different. This tension between sameness and difference characterizes the logical structure of likeness.

Therefore, the essence of the metaphor is the tension that comes from the predicative nature. That is, metaphor creates or destroys a reality. Such metaphor gains its semantic innovation by the inner clash between the primary subject (tenor) and the modifying predicate (vehicle): the tenor and the vehicle are semantically dissimilar or even conflict with each other.

The efficacy of a metaphor lasts as long as the semantic absurdity is perceived between the two. The metaphorical absurdity occurs through the verb ‘is’ that conjoins the subject and the predicate. The ‘is,’ which bridges the subject and the predicate, semantically indicates ‘is not’ because the literal meanings of the two are dissimilar (the semantic remoteness). But the ‘is’ literally means ‘is like’ in the statement (the literal proximity). As a result, a metaphor that “includes the critical incision of the (literal) ‘is not’ within the ontological vehemence of the

---


77 The terms, “tenor” and “vehicle” are from I. A. Richards. See Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 118.
(metaphorical) ‘is’78 keeps the tension by recognizing the difference in itself. This metaphorical language creates meaning as no other language can. It does what no other art form can do. It condenses experience; it intensifies language; it uses words to make the invisible visible through this tension. Moreover, what metaphor has meaning is directly connected to the matter of truth, value, and then reality.

2. Metaphor and Projection of Worlds

We have placed the category and nature of the metaphor between the sign and the symbol, and in the conflicting design of the metaphor versus metonymy. Under the concepts examined, there is essentially different recognition of reality that each theory presupposes. In other words, to select a metaphor instead of sign or symbol means to accept its presupposed understanding on reality. Thus the following looks at what the cognition of reality corresponds to the nature of the metaphor.

First of all, the position that asserts each idea has a different premise of reality – this implies the diversity of reality or at least plural recognition of reality which in turn, is reminiscent of Friedrich W. Nietzsche’s theory. Jacques Derrida suggests that the main characteristics of Nietzsche’s work are a systematic mistrust of metaphysics and a suspicion of the values of “truth” and “meaning.” Many cultural relativists believe that, although the world is interpreted differently according to each individual’s social context, there is a single world that we are all interpreting. For Nietzsche, however, there is no single physical reality beyond one’s

---

78 Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 255. Thus, Ricoeur’s theory is called the theory of tension. *Ibid.*, 255.
interpretations. There are only perspectives. In following Nietzsche, we arrive at the idea that mistrust of metaphysics is to refuse a fixed-unchangeable-reality or the cognition of it. Furthermore, it conforms to the metaphorical recognition of reality, which is different from a symbol that refers to the absolute ‘signified.’

The attitude of Nietzsche that emphasizes the perspective on reality instead of one fixed reality implies the concept of metaphor as category or model taking reality. According to Max Black, with the relation to reality, metaphor is to poetic language what the model is to scientific language. In scientific language, the model is essentially a heuristic instrument that seeks, by means of fiction, to break down an inadequate interpretation and to lay the way for a new, more adequate interpretation. The model belongs not to the logic of justification or proof, but to the logic of discovery. Likewise, the metaphor belongs not to the logic of truth or falsity, but to the logic of creation. However, if the metaphor is just a model, category, or paradigm, a question is raised about its relation to reality. That is to say, if a metaphor is not to express an unchangeable


81 In this sense Thomas Kuhn’s book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, is significant. What made Kuhn’s treatment significant is his notion of paradigm change. Modern science has long used models as a means of understanding the physical world. Kuhn expanded this use in two ways. First, he applied the idea of models not only to science’s objects, but to the performance of science itself, showing that the positivist model of science as objective knowledge is only one possible paradigm for understanding science, and one that is inadequate to the facts. Second, and more important, for the wider import of Kuhn’s work, he presented an analysis of how paradigm changes take place. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962). Many theologians have adapted this analysis as a useful tool for understanding theology and its development. For example, Hans Küng and David Tracy, *Paradigm Change in Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1984); Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).
truth of a fixed reality, is it “the strategy of sous rature”\(^8\) by a deconstructive practice and then is ‘the différance’ between a deconstructive work and another deconstructive one emerged as valuable thing in the endless ‘differing’ and ‘deferring’? Concerning this problem, Wheelwright’s interpretation on Wallace Stevens’ *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* can be an alternative. He suggests a classification of the metaphor in terms of the mode of semantic transformation manifested in the process, and coins two terms that describe the major structural qualities of each: “epiphor” standing for the outreach and extension of meaning through comparison and “diaphor” that means the creation of new meaning by juxtaposition and synthesis. That is, while ‘epiphor’ looks for similarity and extends the significance (it is basically an analogy), ‘diaphor’ for Wheelwright takes two dissimilar things and finds similarity. Some metaphors effectively combine both epiphor and diaphor.\(^8^3\) According to Wheelwright, Stevens’ poem is an example of the diaphor. Its thirteen verses are related diaphorically, by pure juxtaposition.\(^8^4\) “The essential possibility of diaphor lies in the broad ontological fact that new qualities and new meanings hitherto ungrouped combination of elements.”\(^8^5\) Here, on the new meaning, Wheelwright presents the attitude of “take-it-or-leave-it.”\(^8^6\) Thus he leaves behind a

\(^8\) *Sous rature* is a strategic philosophical device originally developed by Martin Heidegger. Usually translated as ‘under erasure’, it involves the crossing out of a word within a text, but allowing it to remain legible and in place. Used extensively by Jacques Derrida, it signifies that a word is “inadequate yet necessary”; that a particular signifier is not wholly suitable for the concept it represents, but must be used as the constraints of our language offer nothing better. Refer to Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, especially chapter two Derrida and Deconstruction, 32-57.

\(^8^3\) Philip Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality*, 72-91.

\(^8^4\) *Ibid.*., 84.

\(^8^5\) *Ibid.*., 85.

\(^8^6\) *Ibid.*., 91.
matter of choice. After examining the natures of reality Wheelwright presents, I will suggest a new notion of reality through comparing metaphorical aesthetics as the tension between ‘is’ (sameness) and ‘is not’ (difference) with Wheelwright’s understanding on reality. Then what are the natures of reality that Wheelwright presents?

The first sense of reality is *presential*. Wheelwright argues that a person’s sense of presence is likely to be most strongly marked and most evident in his/her relationship with another human being.

Explanations, theories, and specific questions are directed toward an object in its *thinghood*, not in its presentness. An object in its thinghood is characterized by spatio-temporal and causal relations to other objects in their thinghood. […] All such questions are peripheral. When, on the other hand, two persons meet and their meeting is one of mutual presentness, the essentiality of their meeting has nothing to do with names and addresses. […] The real awareness in a personal meeting is something quite other than informational detail. No multiplication of such details, however full and meticulous, can be a substitute for real meeting.  

Since the presentness cannot be expressed in a name, it is delivered by tensive contrast that comes from juxtaposition of various expressions that Wheelwright calls diaphor. His logic of presentness and thinghood is related to Jakobson’s metaphor and metonymy. We can say that while metonymy is concerned with spatio-temporal and causal relations to objects, metaphor is concerned with the presentness of objects. Therefore, Wheelwright’s presentness forms one category of metaphorical reality.

The second notion of reality is *coalescent*. By coalescent Wheelwright means the fusion of the universality and the particularity. When coalescence takes place in the time-dimension, it appears therein as the phenomenon of radical change. Therefore, rejecting Plato’s idea in which the changing character of a thing is merely a delusive appearance or at most an inferior, second-

---

class sort of being, he finds reality in the process of change and extinction. For Wheelwright, “the notion of permanent entities that stay absolutely the same and merely undergo redistribution to produce changing appearances is an intellectual fiction.”\textsuperscript{88} In this sense, metaphorical reality is in change and movement, different from the symbolic reality that presupposes the metaphysical transcendence. In other words, metaphor is dynamic.

The last aspect of reality is \textit{perspectival}. It means that to think or speak about reality is always to do so through one perspective rather than another, and to compare one perspective with another must involve the adoption of a third perspective that will be only partly pervious to them both.\textsuperscript{89} Thus Wheelwright refuses to postulate a single type of reality as ultimate. “Reality cannot be typed, for to type it is to limit it to an arbitrarily chosen perspective.”\textsuperscript{90} Consequently, we cannot hope ever to be perfectly right and we can probably find both “enlightenment” and “refreshment” by changing, from time to time, our ways of being wrong.\textsuperscript{91} His conclusion is murmuring with the Hindu gurus of the Upanishads, “neti neti”-“not quite that, not quite that!”\textsuperscript{92}

In sum, in a similar way to Ricoeur’s terms, Wheelwright’s reality is to emphasize (1) the ‘yes’ of the metaphor through the aspect of presentness that is well contrasted with the character of metonymy, (2) the ‘no’ of the metaphor in the coalescence by comparing metaphorical change with the inflexibility of the symbol, and (3) the ‘no’ of the metaphor arguing the recognition of

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 169.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 169-70.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 171.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 173.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
reality is a arbitrarily chosen perspective that seems to incline to the self-destructive and
deconstructive mode.

Nietzsche is also deeply aware of the problem that one is bound by one’s perspective,
saying “truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions.”93 However,
contrary to Wheelwright, Nietzsche sees the positive aspect of recognizing a reality. For him,
every idea originates through an equating of the unequal. Metaphor establishes an identity
between dissimilar things. Nietzsche also gives this figurative drive the name “will to power” in
which it seems that he focuses on the metaphorical nature of yes.94

Consequently we must be on our guard against both the deconstructive tendency of
metaphor and metaphorical peremptory nature because while the former is likely to become a
form of ‘agnosticism,’ the latter a ‘tyranny of language.’ In this sense, Ricoeur’s notion of
‘suspension’ seems to be helpful when explaining the metaphorical tension of reality – yes and
no. Also called ‘epoche,’ this notion refers to “the moment of negativity” in metaphorical
reference.95

Poetic language is no less about reality than any other use of language but refers
to it by the means of a complex strategy which implies, as an essential component,
a suspension and seemingly an abolition of the ordinary reference attached to
descriptive language. This suspension, however, is only the negative condition of
a second-order reference, of an indirect reference built on the ruins of the direct
reference. This reference is called second-order reference only with respect to the
primacy of the reference of ordinary language.96

Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism, 46.

94 Sarup, An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism, 46


96 Ibid., 151.
In this condition of suspension, both metaphor and reality stay in tension between ‘is’ and ‘is not.’ Ultimately, “it constitutes the primordial reference to the extent that it suggests, reveals, unconceals the deep structures of reality to which we are related as mortals who are born into this world and who dwell in it for a while.” As presented above, metaphor is not to reflect a fixed reality but to present it. Therefore, metaphor as not a unilateral statement but communication intrudes into our lives. Madan Sarup speaks on the role of metaphor like this:

Metaphors are not idle flourishes – they shape what we do. They can help to make, and defend, a world view. It is important that the implications of the metaphors we employ or accept are made explicit and that the ways in which they structure our thought and even our action are better understood. I also want to stress that metaphors can be productive of new insights and fresh illuminations. They can promote unexpected or subtle parallels or analogies. Metaphors can encapsulate and put forward proposals for another way of looking at things. Through metaphor we can have an increased awareness of alternative possible worlds.

Here, we may say our conclusion that “alternative possible worlds” metaphor presents accompany not the arbitrary uncontrolled play of deconstruction, but a living organic aesthetics in “the difference” and a communal value based on “the similarity.”


The last matter to be examined in this section is how image and story can be understood as an extended metaphor. Focusing on Ricoeur’s theory, let us turn to the issue. As seen above, Coleridge states that the function of imagination is akin to metaphorical process. In addition, Ricoeur attempts to combine a semantic theory of metaphor with a psychological theory of imagination and feeling to explain how metaphor works. That is, his theory of metaphor is a big

97 Ibid. The notion of suspension or epoche is deeply linked with imagination. Ricoeur says, “All epoche is the work of the imagination. Imagination is epoche.” Ibid., 152.

movement from the substitution theory to tension theory. He defines the semantic theory as “an inquiry into the capacity of metaphor to provide untranslatable information and, accordingly, into [a] metaphor’s claim to yield some true insight about reality.”99 To this theory, Ricoeur adds a concept of imagination and feeling, arguing that metaphors with truth value are partly constituted by images and feelings.

To understand clearly the notion of imagination and story as an extended form of the metaphor, let us look at the polysemic nature of language in Ricoeur’s theory. For Ricoeur, language is polysemic in so far as single words can take on different meanings. The important point is that the polysemic aspects of a word can increase continuously. A word can always gain additional meanings. Ricoeur calls this fact the cumulative capacity of language. While general discourse reduces multiple levels of meaning of words in order to produce a clear meaning, metaphor, on the other hand, is the opposite case. A metaphorical statement activates all the potential meanings of a word by juxtaposing other words. Metaphor exploits multiple meanings in a creative way by bringing two words together. In other words, a metaphor concerns not a single word but a whole sentence. Rather than speaking about metaphor, one should speak about “metaphorical sentences.” A metaphorical statement is a predication that brings together two words that stand in tension with each other. This tension produces a “semantic innovation.” This is arguably Ricoeur’s new approach to imagination. Insofar as the semantic innovation is concerned with double or multiple levels of meaning, it is evident that images can no longer be adequately understood in terms of their immediate phenomenological appearance to consciousness. Replacing the visual model of the image with the verbal, Ricoeur affirms the more poetical role of imagination. That is, imagination has the ability to say one thing in terms of

another, or to say several things at the same time, thereby creating something new. Thus imagination plays the crucial role in this process of “semantic innovation.” According to Ricoeur, the act of imagining is “the concrete milieu in which and through which we see similarities. To imagine, then, is not to have a mental picture of something, but to display relations in a depicting mode.”

For Ricoeur, in the metaphorical process, there are three steps in imagination. The first function of imagination is an imaginative leap. In the first step, imagination is the “seeing” that affects the shift in logical distance. The role of imagination is insight into likeness. “This insight into likeness is both a thinking and a seeing.” Ricoeur calls this act of thinking/seeing, “the instantaneous grasping of the combinatorial possibilities.” He calls this productive character of insight “predicative assimilation.”

The second step is the pictorial dimension. Ricoeur writes that the images displayed by the senses as “bring to concrete completion the metaphorical process. […] The metaphorical sense is generated in the thickness of the imagining scene displayed by the verbal structure of the poem. Such is, to my mind, the function of the intuitive grasp of a predicative connection.” Moreover, Ricoeur locates the second stage of his theory of imagination on the borderline between pure semantics and psychology. The metaphorical meaning thus compels an exploration of the borderline between the verbal and the non-verbal. “The process of schematization and that

100 *Ibid.*, 150.
102 *Ibid*.
of the bound images aroused and controlled by schematization obtain precisely on that borderline between a semantics of metaphorical utterances and a psychology of imagination."\textsuperscript{104}

The third step in imagination is the moment of suspension, or “the moment of negativity brought by the image in the metaphorical process.”\textsuperscript{105} This crucial step makes possible a remaking of reality. “A metaphor may be seen as a model for changing our way of looking at things, of perceiving the world.”\textsuperscript{106} The tension between the ordinary world and the possibility of an extraordinary world – biblically speaking, the kingdom of God – is a crucial feature of imagination as a metaphorical process. In the metaphorical process, there is a suspension of the everydayness. However the world-taken-for-granted is not destroyed but is held in tension with the new. Ricoeur’s notion of epoche, “the moment of negativity” in metaphorical reference is thus the work of imagination. As metaphor redescribes and redefines reality, so does the imagination as an extended metaphor.

Likewise, a good story works metaphorically.\textsuperscript{107} As an example from the Bible, the language of the parables is paradoxical and exaggerated and at the same time in a realistic manner. According to Ricoeur, it is thus an instance of “extravagance which interrupts the superbly peaceful course of action and which constitutes what I [Ricoeur] have called the

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 152.

extraordinary within the ordinary.”\textsuperscript{108} The story engages the listener or reader in a metaphorical process in which reality is redescribed, a new world is disclosed, a challenge to transformation is extended by way of an invitation to enter the possibility of a new world. Drawing on Ricoeur, Lewis S. Mudge says it well in the following:

\begin{quote}
A parable, Ricoeur tells us, is a metaphorical process in narrative form. A parabolic metaphor, in the strangeness of its plot, institutes a shock which redescribes reality, and opens for us a new way of seeing and being. The Kingdom of God is like “what happens” in the story. What happens, despite its everyday setting and circumstances, is “odd.” More, it is “extravagant.” This form of metaphorical process opens an otherwise matter-of-fact situation to an open range of interpretations and to the possibility of new commitments.\textsuperscript{109}
\end{quote}

In sum, both imagination and story, especially the parables of Jesus, engage us in the metaphorical process. A new world is disclosed to us which “deforms” our world. In the metaphorical shock or tension generated by the disorientation, we are driven to enter the new world – the kingdom of God in the case of the Scripture – and to see the reconstruction of our life and identity there. In this sense, both imagination and story operate as metaphorical processes.

\textbf{IV. Summary}

In this chapter, I examined the aesthetic concern in philosophy and theology in general and specifically the relation between theology and rhetoric in preaching. While aesthetic turn is beneficial for the understanding a text as an organic wholeness, it is problematic to dissociate the author from her/his work, for the separation might lead an interpretive process into aestheticism.

\textsuperscript{108} Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics,” 118.

For this reason, some theologians and homiletics have been reluctant to work with aesthetics and rhetoric. As André Resner notes, however, we preachers do not need to dichotomize between theological and rhetorical dimensions in preaching. Following Resner’s “reverse-rhetoric,” I proposed that preaching as a theological-aesthetic task should be “the gospel-driven rhetoric” that is rooted in the biblical message and action of Jesus Christ. Put it another way, preaching should be faithful to the gospel, yet creative and relative to the listener’s lives.

Thus I explored the nature of metaphor and its relation to reality. As Paul Ricoeur argues, the essence of metaphor is found in the tension that comes from the predicative nature of metaphor. Metaphor gains its semantic innovation by the inner clash between the tenor and the vehicle. Metaphor keeps the tension by recognizing it in itself. It is the power of metaphor. This metaphorical tension creates meaning as no other language can. It does what no other art form can do. It uses words to make the invisible visible through this tension. Likewise, imagination and story function metaphorically. In sum, alternative possible worlds that metaphor and extended metaphors present accompany a living organic aesthetics in “the difference” and a communal value based on “the similarity.” In the ministry of preaching, we can deliver “the alternative possible worlds” of God through metaphor, imagination, and stories for contemporary listeners. As seen above, the two worlds of heavenly God and earthly humans are not lost but the new possibility emerges from the clash. This process is exactly metaphorical in such a way that is faithful to the gospel and creative to the new situation. Thus the philosophical and linguistic study of metaphor and extended metaphors (imagination and story) has a great impact on the ministry of preaching. In this sense, preaching is a theological and aesthetic task and will be further developed as dramatic one in what follows.

With the subject matter, let’s turn our attention to the world of John’s Gospel in order to inquire if the Gospel of John as an example of the biblical books is faithful to God (or the
message of Jesus Christ) and *creative* to the contemporary listeners at the same time. It will be a good reason why we should preach the gospel with the aid of aesthetics if the biblical writings are not only faithful to the gospel message but also creative to their own situations.
CHAPTER TWO: JOHN’S GOSPEL – THE UNFOLDING DRAMA: AN EXPLORATION OF THE SITUATION OF JOHN’S COMMUNITY AND HOW JOHN GIVES DIRECTION

Introduction

Preaching is a theological - aesthetic task that considers how both faithfulness toward the gospel of God and creativity for the new situation of the listeners are combined. In this, theology and aesthetics should not be separated but rather should be integrated in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ in what I call a “gospel-driven rhetoric.” Metaphor and extended metaphors (imagination and story) are the key elements of this aesthetic preaching. In this chapter, my aim is to examine whether the biblical writings can support the argument of preaching as a theological-aesthetic task. What is the nature of “the gospel-driven rhetoric” in John’s Gospel? I will begin this adventure with one question – “What is the role of imagery in the biblical text?”

Is imagery just a colorful means to explain a theological proposition, such as Aristotle’s ornament, or is it more than that? This is an operative question in this chapter as I explore the role of the imagery in the Fourth Gospel. There is one major reason why I take the imagery seriously – it is related to the study of history and theology in the Fourth Gospel. Rather than reading the Gospel as reflections on the history of a particular community, I work with the assumption that the Gospel was written in order to recall the ministry and teachings of Jesus for the early Jesus followers during a period when the first Christian community was emerging as a separate social entity and defining itself theologically. My interest is in how the imagery within
the Gospel helps readers feel and understand their ecclesial identity on the basis of the identity of Jesus Christ. My thesis is that the imagery itself is a foundation of John’s theology, especially for his Christology and ecclesiology.

This chapter consists of three sections: first, a survey of Johannine scholarship concerning the origin and situation of the community will be outlined. The second section will suggest why the imagery in the Fourth Gospel is important. I will focus on the functions of imagery in terms of Christological and ecclesial meanings. In the final section, as a case study, the prologue of the Gospel will be examined with special reference to the role of imagery. My conclusion is that every image in John’s Gospel tells a drama; there are two levels of drama that provide on one side the message and action of Jesus and on the other the identity of the Johannine community based on the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is, the Johannine imagery is one of the best partners for theological work, which shows the identities of Jesus and the Johannine community in a dramatic fashion. Before these matters can be taken up, a significant problem must be acknowledged. “Is it possible to find a specific community behind the Gospel of John?” I will begin with that question.

I. The Exploration of Johannine Community

1. The Possibility of Finding a Specific Community behind the Gospel Texts

   Regarding the notion of particular Gospel communities, especially the historical construction, some are asking more general questions, suggesting that finding any specific community behind the Gospels texts may be fundamentally wrong. Perhaps all the Gospels were not written for a particular local community at all. Indeed, in some scholarly circles, the specific community approach to Gospel studies is now being sharply attacked. For instance, Richard Bauckham argues that the assumption that each Gospel was written for a particular local
community goes against the evidence of the early Christian church and ancient understandings of written versus oral traditions.\textsuperscript{110}

On the first point, Bauckham suggests that the early Christians regarded themselves as a world movement. Furthermore, it is clear that Christian leaders made good use of the Roman transportation system, traveling from church to church and maintaining close ties among communities. As for the second point, the fact that the Gospels were written, and written in the form of an ancient biography, suggests that the traditions moved from a local oral audience to a wider audience. As Bauckham states:

\begin{quote}
The obvious function of writing was its capacity to communicate widely with readers unable to be present at its author’s oral teaching. Oral teaching could be passed on, but much less effectively than a book. Books, like letters, were designed to cross distances orality could not so effectively cross. But whereas letters usually (though not invariably) stopped at their first recipients, anyone in the first century who wrote a book such as a \textit{bios} expected it to circulate to readers unknown to its author.\textsuperscript{111}
\end{quote}

Notwithstanding some attacks, we do not have to abandon the historical investigation. I assume that behind the characteristics of John’s portrayal of Jesus who has been sent by God into the world, there is the Johannine community that influences John in a greater degree. The recognition of the existence of the Johannine community is indispensible for interpreting John. Paul S. Minear has produced a work on John’s Gospel from a perspective in terms of integrating Jesus in John’s Gospel to the Johannine community. In regard to the prologue of John, he points out:

\begin{quote}
The most obvious trace of his work [John’s Gospel] is an occasional use of the first person pronoun in the opening chapter, for instance: “And the Word … dwelt
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Ibid.}, 29.
among us...; we have beheld his glory...[1:14].” Such a statement clearly implies that the entire opening confession should be read as “our” confession. The narrator is writing as a believer and as a member of a community of believers who have seen and bear witness to the glory of this Word, this Son. The choice of we rather than I suggests that the narrator is writing not only himself but also as a representative of a larger group, either the whole company of believers or a limited group of its leaders who have been granted a vision of the glory.112

In fact, the description of Jesus in John’s Gospel and the situation of the Johannine community behind the Gospel are not to be easily separated, as Minear indicates. The story of Jesus in John’s Gospel is the story of the Johannine community. One of the most prominent works to coherently connect John’s description of Jesus to the Johannine community is that of J. Louis Martyn.113 His work is a good starting place to investigate the Johannine community. Before dealing with Martyn’s work, however, it will be better to clarify my assumption about Johannine community.

It is suggested that to some extent many socio-religious backgrounds influenced the forming of John’s Gospel. For example, some scholars argue that the Johannine community is over against the sect of John the Baptist, over against Judaism, and over against other Christian groups.114 My thesis is, however, neither to construct the full history of the Johannine community nor to trace the multi-layers of the Gospel text. In this chapter I will focus on the conflict between the Johannine Jesus movement and the Pharisees within Judaism because it has the most obvious evidence from the text itself. In fact the Gospel presumes its readers are very


familiar with the Old Testament, Jewish religious festivals, customs and methods of rabbinic argument. These clues in the text lead scholars to identify a Johannine community that is predominantly Jewish, including some disciples of John the Baptist, some Samaritans as well as some Gentiles. That is, a central concern at that time when the Gospel was written is the Johannine community’s relationship with other branches of Judaism. It leads me to examine Judaism in the Gospel of John first.

2. Judaism in the Gospel of John

In the Gospel of John, there are so many debates between Jesus and his opponents, called “the Jews” and “the Pharisees.” The debates are those from which the theological themes of the Gospel emerge. In fact, just the use of “Jews” for Jesus’ opponents is more or less uncanny. Jesus and his disciples were “Jews.” Nevertheless, in the Gospel of John being a Jew, or a Pharisee in particular, is explained as a bad thing. The author John seems to state that “Jew” and “Pharisee” are virtual synonyms. The Johannine antagonism to the Jews and the Pharisee should be explained in order to interpret the text correctly. According to some scholars, the important clue can be found in the threat to expel Jewish followers of Jesus from the synagogue (cf. John 9:22), which epitomizes the hostility between the Pharisees and Jesus’ followers. Yet this is


117 J. Louis Martyn employs the passage as starting point to explore the history and theology of John. It will be discussed below.
rather strange too. For the rest of the Gospel there is no evidence for such expulsion during Jesus’ ministry. Moreover, if followers of Jesus believe in Jesus as Messiah, why should they fear expulsion from the synagogue? The debate between Jesus and the Jews is the crux of the matter, and we find here an important key to understand the theological controversy that produced the Fourth Gospel. In this regard, eventually we will be able to examine the purpose of the Gospel of John.

Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John is reluctant to present a picture of Judaism that includes scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, even Zealots, followers of John the Baptist, Jesus and his disciples. The author of John tends to reduce the picture merely to Jesus and his disciples, on the one hand, and the Jews as Pharisees, on the other hand. The Gospel of John is unique that Sadducees, the high priestly party, Zealots, Herodians, and Essenes, along with scribes, are not found, and it tells us something about the time and circumstances of the Gospel’s origin. After the disastrous Roman war (66-70 C.E.) and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, most of the Jewish parties and groups that are not mentioned in the Gospel would have disappeared from the scene. According to Shaye J. D. Cohen, “In the first century CE Judaism was marked by numerous sects and groups: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, the Jews of Qumran, Zealots, Sicarii, ‘the Fourth philosophy,’ Christians, Samaritans, Therapeutae, and others. Judaism after 70 CE, in contrast, was not marked by sectarianism.”

For example, the high priestly party would have disappeared after the destruction of the temple, while the Essenes and the members of the Qumran community were destroyed in that war. On the contrary, the Pharisees, or the Pharisaic point of view, became “the dominant surviving

---

group” and laid “the foundations for the more concentrated rabbinic Judaism.”\textsuperscript{119} This fact is reflected in the Fourth Gospel, in that “Jew” and “Pharisee” appear to be virtual synonyms. That is, the Pharisees became the leading group to renew Judaism after the Roman war. The process to renew Judaism was symbolized in the character and work of R. Johannan ben Zakkai, who first gathered at Jamnia the scholars who survived the revolt of 66-70 C.E. against Rome. Following the location, this renewed Judaism was called “Jamnian Judaism.”\textsuperscript{120}

In this period of retrenchment and renewal within Judaism, the old faith in God and belief in divine favor toward Israel remained, but aspects of religious practice had to change. With the temple in ruins and the priestly royal establishment dissolved, the Pharisees moved into the socio-religious vacuum and occupied the central role. Judaism as a religion was emerging as a religion of the Scripture and its interpretation. The Torah replaced the functions of old rituals, especially the temple. The early Jesus disciples were also interpreters of the same book, but they presumed to understand it on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ. They tried to apply its teachings to the various situations of life. Moreover, the first followers of Jesus had hopes of an apocalyptic restoration of the people of God with Jesus’ return. For the Pharisees the theology of Jesus followers might seem to be an aberration and a danger. From the Pharisaic point of view, the Jesus followers did not observe the Torah. The most offensive action against the nonobservant, like the early Jesus followers, was to deprive them of all civil and religious rights. They were deprived of the right to sit on local councils and lost their place as children of Abraham in the life of the age to come. They became quasi-Gentiles. The major vehicle of social

\textsuperscript{119} Davies, “Aspects of the Jewish Background of the Gospel of John,” 47.

\textsuperscript{120} Concerning the developing process of “Jamnian Judaism,” See Davies, “Aspects of the Jewish Background of the Gospel of John,” 46-56.
and religious rejection was the refusal of table fellowship. To share a meal with a person was an expression of acceptance; to refuse to share a meal symbolized disapproval and rejection. Accordingly, Pharisees would not share a meal with the nonobservant.\(^\text{121}\)

Thus the Jesus followers were excluded from the synagogue and from the Jewish community. Some such circumstances underscore the fear of being put out of the synagogue in the Fourth Gospel, and this fear could only have emerged at the time when the earthly Jesus had passed from the scene. In sum, John knows, or knew, Jews who followed Jesus and wanted to remain Jews in good standing, who therefore feared expulsion from the synagogue because of their belief in Jesus. The Gospel of John is thus rooted in Jewish Christianity. J. Louis Martyn’s work well presents the aspects of Jewish background in the Fourth Gospel.

3. Assumption of the Fourth Gospel as a Two-Level Drama

In the late 1960s, J. Louis Martyn wrote a small volume that he titled *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. This small book made a huge impact on the Johannine scholarship. Indeed, John Ashton goes so far as to call it “the most important single work on the Gospel since Bultmann’s commentary.”\(^\text{122}\)

Martyn’s central argument is that the Fourth Gospel is a two-level drama. As his entry point to the gospel’s historical setting, Martyn used the reference to synagogue expulsion in John 9:18-22, which depicts the aftermath of Jesus’ restoration of sight to the man born blind:

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is

\(^{121}\) For a brief introduction to various parties within Judaism at the time of Jesus and his disciples, see Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, translated by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. (John 9:18-22, NRSV)\(^{123}\)

For Martyn, the passage is not just an historical hint about the healing ministry of Jesus.

In his discussion of the healing of the blind and John’s use of that material, Martyn makes a central claim:

In what follows, therefore, we will have to keep constantly in mind that the text presents its witness on two levels: (1) It is a witness to an einmalig event during Jesus’ earthly lifetime. Though we cannot a priori limit this witness entirely to vv. 1-7, it will be safe to assume the original healing story as its major locus. (2) The text is also a witness to Jesus’ powerful presence in actual events experienced by the Johannine church.\(^{124}\)

Therefore, for Martyn, to read the text rightly is certainly not just to read it for historical hints about the healing ministry of Jesus. To read John 9 rightly is always to read it as a two level drama, offering glimpses into both the ministry of Jesus on one level and the history of the community on the other.

To confirm his two-level drama theory, Martyn attempts to define the meaning of aposunagogos (ἀποσυνάγωγος), a term found only in John,\(^{125}\) and to find its historical argument. Martyn lists the various requirements of a historical counterpart determined by 9:22 and then reviews all of the possible correlations, rejecting all that do not fulfill his requirements. He argues convincingly that the historical evidence for John 9:22 is found in the Jewish benediction

\(^{123}\) Hereafter all biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible* unless otherwise noted.


\(^{125}\) See John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2.
against Heretics. Examining the twelfth benediction relating to the heretics in an early version of the Eighteen Benedictions, Martyn argues that this benediction against Jesus follower heretics, *birkat ha-minim*, was enacted and announced by the Jamnia academy about 85 C.E.\(^\text{126}\) This correlation indicates that the drama in John 9 can well represent the situation between the Johannine community and the Pharisaic Judaism within the synagogue in John’s city.

Once the dramatic passages ( chapters 5, 7 and 9) have been examined, Martyn proceeds to a discussion of the Christological titles used in the passages and of their theological significance in the Fourth Gospel. His argument is that in the discussion between Nicodemus and Jesus and in John 6, the author John shows that it is the election of God and not rabbinic midrash that determines the Messiah. In John 6:27-34 the comparison between Moses and the Son of Man does not show how the latter figure is like Moses. It is simply to show the midrashic manner of determining the Messiah. According to Martyn, however, John ignores this form of discussion and claims that God (not Moses) authenticates this bread that comes down from heaven. Martyn states “Far from being predicated on certain exegetical patterns such as the Moses-Messiah typology, faith has only one essential presupposition: the presence of Jesus and his self-authenticating word, ‘I am the bread of life.’”\(^\text{127}\)

In the final chapter, Martyn examines how John leads his readers from the recognition of Jesus as the Mosaic Prophet-Messiah to the confession of him as the Son of Man. He demonstrates that four times (3:13; 6:53; 8:28; 9:35) an announcement or recognition of Jesus as

---


\(^{127}\) Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 123.
the Son of Man reaches the very pinnacle of the passages that begin with the recognition of Jesus as the Mosaic Prophet-Messiah. For Martyn the Gospel of John is attempting to lead his audience into a more adequate recognition and confession of Jesus as the Son of Man. In the Son of Man, Martyn finds the reason for the two-level drama. The Son of Man is an apocalyptic figure who originally functioned on one of the two levels of apocalyptic visions. According to Martyn, however, John has essentially altered those two levels from present and future (below and above) to past and present, the levels of his drama; and Jesus as the Son of Man appears in both levels. Martyn has one final section showing how the promised Paraclete makes the Son of Man effectively present in the work of the Jesus follower witness in John’s city. While Luke must write Acts to handle the second level, John is able to combine the past and the present into one drama. Martyn draws the appropriate hermeneutical conclusions from his overall historical task:

The two-level drama makes clear that the Word’s dwelling among us and our beholding his glory are not events which transpired only in the past. They do not constitute an ideal period when the Kingdom of God was on earth, a period to which one looks back with the knowledge that it has now drawn to a close with Jesus’ ascension to heaven as the Son of Man. These events to which John bears witness transpire on both the einmalig and the contemporary levels of the drama, or they do not transpire at all. In John’s view, their transpiring on both levels of the drama is, to a large extent, the good news itself.

On the basis of this analysis, Martyn posited three stages in the history of the Johannine community: 1) an early period in which the messianic group existed within the community of the

---

128 Ibid., 124-30.
129 Ibid., 136-43.
130 Ibid., 139.
131 Ibid. 143.
synagogue; 2) a middle period in which part of the group became a separate community reacting to the traumas of excommunication from the synagogue and of martyrdom; and 3) a late period in which the community was solidifying its social and theological identity.\textsuperscript{132}

Martyn (and his successors) has shown that the two-level drama in John expresses Johannine theological ideas concerning the present witness of the Son of Man. Following Martyn’s two-level drama, I assume that the Fourth Gospel displays the situation of Johannine community that is in conflict against the Pharisees. In my reading, although there are many considerations for the construction of the Johannine community, the struggle within the synagogue is the most important historical background to interpret John’s Gospel.\textsuperscript{133} That is, the focus will be given to the situation of a newly emerging community from Judaism. I also argue that the presence of the two levels, past and present, may possibly be considered a basic feature of the form “Gospel” rather than an exclusive feature of any one Gospel. A Gospel basically proposes to tell the story of Jesus with reference to the presence of the believer. For example, Mark may be shown to contain an early Jesus follower Christological contest in the guise of a story about Jesus. As Martyn suggests, Luke has broken the form by allowing Acts to carry the second level.

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Ibid.}, 145-67. Originally it is from his article “Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community,” appended for the third edition of \textit{History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel}.

\textsuperscript{133} Like Martyn, Raymond Brown traces a fairly similar view of the community’s history but with more emphasis on interaction with Samaritans and Gentiles. See Raymond E. Brown, \textit{The Community of the Beloved Disciple} (New York: Paulist, 1979). Brown posited four phases in the community’s history: 1) the pre-gospel era during which the community was expelled from the synagogues, which is referred to in John 9:22 and 16:2, as Martyn suggested; 2) the life situation of the Johannine community at the time the gospel was written, during which persecution continued; 3) the period during which the Johannine Epistles were written, when one group of Johannine believers “went out” from the community because in the view of the Elder who wrote 1 John, “they were not of us” (1 John 2:19); and 4) the dissolution of the two Johannine groups after the Epistles were written, with the secessionists probably blending into second-century Gnostic groups and the elder’s carrying the gospel and Epistles with them into the emerging church of orthodox Christianity.
Furthermore, the dramatic nature of the Gospel is to suggest that the Gospel was not simply the recitation of an old Jesus story, but the drama of God in the Fourth Gospel was rewritten *faithfully* to the old tradition and *creatively* to the new situation. That is, the author of the Fourth Gospel is a faithful *improviser* who is in proficient of *overaccepting* and *reincorporating.*\(^{134}\) According to Samuel Wells, *overaccepting* is a practice central to the Gospel story, and especially the ministry of Jesus. It builds on the interpretive tasks of nurturing the continuity of tradition and thinking creatively for the present and the future (new contexts). What does overaccepting involve? When a person receives an “offer,” a verbal or nonverbal communication, from another person that invites a response, there are two obvious options. The person can “accept” the offer, that is, respond in a way that carries forward its premise, and the story goes on. Or the person can “block” the offer – undermine or negate it. In case of blocking, there is no way to go forward. There is also a third way, to “overaccept.” Overaccepting is a matter of incorporating offers into a larger story, moving it forward by reconceiving it in a new and redemptive way. My thesis is that this is how the author of John unfolds the drama of God’s reign in the Gospel.

The faithful author is also proficient in the activity of “*reincorporating.*” As a faithful improviser, John is one who seeks not to create novelty but to respond to the past, for the future is formed out of the past. That is, *memory* is more important than *originality.* The improviser is like “a man walking backwards” who sees only where he has been, not where he is going.\(^{135}\)

\(^{134}\) Concerning the notions of improvisation, overaccepting, and reincorporation, refer to Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004) and Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine,* especially Part Two. These notions will be discussed in relation to dramatic theology in chapter five.

Improvisers thus need proficient narrative skills: “Improvisers must keep the full picture in memory in order to move the scene forward effectively. [...] An improviser’s powers of observation and memorization are keys to retaining this ever-growing assembly of ideas.”

In sum, although it is true that Martyn’s construction of the historical situation is also open to critique: for example, in the works of Adele Reinhartz, the Gospel of John is a two-level drama showing the improvisatory skills of overaccepting and reincorporating to help the Johannine community that is in conflict. Thus the implication of the “dramatic nature” of the Gospel reveals the purpose of the Gospel. Though the triune God, especially Jesus Messiah in the Fourth Gospel, is the primary voice and actor, the Johannine community members have been given the privilege and responsibility not only of thinking God’s thoughts after God but also of speaking God’s words and acting God’s acts after God too. The purpose of writing the Gospel is thus to enable listeners and doers of the gospel to respond and to correspond to the prior Word and Act of God, and thus to be drawn into the action. We may say that the purpose of the Fourth Gospel is to strengthen the church members in their faith and to encourage them to face even the

---


137 From the Jewish perspective, Adele Reinhartz gives some points against the two-level drama. One of them is how likely it is that a group would be expelled from the community on account of a belief that a given individual was the Messiah. In the first third of the second century, a mere forty years after the gospel was written, at least some Jews, including apparently the highly-respected Rabbi Akiva, believed a man named Simeon Bar Kosiba to be a messiah and rallied behind him in opposition to Rome. Rabbi Akiva certainly was not expelled from the synagogue, and neither were any of the other followers of Bar Kochba, as Simeon bar Kosiba came to be called. For a more detailed exposition of these points, see Adele Reinhartz, “Judaism in the Gospel of John,” *Interpretation*, v.63 (4), 10/2009: 382-93; Adele Reinhartz, “Rabbinic Perceptions of Simeon Bar Kosiba,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 20 (1989): 171-194.
most serious consequences in the confession of this faith: to keep their faith in spite of external struggle and to confess their faith boldly in public (John 20:30-31).\textsuperscript{138}

Based on the consideration above I summarize my assumptions for interpreting the Gospel of John as follows:

**The Text and its Author(s):** I accept the text as a unified whole, allowing the probable stages of a first writing and then a later writing or writings. Concerning the author, though there are plenty of theories, no one knows for sure who wrote the Gospel or the identity of the “John” with whom the Gospel is linked. It is not even clear whether it is appropriate to speak of one author or several as many scholars think the Gospel of John was developed through various editions by several writers.\textsuperscript{139} While recognizing the possibility of multiple versions and authors, I am chiefly interested in the “final” form of the Gospel, the form that significantly resembles the text as we know it.

**Location:** No one knows where the Gospel of John was written. Traditionally it has been linked with Ephesus. Over the centuries scholars have made arguments for and against this location and suggested other possible sites such as Alexandria or somewhere in Judea-Galilee, or for the followers of Jesus, anywhere. For this study, I have adopted no specific location. But I assume the Gospel was written in a situation of conflict. The consistent conflict Jesus experiences with some of the Jewish leaders, the strong rhetoric that emerges in these conflicts,


the three instances of term *aposunagogos* (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), suggests a community in conflict with at least the local synagogue.

**Date:** Similarly, no one knows when the Gospel was written, at least in its final form. With many scholars, I assume that it was written around the end of the first century. Hence, this is not a study of the historical Jesus but of the possible interaction between John’s text and the followers of Jesus in the last decade or so of the first century.

With these presuppositions, I now turn to the characteristics of the Johannine community in order to know how John unfolds the drama of God for the specific community.

4. The Characteristics of Johannine Community

After Martyn’s ground-breaking theory, there is a wide consensus that the Gospel of John should be read in relation to the Johannine community. In fact, the description of Jesus in John and the situation of the Johannine community behind them are not to be easily separated. The story of Jesus in John is the story of the Johannine community. For this reason, there is an operative question: *how do the members of the Johannine community define themselves?* In other words, the central matter is their religious identities. In a situation of conflict, how the community members identify themselves is the most crucial question. Considering the passages of excommunication from the synagogue, I will argue that the identity of the Johannine community is an isolated sect.

The passage of John 9:14-22 declares that those who confess faith in Jesus as the Messiah are to be excluded from the synagogue. Two other passages also refer to an expulsion from the synagogue. In 12:42, the text tells us that “many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue.” In 16:2, Jesus warns his disciples that “they [the Jews] will put you out of the
synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.”

Expulsion from the synagogue was not a one-time matter of leaving a building or a worship service on a given day, and being able to return on a future occasion. Rather, expulsion meant exclusion from the Jewish community as a whole. I assume that the Johannine believers were expelled from the Jewish community on account of their faith. Confessing Jesus in public made the first Jesus followers an isolated group. It leads to the conclusion that the Johannine community is a sect.

One of the most important works to connect the description of Jesus in John to the Johannine community as a sect is that of Wayne A. Meeks. He draws on theories about the nature of sectarian societies to provide a description of the social dynamic within John’s community. In his article, “The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,”¹⁴⁰ Meeks agrees with Martyn that John’s Gospel reflects a history of separation but further argues that in this separation, the myth or symbol of the descending and ascending Son of Man provides the conceptual framework that allows the community to understand what has happened to it and to affirm its own distinctiveness. Meeks states:

Thus, despite the absence of “ecclesiology” from the Fourth Gospel, this book could be called an etiology of the Johannine group. In telling the story of the Son of Man who came down from heaven and then re-ascended after choosing a few of his own out of the world, the book defines and vindicates the existence of the community that evidently sees itself as unique, alien from its world, under attack, but living in unity with Christ and through him with God.¹⁴¹


¹⁴¹ Ibid., 69-70.
Meeks further makes clear that the Gospel is not simply a projection of the sectarian status of the community:

I [Meeks] do not mean to say that the symbolic universe suggested by the Johannine literature is only the reflex or projection of the group’s social situation. On the contrary, the Johannine dialogues suggest quite clearly that the order of development must have been dialectical: the christological claims of the Johannine Christians resulted in their becoming alienated, and finally expelled, from the synagogue; that alienation, in turn, is “explained” by a further development of the christological motifs (i.e., the fate of the community projected onto the story of Jesus); these developed christological motifs in turn drive the group into further isolation. It is a case of continual, harmonic, reinforcement between social experience and ideology.\(^\text{142}\)

The analysis implicitly suggests that communities develop their own symbols, their own language, and their own stories to reinforce their identity. The more separated, anxious, and persecuted the group, the more cryptic, coded, and secret the language may become. That is, the Gospel of John provides a myth to validate differences and a corresponding language to reinforce that differences. According to Meeks, the language patterns of the community show its identity as an isolated sect because they demolish the logic of the world, particularly the world of Judaism, and progressively emphasize the sectarian consciousness.\(^\text{143}\)

Some commentators present John’s language as “anti-language” which is “the language of an “anti-society,” that is a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it.”\(^\text{144}\) Therefore, for his isolated sect, the Johannine community, the author John

\(^{142}\)Ibid., 71.

\(^{143}\)Ibid. There are some objections to sectarian reading. For example, in his book John and Empire Warren Carter disagrees with those who argue the sectarian-spiritual reading of John. He maintains that John’s Gospel should be read in the context of the Roman Empire and denies both spiritual and sectarian interpretations of it. However, Carter’s objection seems to be unconvincing. From the inner and outer evidences suggested above, I assume the sectarian nature of Johannine community is obvious. Refer to Warren Carter, John and Empire: Initial Exploration (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 3-18.

\(^{144}\)Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 7.
tries to provide anti-language. This anti-language is not simply a specialized or technical variety of ordinary language used in a special way or in particular, technical contexts. Rather, an anti-language arises among people in groups held by alternative perceptions of reality, which are experienced and set up in opposition to some established mode of conception and perception. Consequently, unlike ordinary language, anti-language creates and expresses an interpretation of reality that is inherently an alternative reality, one that emerges precisely in order to function as an alternative to larger society. For this reason I turn to how John gives direction for the sectarian community in conflict.

II. The Imagery in the Gospel of John

1. How John Gives Direction for the Sectarian Community in Conflict

   As Meeks and others mentioned, a sectarian community employs its own language for its identity and against the logic of the world. In the Gospel of John there are many unique linguistic expressions. Among them I find the most impressive one is the role of imagery. As a language for the sectarian community, the Gospel of John is a book of imagery. The imagery is clear, concise, paradoxical, and spiritual.

   In this section, I will explore the role of the Johannine imagery. My thesis is that the imagery is employed to convey the central meaning of the Gospel for the sectarian community in conflict against Pharisaic Judaism. The image tells a story, the two-level drama of God, in and through both Jesus the Messiah and the Johannine community. In other words, the Johannine imagery in the two-level drama unfolds as two identities: who Jesus is and who the readers are. The imagery does not simply serve to illustrate what God is like, or to provide color or imaginative detail to the drama, although imagery may indeed stir the aesthetic nature of readers and evoke responses that other modes of communication do not. As a linguistic expression for
the sectarian community, the imagery in John plays a pivotal role in the formation of the self-
identity. Thus the imagery has two central functions in order to answer two identities above:
Christology and ecclesiology. The imagery in John is also improvisatorially developed in a
dramatic fashion: faithfully to the old tradition and creatively to the new situation.

To this end, the functions of various images in the Gospel of John, especially
Christological and ecclesial meanings are to be examined. Then, I will offer a case study on the
prologue of John because the prologue is deeply linked with both Christological and ecclesial
identities. First, it will be helpful to clarify the definitions of imagery and similar word groups.

The word *imagery* is used in different ways and with different connotations. Karl
Beckson and Arthur Ganz give the following description:

> In general, the term ‘imagery’ refers to the use of language to represent
> descriptively things, actions, or even abstract ideas. This word, however, has been
> so widely used by recent critics that it cannot be said to have a single agreed-upon
> meaning. In its most common use, imagery suggests visual pictures, though many
> critics insist that words denoting other sensory experiences are, properly speaking,
> images.¹⁴⁵

I will use the word in the way described above. In speaking of imagery and image, I
follow Jan G. van der Watt and he understands them as a total and coherent account, or a mental
picture of objects, with corresponding actions and relations. They are basically taken from life’s
experiences and associatively and thematically belong together. Imagery will therefore be
identified using two criteria. It must be an account associated with life’s experiences creating a

---

mental picture and applied figuratively to enhance communication.\textsuperscript{146} That is, in this sense, the images are not just “things that can be perceived by the senses.”\textsuperscript{147}

In using the terms \textit{metaphor} or \textit{metaphorical}, I mean the imagery creates something new beyond literal description as a metaphor does. As seen in the previous chapter, the essence of metaphor is in the tension that comes from the inner clash between the primary subject (tenor) and the modifying predicate (vehicle): the tenor and the vehicle are semantically dissimilar and may evoke conflict with each other.\textsuperscript{148} For example, when we say “my heart is a lake,” the sentence is in tension which comes from the identity and nonidentity between \textit{my heart} (tenor) and \textit{lake} (vehicle). That is, the tension of metaphor keeps two opposites and creates the third possibility. The function of imagery is virtually similar.

In a similar vein, \textit{symbol} is the throwing together, the joining together of two otherwise dissimilar realities. Unlike a metaphor in which the tenor and the vehicle are given, a symbol only presents the vehicle. The relationship between the tenor and the vehicle may be stated, implied by the context, or assumed from the shared background. The reader’s task is to discern the tenor or meaning of the symbol.\textsuperscript{149} With these definitions I turn to the meaning of the images in John: especially its Christological and ecclesiological meanings.


\textsuperscript{148} For a detailed discussion on metaphor, see chapter one in my thesis and see Paul Ricoeur, \textit{The Rule of Metaphor}.

2. The Christological Meaning of the Images

The images in the Gospel of John are not only formally interesting but also theologically important. Above all, they fulfill a theological function. The most important theological dimension of the images in John’s Gospel is in their Christological meaning. As I mentioned above, my focus is that these images are not intended only to illustrate a certain high Christology, but rather that it is through imagery that the Christology of the Fourth Gospel receives its specific character.

It is remarkable that there are diverse and abundant images of Christ in John: ego-eimi sayings, various titles for Jesus like the Son of God, and so on. According to Ruben Zimmermann, this diversity implies that one single title, one image, or one symbol is not sufficient to express who Jesus was. He argues that the diversity and multidimensionality of the images of Christ were obviously chosen in order to preserve Jesus from narrow restrictions and one-sided definition. Even if every partial image has its own value, the merging of the individual images into a complete work creates something new – something that is more than the sum of all the individual parts. Thus, the imagery of Christology is in its own nature very metaphorical. This metaphorical nature of the Johannine images is also obvious in the images of God.

The Image of God

In the Fourth Gospel there are images used uniquely for God. According to P. W. Meyer, however, these images remain closely connected to Jesus, for a father is a father only in relation

to the son.\textsuperscript{151} Furthermore, images of God, mostly taken from the Old Testament, were applied directly to Jesus. Jesus is often portrayed as the ‘image of God,’ which is particularly revealing in view of the determination of the Father-Son relationship. Images and symbols that were traditionally employed for God are now transferred to Jesus. It is through these images that Jesus is placed into the realm of God, becomes transparent for God, and becomes an image or likeness of God. Christ, however, is not a likeness in the derogatory sense, but rather for John the images finally enable perception of God. The otherwise invisible Father is disclosed only by the Son as John emphasizes in the last verse of his prologue (John 1:18). This Christological-theological point is similarly reflected in John 12:45 and John 14:9, “And whoever sees me [Jesus] sees him [God] who sent me.”

As Zimmermann discusses, the reflections on this figurative father-son relationship can be also catalysts for the problems of the later Christological debates, since the image of Christology prevents the subordination of the Son to the Father. At the same time, a simple identification between Father and Son is hardly allowed. The unity between Jesus and God, which is declared in images, simultaneously preserves their difference. This tensive unity of metaphorical images can be seen as a necessary element of the image because the image is characterized by the seemingly irreconcilable tension between the ‘is’ and the ‘is not.’ In this way, images in the Fourth Gospel function metaphorically. The imagery of God in John is a unique way of Father-Son relationship. The figurative classification of Jesus makes it possible, in

connection with the ancient understanding of images, to exhibit “an intrinsic bond between God and Jesus without risking a blasphemous violation of the principle commandment.”

3. Ecclesiology

In the Gospel of John, human life is not seen individualistically but relationally. Thus it leads us to a further aspect. As Meeks and others showed above, a common tradition of language and image finally enables a specific group to have an identity. The Johannine theology corresponds directly to the situation of the Johannine community. Therefore, there is also an interaction between the Johannine images and the Johannine community.

The source of the ecclesial imagery is deeply related with the Christological images. In other words, not only the disciples, but the historical Johannine community members were also able to take over roles and images from Jesus. The images of Christ become role models for the life of early Jesus followers. For example, in the washing of the feet, Jesus makes clear that his behaviour should be an example to the community of the disciples (John 13:15). As Jesus took the role of the servant, the disciples should also do so. The roles and images of Jesus should become paradigms or models for the disciples. That is, John’s images have a didactic function. The images teach the disciples and the Johannine members what the community should be.


According to R. Alan Culpepper, while the explicit evidence of the ecclesial dimension of the Johannine community is hardly discerned, the most explicit passage of such concern is found in the farewell discourse. In the farewell discourse, Jesus advises his disciples to wash one another’s feet, love one another so that the world might know that they were his disciples, and keep his commandments. He anticipates that they will do greater works, be persecuted by the world, and put out of the synagogue. Jesus also tells them that he will send the Paraclete to guide them into all truth, and he prays that they might become one. In this passage there is no explicit reference to the word “church,” but clearly the farewell discourse visualizes that the disciples would continue on Jesus’ works after his death and that they would be separate from both the world and the synagogue.\footnote{R. Alan Culpepper, “The Quest for the Church in the Gospel of John,” 349.}

The individual images of Christ can now be transferred to the disciples. The images, along with Jesus’ symbolic action and speech, show what the Johannine community should be. Moreover, as Jesus is “Son of God,” the disciples themselves can also become “sons” or “children of God,” as is already predicted in the prologue (1:12). In the so-called “high-priestly prayer” Jesus even asks for the disciples to be joined in unity with his Father (17:21). Through his relationship with God, described in images as the ‘Son,’ Jesus opens up to the disciples a similar intimate relationship with God; through this renewed covenant, he creates a community based on love and equality.

This is the way the images of Christ can become role models of a new community established by Christ himself. The community of Jesus’ followers will be newly established under the cross. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ will become a heavenly family member of being born in Water and Spirit (3:5). In sum, this role of imagery in John helps the Johannine
community members to understand *who Jesus is* and *who they are to be*, and gives direction to his congregations how to respond to one another in the community as an isolated sect and to the hostile world. In my opinion, the best link example between Christological and ecclesial images is found in the prologue. Thus I turn to the first scene of the Gospel.

**III. A Case Study: Christological and Ecclesial Image in the Prologue**

1. The Structure

   The Gospel of John starts with one of the most challenging texts in the New Testament. The scope of the prologue (John 1:1-18) is cosmological because the first scene begins with the pre-existence of the Word (logos) and the Word’s relationship to the world rather than with Jesus’ birth narratives (cf. Matthew 1:1-2:23; Luke 1:1-2:52). Moreover, the literal form of the prologue is also confusing. Johannine scholars, thus, have particularly concentrated on two questions: first, the question of the poetic and prose forms of style; second, the question of the unity or unevenness of thought, both within the prologue itself and between the prologue and the rest of the Gospel.\(^{156}\) As far as form is concerned, several scholars, such as Rudolf Bultmann, Ernst Käsemann, Rudolf Schnackenburg, and Raymond Brown, have suggested that the author has used a poetic original hymn and supplemented it with the prosaic words about John the Baptist as a secondary addition.\(^{157}\) However, I am not convinced of viewing the John the Baptist material as interpolations into an original hymn. In this work, I agree with C. K. Barrett and


others that the prologue was specially composed by the author as the beginning of the Gospel of John. 158

Then what is the picture of the overall movement of the prologue as the introduction of the Gospel? Firstly let’s observe the structure of the prologue itself. I follow Peder Borgen who suggests that the prologue’s structure is not dependent on its forms of the style, but on double expositions (basic and elaborate ones) of the creation narrative in Genesis 1:1-5. 159 With his examination of the parallel between the Genesis creation story and the prologue of John, Borgen argues that the prologue draws heavily on Genesis 1:1-5, the verses that depict the first day of creation. According to Borgen, while the passage of John 1:1-5 is the basic exposition of Genesis 1:1-5, the rest of the prologue elaborates upon terms and phrases from John 1:1-5. The suggested structure becomes apparent when we identify the words and phrases based on Genesis 1:1-5, which are used repeatedly in the prologue. The structure of the prologue follows the pattern A-B-C-C”-B”-A” that is a parallel to the Jerusalem Targum 3:24 as below 160:


160 *Ibid.*, 293-95. The Targums are Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures used in the Liturgy. In a slightly different way, Mary Coloe employs the Targums to link the prologue with the Genesis creation story. She suggest a parallel between the whole story of creation in Genesis 1 and the prologue of John's Gospel. See Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001), 21-23.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>vv. 1-2</th>
<th></th>
<th>vv. 14-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος. 2 οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>14 Καὶ ὁ λόγος σάρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενὸς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας. 15 Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγον· οὗτος ἦν ὁν εἶπον· ὁ ὁπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἐμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν. 16 ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος. 17 ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μούσεως ἔδωθε, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο. 18 Θεὸν οὕτως ἐδόρακεν πόστοτε· μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὃν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκείνου ἐξηγήσατο.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3 πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἐν. ὁ γέγονεν</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>10 ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ οὐ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. 11 εἰς τὰ ἱδία ἤλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἱδίοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. 12 ὅσοι δὲ ἠλάβον αὐτόν, ἐδοκεῖ αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύοντις εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, 13 οἱ οὖν ἐς αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ’ ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>4 Ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἦς ζωὴ ἦν τῷ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. 5 καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἦς σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>6 Ἐγένετο ἀνθρωπος, ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννης. 7 οὗτος ἤλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν ἰνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the structure above, if we consider the prologue as a unity with regard to both form and content, its arrangement can be presented like this:\(^{161}\):

(A) vv. 1-2 and vv. 14-18:

The eternal/cosmic Word and God, and the temporal/spatial Word and God.

(B) v. 3 and vv. 10-13:

The Word creating the world, and the Word claiming its possession of the world.

(C) v. 4-5 and vv. 6-9:

The Word as Light shining in the darkness, and John the Baptist as a witness to the light.

From the perspective of this structure, it is very plausible to acknowledge the parallelism between the first day of creation narrative from Genesis 1:1-5 and the prologue of John. It is also clear that vv. 1-2 must be interpreted together with vv. 14-18; likewise v. 3 with vv. 10-13; and vv. 4-5 together with vv. 6-9. Among the many important points in this structure, my major interest is the contrast between the two different spheres of God’s presence: the world above and the world below. While the cosmic and transtemporal dimension of the prologue receives its fullest expression in the basic exposition (A-B-C) of vv. 1-5, the rest of the prologue, the elaborate exposition (A*-B*-C*) introduces diverse actors from the human drama into the prologue such as John the Baptist, Moses, and the children of God. It is also worth noting that

---

\(^{161}\) This is a revised arrangement from Peder Borgen. See Peder Borgen, “Logos was the True Light: Contributions to the Interpretation of the Prologue of John,” *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972): 115-30.
after a focus on the earthly realm in vv. 6-17, the prologue ends in v. 18 by returning to a world similar to that of vv. 1-2. That is, the overall movement of the prologue is like “V” shape showing Jesus the *logos* descending from above and re-ascending from below. The “V” movement of the prologue has led scholars to compare Jesus the *logos* with the wisdom tradition. Utilizing the parallel structure with the Wisdom motif, John displays both the identity of Jesus and the Johannine community’s self understanding. Let’s turn to the comparison between the Word and Wisdom.

2. The Word and Wisdom

According to Warren Carter, one of the most important themes we find in the prologue is the identity of Jesus the *logos*: his origin and destiny. The figure of Jesus as the *logos* is similar to Wisdom, the *sophia* in the Old Testament. Raymond Brown summarizes the functions of Wisdom in the Old Testament as follows: According to the wisdom literatures in the Old Testament, Wisdom is described as having existed with God from the beginning even before there was an earth (Proverb 8:22-23; Sirach 24:9; Wisdom 6:22). Wisdom is said to be a reflection of the everlasting light of God (Wisdom 7:26); and in lighting up the path for people (Sirach 1:29), she is to be preferred to any natural light (Wisdom 7:10, 29). Wisdom is described as having descended from heaven to dwell with human beings (Proverb 8:31; Sirach 24:8; Baruch 3:37; Wisdom 9:10). In this way the function of Wisdom is virtually same as that of Jesus. However there is a huge difference between Wisdom the *sophia* and Jesus the *logos*.

---

162 For Carter, three other major themes in the prologue are “Jesus as the revealer,” “responses to Jesus,” and “the relationship of Jesus the logos to other figures.” See Carter, “The Prologue and John’s Gospel: Function, Symbol and the Definitive Word,” 37.

While Wisdom is a poetic personification, Jesus is a living historical figure. However, the fundamental question arises from the seeming similarity between Jesus the *logos* and Wisdom the *sophia*. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, why did John employ the wisdom tradition to present Jesus Christ?

We can guess the intention of the author of John from the socio-historical setting which the Gospel addresses and by which it is shaped. One of the issues facing both the Jesus follower community and post-70 Judaism was, where Wisdom is to be found, “where God in God’s knowability, visibility and audibility was to be encountered.” That is, both the Johannine community and the Pharisees claimed to possess the revelation of divine Wisdom, and came into irreconcilable conflict over the key question. While renewed Judaism claimed Moses’ revelation in Torah as the dwelling place of Wisdom, John’s community offered Jesus as the new Wisdom. For the Johannine community, the emphasis on the law as the dwelling place of Wisdom, or on Moses (or any other figure) as the revealer, infringed on the role of Jesus as the pre-existent divine being sent by God. Thus John is not content to have Jesus as one revealer amongst others, but presents him as the only revealer (1:18 - Θεὸν οὐδείς ἐφοράκεν πώποτε). In the prologue, John proclaims that revelation as divine Wisdom is accessible to human experiences through the life of Jesus.

3. Dwelling Place of the Word

In this sense the verse 14 is important. It begins by announcing that the *logos* “became flesh” (ἐγένετο) and “dwelt among us” (ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν). As a turning point of the prologue, in this verse I find two changes of the Word: temporal and spatial change. The verb “to become”

---

is used for the Word for the first time. Prior to v. 14, only the verb “to be” has been used. That is, the use of the verbs “to become” and “to dwell” shows that the Word has definitely moved from the eternal sphere to the temporal/spatial realm as Wisdom did in the Old Testament. Moreover, when we read the verse alongside verse 1, it is clear that the Word who dwelt with God now dwells “with us” (ἐν ἡμῖν). Especially, the use of the word σκηνόω draws attention to many older traditions of God’s presence dwelling in Israel. This verb is derived from the word σκηνή for “tent” or “tabernacle,” the place where God spoke to Moses (Exodus 33:9) and where God’s glory was seen (Exodus 40:34). That is, the verb is related to the images recalling Israel’s Sinai experience, wilderness in desert with the Ark and Tent, Wisdom literature, and the ritual cult associated with the ancient Tabernacle and Temple.

As a result of presenting the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, the author establishes the contrast between the role of Israel’s law and the identity and role of Jesus. The next claim “we have seen his glory,” continues this contrast. Moses desired to see the glory but was not permitted (Exodus 33:20-23). However, the Johannine community that received the Word can see the glory and become the children of God (1:12).

In this regard, the difficult phrase χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος in v. 16 is important. The preposition ἀντὶ can be read as expressing both replacement (grace in place of grace) and accumulation (grace upon grace). It may seem that John wishes to express the double meanings of divine grace: While God’s presence in Jesus Christ is continuous with the Torah of

---

165 The LXX uses the word σκηνή to translate both the tent and the tabernacle. For example, in Exodus 40:34, the same term σκηνή is simultaneously employed for both “the Tent of meeting” (אֹ֣הֶל מוֹעֵד) and “the tabernacle” (מִשְׁכָּן).

166 Most English translations take the meaning of the latter (grace upon grace); NIV, NRSV, NAS, NIB, and so on.
Moses, the revelation in Jesus the logos surpasses all others. That is the way the Johannine community could not only maintain their Jewish traditions but also insist on their new faith in Jesus.

The prologue of John contains two overarching themes: Jesus’ identity and the believer’s identity in relationship to Jesus. Both of these themes in the prologue recur through the Gospel. Our attention is that John introduces the life and ministry of Jesus and the situation of the Johannine community by using various images: light and darkness, being and becoming, eternal and temporal realms, tent, father-son relationship, and glory. In other words, these images are not intended only to illustrate theological contents, but rather that it is through imagery that the theology of John receives its specific character.

4. Temple Imagery in the Prologue

Among the images in the prologue, the temple image in verse 14 is the representative one that shows not only Christological but also ecclesial characters in John. Then why is the temple imagery so important in terms of Christological and ecclesial meanings? As we examined above, it is related to the situation of the Johannine community. The first Jesus followers came from Judaism, and the initial proclamation of the gospel was made within Judaism. The first preaching about Jesus received divergent opinions (Acts 14:4). However, initially such a preaching did not of itself cause a widespread break between the Jewish Jesus followers and the wider Jewish community. In the aftermath of the destruction of the temple, however, this situation gradually changed. With no temple, no sacrifices, and no priesthood, Judaism was faced with redefining its religious identity. The temple had been the visible symbol of God’s presence. Even if one lived beyond the land of Israel, the temple still functioned as the central place of sacrifice, atonement, and daily purification. After the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E., to replace the temple as the
locus of God’s presence, a new focus of religious identity was needed; with the leading role of the Pharisees, the Torah became the new focus in Judaism as seen above. The first Jewish Jesus followers, meanwhile, were also faced with the issue of redefining themselves. According to Mary Coloe, when they found they were no longer accepted within the synagogue, they faced the very painful question: “how could they maintain their Jewish traditions, especially their rich cultic traditions, and maintain their new faith in Jesus?” In other words, they needed to answer how they could redefine their identity in an improvised fashion.

The temple imagery plays a central role in forming identity in John. Coloe shows that in the course of the gospel, the significance and symbolism of the temple shifts from the building to the person of Jesus, seen in John’s report of Jesus speaking of “the temple of his body” (2:21), and then to the believers. The temple was regarded as the dwelling place of God in the midst of Israel (1:14), but in the farewell discourse Jesus announces that the Father and the Son will make their abiding place in the disciples (14:23). Consequently the Johannine community understands itself as a new spiritual temple and household of God on earth. Coloe writes as follows:

For the Johannine community the Temple is the major symbol that functions in two ways: i. The Temple, as the dwelling place of God, points to the identity and role of Jesus; ii. The imagery of the Temple is transferred from Jesus to the Christian community, indicating its identity and role. […] The Temple functions in the narrative as the major Christological symbol that gradually shifts its symbolic meaning from the person of Jesus to the Johannine community in the post-resurrection era.

As Coloe states, the temple functions as a symbol. While Judaism was transferring the meaning of the Temple’s destruction and sacrificial imagery into daily living according to the Torah, the Johannine community also reinterpreted the meaning of the Temple as the person of

167 Coloe, God Dwells with Us, 2.
168 Ibid., 3.
Jesus. To this end, the author employs two major images: the Wisdom motif and tabernacle images in the first scene of the prologue and following narrative.

IV. Summary

In this chapter, I examined the way that imagery plays a pivotal role in the Gospel of John. In the first section, I offered the study of historical and theological background on the Johannine community that is linked to the Gospel. According to J. Louis Martyn, the excommunication story in John was not just a reflection of Jesus earthly ministry. The story also was to reflect the Johannine community’s situation after the destruction of temple. That is, the Gospel itself is a two-level drama. It has a two-tiered meaning, one story of Jesus ministry and the other story reflecting the Johannine community’s situation. It says that the author of John is a faithful improviser who writes the drama of God in the Fourth Gospel faithfully to the old tradition and creatively to the new situation. In other words, the author of the Fourth Gospel collects many resources and writes the text from a new perspective to direct his readers at that time in a dramatic fashion. The most important one given by the author is the identity of the Johannine community on the basis of Jesus’ identity.

In this process, imagery plays a central role in developing the drama. That is, aesthetic tools, like imagery, metaphor, symbol, and figurative language, are the foundation for the drama of God. Thus I examined the function of the images in John in terms of Christology and ecclesiology. After that, as a case study, the prologue of John was examined to observe how the images contribute to the identity of a newly emerging community from Judaism.

We can confirm that with images of Christ and Jesus’ symbolic action and speech, the author of John shows what the community should be and gives direction to his community in the struggle against Judaism. As presented in the prologue, the only revealer is Jesus Christ. Thus the
community members are instructed through temple imagery and other images to keep their faith and to have life in Jesus’ name (20:31).

This is the way the images of Christ can become role models of a new community established by Christ himself. With the help of various images John argues that, as a new spiritual temple and household of God on earth, the community will be newly established on the basis of Jesus’ identity. In sum, the author of John’s Gospel is a role model preacher for today’s preacher. Preaching is a theological-aesthetic task that is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ and is highly relevant to the lives of contemporary listeners at the same time. In order to give direction to his community members, John employs various images as the means of theological creativity. We may conclude that the Gospel of John itself can be good proof as to why preachers need to incorporate both theology and aesthetics into the ministry of preaching. In the next chapter I will explore historical roots of both aesthetic theology and aesthetic preaching in the works of Horace Bushnell.
Introduction

When it comes to the aesthetic dimensions of preaching, new understandings of language are essential. Aesthetic preaching is basically a linguistic revolution against earlier views that language is just a tool to deliver propositional truth and value, and that truth already exists objectively and simply needs to be described. As discussed in chapter one, preaching can be conceived as a theological-aesthetic task that might be called a “gospel-driven rhetoric.” In order to avoid falling into aestheticism devoid of theology, on one hand, it is imperative to keep God at the center, and on the other hand we need to improvise the gospel delivered long ago for contemporary listeners. Metaphor is a great necessity for aesthetic preaching because human knowledge, language, and thought are intrinsically metaphorical and involve imagination. The author of the Gospel of John exhibits a theological role of imagery and influences the thoughts and actions of his community members. As a good improviser, John writes his Gospel as a two-level drama that reflects both the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the situation of the Johannine community at the same time. Put another way, John gives theological direction to his community based on the identity of Jesus Christ with the aid of various imagery. John’s language is full of aesthetic and theological values. Now the rising question is how contemporary theologians think of the role of language in terms of aesthetics.
Contemporary scholars in a diverse range of fields now recognize language as central to human experience. Modern philosophers, for example, have increasingly come to believe that “philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use.” Underlying this belief is a revolutionary view of language itself, that it is no longer merely a tool by which experiences are shared, no longer even an adornment for lucid discourse, but the essence of that which constitutes human knowledge. Language creates worlds.

The influence of this enriched understanding of language has been felt in such fields as linguistics, anthropology, rhetoric, and theology, especially homiletics. When a theologian takes the theme of the linguistic turn in theology, there is one preacher who must be reckoned with. The man is Horace Bushnell who was a preacher and theologian of Hartford, Connecticut. In this chapter, I will explore Bushnell’s language theory by examining how he develops his theology from his unique linguistic philosophy. The main explication of his ideas on language appears in God in Christ. This book contains three theological discourses delivered in 1848 that caused considerable controversy at the time. As an introduction to these theological statements he includes a “Preliminary Dissertation On The Nature of Language As Related To Thought And Spirit.”

Paying attention to the “Preliminary Dissertation,” the present chapter consists of four sections. The first section briefly offers the socio-religious context of Bushnell’s day. After

---


171 Ibid., 9-117.
examining his thought on language in the second section, I will explain how Bushnell applies his new understanding about language to his theology and homiletics in the third. Lastly, it will be discussed whether Bushnell’s proposal of aesthetic theology is still viable in the twenty-first century. After examining both the Biblical Theology Movement as a representative of the rational method of theology and contemporary liberal aesthetic theologians (Sallie McFague and David Tracy), I will argue that Bushnell’s position is still influential as an ancestor of dramatic theology that takes seriously Scripture’s own claims; yet at the same time, he creatively relates those claims to contemporary settings. That is to say, Bushnell’s aesthetic theology (preaching) is an ancestor of dramatic theology (preaching) that we will later see is developed by contemporary theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar and Kevin Vanhoozer.

I. The Language Theory of Bushnell

1. The Context

In Horace Bushnell’s nineteenth-century, America was filled with conflicting religious currents. Puritan Protestants who had enjoyed a religious hegemony were confronted by the appearance of such outsiders as Catholic immigrants, Mormons, religious communitarians, and foreign-language-speaking Protestants.\(^\text{172}\) Baptists and Methodists increased mainly among the lower classes, Episcopalians and Unitarians among the upper classes. Along with the rapid development of urban industry the perplexities of the New Englanders who still longed for a Calvinist-driven society increased. Throughout New England, the beginnings of industry, the promise of the West, and the building of canals and better roads redistributed the population and changed familiar living patterns. Mobile young people in search of a fortune filled the cities.

Impoverished families in the rural villages saw sons and daughters leaving for western lands or growing cities. The stable unified church of the Puritan faith ceased to exist. The American Civil War (1861-1865) was another force to make the religious situation more divided.

We may summarize the age in terms of religion as follows: (1) Revivalists of different Protestant denominations still clamored for the commitments of people in all regions of the country. (2) Influenced by Deism and other Enlightenment rationalisms, many Protestant theologians sought to be as scientific in their claims as other modern scientists of the natural world. For example, Charles Hodge (1797 - 1878) of Princeton insisted that, “The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his storehouse of facts; and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches is the same as that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches.” Hodge even had pleasure in the thought that no new idea had ever appeared in Princeton during his professorship. (3) Also, Deism and other Enlightenment philosophies challenged orthodox beliefs. For example, Unitarians departed from the traditions of mainline Congregation churches because certain traditional doctrines could not be reconciled with human reason.

In this socio-religious turmoil, Bushnell’s life was the record of one man’s personal and religious struggle to find and hold Christian truth for himself and for his contemporaries. Thus James Duke writes of Bushnell’s life and ministry “signalized a turning point in American


Protestant thought.” In practice Bushnell spent a great deal of his intellectual energy questioning the rationalism of the Protestant orthodoxy of his day. For Bushnell the consequence was the abstraction of theology from the living lives and the tangible realities of the human spirit. Bushnell was also offensive to the revivalists because he assumed that children born into Christian families and baptized could “grow up in love with all goodness, and remember no definite time when they became subjects of Christian principle.” He thought that the revivalist understanding of conversion required a particular religious experience and ignored the need for the structures of family, church, and society, which nurture the person into the religious life.

To replace the rationalistic and propositional theology of his contemporaries, Bushnell called for a poetic theology that was deliberately an art form, a kind of poetry of the divine and the human spirits. Instead of attempting to dissolve mystery with propositional language, he made every effort with his words to preserve religious mystery, thereby calling attention to the manner in which the truths of God surpass human comprehension. For Bushnell, the new path to preserve religious mystery was deeply related to human language. Bushnell’s general notion of claiming language as the center of his thinking resonates deeply with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In the work of *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge asserts, “Christianity is not a Theory, or a Speculation; but a Life. Not a Philosophy of Life, but a Life and a living Process.” Language is a pivotal aspect of this claim. For Coleridge, sometimes what appear to be concrete truths of

---


179 Ibid., 150.
the Gospel are truths wrapped in metaphorical language. Thus, metaphorical language aids “conviction” when “a thing, power, or principle in a higher dignity is expressed by the same thing, power or principle in a lower but more known form.” The first stated aim of Aids to Reflection is “to direct the Reader’s attention to the value of the Science of Words, their use and abuse and the incalculable advantages attached to the habit of using them appropriately, and with a distinct knowledge of their primary, derivative, and metaphorical senses.” In this regard, Bushnell argues that language cannot encapsulate truth exhaustively. But he also recognizes its power: it can, if used imaginatively or metaphorically, enliven human existence. “The poetic forms of utterance are closer to the fires of religion within us, more adequate revelations of consciousness, because they reveal it in flame.”

For this reason, he develops a unique language theory with the help of Coleridge. Bushnell’s proposal is predicated on a dialectical relationship between language and experience; “Language gives form to experience; experience gives meaning to linguistic form.” Now we turn to his understanding of language in detail.

2. The Centrality of Language for Human Experience

In this section, I will examine Bushnell’s idea of language based on his work, “Preliminary Dissertation.” Bushnell, who was influenced by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, claims

---

180 Ibid., 153.

181 Ibid., xliv-xlv.

182 Horace Bushnell. Christ in Theology: Being the Answer of the Author before the Hartford Central Association of Ministers, October, 1849, for the Doctrines of the Book entitled “God in Christ.” (Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1849; 1851), 87; Cited from Cherry, Horace Bushnell: Sermons, 11.

that much of the difficulty and argument in Christian theology arises from a failure to explore and understand the nature of language. Throughout the Christian doctrine and theology “we are found committing ourselves most unsuspectingly to language and logic, as if the instruments were sufficient, and the methods infallible.” \(^{184}\) Therefore he is primarily concerned with the speaking of language as “vehicles of thought and spiritual truth.” \(^{185}\) He attempts to analyze the significance of words and in the development of this topic he touches upon many aspects of the philosophy of symbolism.

**Language as a Human and Divine Co-Product**

For Bushnell, human language is “a gift of God to the race.” \(^{186}\) This does not mean that God gave humans the particular words and sounds that they use, but that God first “called into action the instinct of language,” by directing the human mind to the objects around him/her, “to see what human would call them.” \(^{187}\) In this sense God was the “occasional and creative cause.” \(^{188}\) Thus language is both a human and a divine product. “It is not only for the race, but it is also of the race – a human development, as truly as knowledge, or virtue, or the forms of the social state.” \(^{189}\)

\(^{184}\) Bushnell, *God in Christ*, 12.

\(^{185}\) *Ibid.*


\(^{188}\) *Ibid.*

This beginning, however, has little importance for Bushnell, for the language so created no longer exists. The biblical story of the tower of Babel and the following dispersion of language led to the belief that this first language disappeared. Consequently it is a waste of time for modern study of language to try to find the common basic language from which all other languages arose. It no longer exists and they will merely find the diversities of languages with some common elements that are due to cultural interpenetrations; they will not find one primitive language.\(^{190}\) The question thus arises as to how these diverse languages originated. Bushnell’s answer is that they are “free developments of the race; though all from God, in the sense that God has created in all humans a certain free power of self-representation or expression, which is itself a distinct capacity for language, and, in one view, language itself.”\(^{191}\) In this sense, God remains the cause of language. Upon this basis it is easy to see that the physical objects perceived through the senses will be named with sounds arbitrarily selected as representing those objects. The cause of such selections are too vague to specify and “the sounds or names which stand for the same objects, have generally no similarity whatever; Whence it follows, irresistibly, that nothing in the laws of voice or sound has determined the names adopted.”\(^{192}\)

However, the more difficult task, for Bushnell, is to indicate the cause of the languages that refer to thought, emotion, or spiritual reality, rather than to physical objects perceived through the senses. This task is more difficult because it lies out of reach of the senses. Non-sensory objects cannot be pointed at in order to reach agreement as to what is signified by language; and yet, at least in the sphere of thought and emotion, all will admit their existence.

\(^{190}\) Ibid., 14-15.

\(^{191}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{192}\) Ibid., 20.
Language concerning these realities is the “language of intelligence; that which, under an
outward form, carries an inward sense, and so avails to serve the uses of the mind.”\textsuperscript{193} The real
problem in the philosophy of language is that of language as an instrument of thought and
spiritual truth.

In order to develop an adequate “language of intelligence,” Bushnell suggests that the
“mediation of things”\textsuperscript{194} is required. Objects of the sensory world can be an aid as signs and
interpretations of thought because of the fact that “there is a Logos in the outer world, answering
to the logos or internal reason of the parties.”\textsuperscript{195} Thus, people are able to understand and
communicate regarding thought and spiritual conditions. When it so happens that objects are
used as basis for the “language of intelligence” their physical and material qualities are forgotten;
rather, the object becomes a sign of an internal state, and communication of thought which does
not have an immediate sensory referent is possible. Bushnell proceeds to give numerous
illustrations showing how the history of language supports his argument, and as concluding the
analysis he writes:

We find then that every language contains two distinct departments: - the physical
department – that which provides names for things; and the intellectual
department – that which provides names for thought and spirit. In the former,
names are simple representatives of things, which even the animals may learn. In
the latter, the names of things are used as representatives of thought, and cannot,
therefore, be learned, save by beings of intelligence – (intus lego) – that is, beings
who can read the inner sense, or receive the inner contents of words; beings in

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Ibid.}, 20-21.

\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Ibid.}, 21.

\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Ibid.}
whom the Logos of creation finds a correspondent logos, or reason, to receive and employ the types it offers, in their true power.\textsuperscript{196} 

Giving some examples in English words, which show us more than a word to correspond to a thought, Bushnell writes “All things out of sense get their name in language through signs and objects in sense that have some mysterious correspondence or analogy, by which they are prepared beforehand to serve as signs or vehicles of the spiritual things to be expressed.”\textsuperscript{197} It also furnishes a basis for grammatical construction. The relations of things in space, their position, and connections are such that the grounds of grammar are also given. “Nature having them in her own bosom, existing there in real grammatical relation, not only gives us the words, but shows how to frame them into propositions.”\textsuperscript{198} In this process, the logos in nature is functional. “There is a logos in the forms of things, by which they are prepared to serve as types or images of what is inmost in our souls; and then there is a logos also of construction in the relations of space, the position, qualities, connections, and predicates of things, by which they are framed into grammar.”\textsuperscript{199}

Language and the Knowledge of God

This theory furnishes Bushnell with a unique approach to a traditional argument for the knowledge of God. The logos throughout creation indicates an intelligence in nature, which must be that of the Author of nature. The intelligence of God is manifested throughout creation in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{196} \textit{Ibid.}, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{197} \textit{Ibid.}, 25-26.
\item \textsuperscript{198} \textit{Ibid.}, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{199} \textit{Ibid.}, 30. However, in his explanation, it seems that Bushnell does not analyze the relationship between the logos in things and the internal logos.
\end{itemize}
ground for language. “No series of Bridgewater Treatises, piled even to the moon, could give a proof of God so immediate, complete and conclusive.”\textsuperscript{200} In short, there is an analogy between nature and God. Language itself has the analogy of the intelligence of God given through symbols.

Before dealing with how to get the knowledge of God through language, it is now necessary to indicate how words convey meaning. They are not exact counterparts of things symbolized, but images presented to the mind that may cause one to have a similar thought, if one has sufficient experience to do so. There is also, however, a class of words with a perfectly determined significance, which refers to necessary ideas. This class includes such terms as “time, space, cause, truth, right, arithmetical numbers, and geometrical figures.”\textsuperscript{201} The exactness of these ideas gives a precision to the corresponding words.

“Language of intelligence,” on the other hand, always affirms something that is false. They give form to something that does not have form. “Thinking, in fact, is nothing but the handling of thoughts by their forms.”\textsuperscript{202} Inasmuch as such activity, in regard to the “language of intelligence,” is always inexact, constant correction is necessary. There will be a continual increase in form in an attempt to achieve exactness. It becomes necessary to present many aspects of the subject and thus let form battle form in order to convey exact meaning. “Accordingly, we never come so near to a well-rounded view of truth, as when it is offered

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 30.

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 52.
paradoxically.”  

The real truth in regard to such matters will be perceived by insight, penetrating beyond the words, through the analogy between words and things, to the real meaning of the phrase.

Based on this idea, Bushnell asks what Christian truth is: “Pre-eminently and principally, it is the expression of God – God coming into expression, through histories and rites, through an incarnation, and through language – in one syllable, by the Word.” Given this premise, the task of theology will be to explain how biblical expressions communicate the truth of God’s identity. Such interpretation relates Christian theology closely to poetry, and implies considerable reconstruction in the field of logic. It further implies the impossibility of final philosophical statements or any final system of Christian dogmatics. Bushnell sees one hope of moving beyond this lack of precision in the statement of spiritual truth. Physical science may come to understand nature sufficiently, explain its workings and laws so that the unity of the real universe will be manifest; and as this happens we may be able to make the second department of language perfect with more exactness. “Undoubtedly, the whole universe of nature is a perfect analogon of the whole universe of thought or spirit. Therefore, as nature becomes truly a universe only through science revealing its universal laws, the true universe of thought cannot sooner be conceived.”

---

203 Ibid., 55.

204 Ibid., 74.

205 Ibid., 78.

206 Ibid., 78-79.
Bushnell looks for the primary effects of these ideas in the field of theology. He expected his theory to mitigate the rationalistic dogmatism that had pervaded the development of Christian theology in the New England, and by relating theology more closely to aesthetics should draw it much closer to the practical life of Christianity. Such ideas should increase the interest in the study of Scripture, and also change the method of such study. Most especially such ideas should bring about a friendly state among different Christian groups, and a more intense conviction “that truth, in its highest and freest forms, is not of the natural understanding, but is, rather, as Christ himself declared, Spirit and Life.”

II. Two Kinds of Theological Methods

1. The Rationalistic Method of Theology

For Horace Bushnell, basically there are two methods of theology: the rationalistic and the imaginative. Influenced by Coleridge, Bushnell perpetuates the distinction under the terms “understanding” and “heart” or “imagination.” In this scheme reasoning is the activity of the understanding. For Bushnell, the rationalistic theological tradition seemed to ignore the imagination in favor of the understanding. The New England theology was a rationalistic one. The New England theologians were not rationally faith-denying. However, assuming the trustworthiness of the Scripture, they applied a method of reasoning in order to add support and understanding.

---

207 Ibid., 91-96.

208 Horace Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1881), 284.

209 Bushnell, God in Christ, 92.
Not allowing ourselves to be rationalists over the Scriptures, we have yet been as active and confident rationalists under them, as it was possible to be – assuming, always, that they address their contents to the systematic, speculative reason of man, into which they are to be received, and by which they are to be digested into formulas – when they are ready for use.\(^{210}\)

This “rationalistic method,” according to Bushnell, holds that theological language could convey literal truths in propositional form to human understanding. It grants that there is figurative language in religion, but it also maintains that religious language contains literal terminology. Metaphors and images are the tools of eloquence that can be reduced to literal statements by the qualified scholar.\(^{211}\)

When we look into the history of rhetoric, such a view is not greatly different from Puritan methodology. Classical rhetoricians regard the five dimensions of rhetoric – invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory – as a single productive unity. By being attentive to these elements the rhetor could form a comprehensive view of speech that is both coherent and persuasive. However, sixteenth-century rhetorician Peter Ramus had proposed the new way of dividing up the traditional five dimensions of classical rhetoric into two areas: logic and rhetoric.\(^{212}\) Ramus assigns invention and disposition to the province of logic, allocates style and delivery to the realm of rhetoric and simply ignores memory. According to the new scheme advocated by Ramus, an argument must first be proven true by logical means; only secondarily should the speaker adorn the speech with stylistic elements in the attempt to arouse the affections of the listeners.

\(^{210}\) Ibid., 92-93.

\(^{211}\) Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, 265; Cross, Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America, 99.

Ramus’ new proposal of logic and rhetoric acquires strong favor among Calvinist scholars and preachers alike and Puritan scholars adopt Ramean rhetoric primarily because it is advantageous to their propositional theology and to their own fondness for plain style. The rhetoric of Ramus “seemed a more efficient method than the logic of the schools for interpreting Scripture, and his rhetoric more suited to preaching the unadulterated Word.” On this basis, Ramus becomes the most direct and decisive influence upon the development of Puritan preaching. In the Ramean tradition, the content of oration becomes a matter of reason, logic and method, while rhetoric serves as a compliant and stylistic vehicle by which one delivers the content of speech. According to this exposition, the affections of the listeners “would be moved most cogently if presented with that which is in itself true and has been proved dialectically to be as the thing is, with no other enhancement than pleasing figures of speech and appropriate gestures.”

Bushnell sees that for both the Unitarians and the New England theologians, their understanding is the final judge, since the Bible is reasonable and theology cannot tolerate contradictory statement. But the conflict between Unitarians and Trinitarians cannot be resolved on rationalistic grounds. Moreover, the theological method of rationalism also makes the problems focusing on Calvinism and Arminianism irreconcilable, and in the nineteenth century.

---


century their understanding failed to master the doctrine of the atonement.²¹⁶ As Bushnell sees it, the certainty and the precision of theological statements by some of his contemporaries are not possible. In order to give an alternative, Bushnell attempts to explain the imaginative theological method.

2. The Imaginative Theological Method

The rationalistic method of theology that Bushnell finds dominant in the New England of his day is a major cause of sectarianism. The error of rationalism is that it holds its theories and propositions to be literally true. In developing his own views, Bushnell did not hold them as the literal truth. As metaphors and images appeal to the imagination, they serve the Life of God rather than subjecting it to the notions and opinions of the understanding. Not only is the rationalistic method of theology undesirable; its simplicity is not possible:

And what is theology? It is very commonly supposed to be a speculated system of doctrine, drawn out in propositions that are clear of all metaphor and are stated in terms that have finally obtained a literal and exact sense. But no such system is possible, for the very plain reason that we have no such terms.²¹⁷

In his discourse on dogma and spirit, Bushnell contrasts dogma and spirit.²¹⁸ He is not opposed to theology, but he holds that theology must be distinguished from dogma. In speaking of dogma, Bushnell intends two elements. Firstly, it is an opinion addressed to the understanding.


²¹⁸ Bushnell, “A Discourse on Dogma and Spirit; or the True Reviving of Religion,” in *God in Christ*, 300-10.
Secondly, such opinion is held as a rule or a norm for “the opinions, the faith, or the Christian experience, whether of ourselves or of others.”\(^{219}\)

While dogma is of the head, there is another knowledge which is of the heart and in which right sensibility is more important than reason. Opinions may be written down and preserved even after the living reality to which the opinions point disappears, but “spiritual truth dies with spiritual life. It is vital, it is essential life in its own nature, and therefore must be kept alive as it began to live, by an inward and immediate connection with God.”\(^{220}\) For Bushnell, Christianity is not a dogma. It can be taught only by the Spirit.

Dogma, having its locus in the understanding, can exist even when “Life” has gone, and when this happens, all that human beings have to work on is the propositions. It “will always be observed that, as the activity of faith and spirit declines, the activity of flesh and dogma increases.”\(^{221}\) The relation of head and heart projected by the theological method of rationalism had missed the essence of Christianity. Opinions, articles, dogmas, and theologies had come to reign. But dogmatism would have to withdraw, for Christianity is not basically of the head, but of the heart. “It teaches that out of the heart are the issues of life; that God hath given us light in the face of his Son, by shining into our heart; that heresies themselves belong to the natural understanding; and that only the pure in heart can behold the face of God.”\(^{222}\)

\(^{219}\) *Ibid.*, 301.

\(^{220}\) *Ibid.*, 305.


\(^{222}\) *Ibid.*, 328. In *Christ in Theology*, Bushnell distinguishes between “theology” and what he calls “Divinity”: “The student will then be a student, not of theology, but, in a proper sense, of divinity. The knowledge he gets will be divinity, filling his whole consciousness – a Living state and not a scheme of wise sentences. He will be a man who understands God as being indoctrinated or inducted into God, by studies that are themselves
3. Divine Life in Theologian and the Receptive Imaginative Hermeneutics

His imaginative theological method makes Christian theology the task of those who have common religious experiences. All of Bushnell’s theology has the experience of divine Life in humans as the main subject, the continued existence of which is a prerequisite for the theologian. At his contemporaries Bushnell takes aim the following criticism:

it has not been held, as a practical, positive, and earnest Christian truth, that there is a PERCEPTIVE POWER in spiritual life, and unction of the HOLY ONE, which is a kind of inspiration – an immediate, experimental knowledge of God, by virtue of which, and partly in the degree of which, Christian theology is possible.\textsuperscript{223}

For Bushnell, inspiration by the Life of God supplies the theologian with a “perceptive power” and is also that by virtue of the Life of God theology is possible. Thus Bushnell claims that in order to understand the Bible, one must come to it with “a pure and loving heart,” “a delicate reverence,” and “a generous faith.”\textsuperscript{224}

Moreover, the degree of inspiration experienced by the theologian is not irrelevant to that person’s degree of theological perceptiveness. When Paul teaches that spiritual things are to be spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14), he intends that “Christian truth can be in our soul only as it is of it, begotten there by the indwelling of Christ, and the private rehearsal of the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{225}

\textsuperscript{223} Bushnell, \textit{God in Christ}, 93.


\textsuperscript{225} Bushnell, \textit{God in Christ}, 291.
If we defend Christianity as a “book of articles” and not as the Spirit and Life, Christianity is unable to live.\textsuperscript{226}

By placing an emphasis on Spirit over Dogma, Bushnell does not intend to discard theology. His intention is to place natural (or scientific) judgments in proper perspective by filling those faculties that are theologically productive with the same divine Life that animates the heart. The result is a theology that does not only find its source in the divine Life, but also play a pivotal role as a vehicle of that Life as well. Bushnell writes,

Then every faculty is promoted, and the whole man becomes spirit, acting not as in mere nature, but as in the life of God; without eagerness, partiality, prejudice, or care – acting as in rest. And then it will be, not science, stretching itself as before, to compass the unimaginable and infinite worlds of faith, but science indeed, the quiet reading of God through the heart.\textsuperscript{227}

The rationalistic method of theology breaks up theology by offering a series of finite, literally true statements devoid of any organic feature. Bushnell’s symbolic view of language, based upon the immediate knowledge of God in inspiration, provides an organic knowledge of God.

We shall receive the truth of God in a more entire organic and organific, manner, as being itself an essentially vital power. It will not be our endeavor to pull the truth into analytic distinctions, as if theology were a kind of inorganic chemistry, and the last end of discovery, an atomic theory; but we shall delight in truth, more as a concrete, vital nature, incarnated in all fact and symbol round us – a vast, mysterious, incomprehensible power, which best we know, when most we love.\textsuperscript{228}

Bushnell, thus, is not reluctant to be called “Mystic!” He writes that “a mystic is one who finds a secret meaning, both in words and in things, back of their common or accepted meaning –

\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 294.

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 309.

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., 93-94.
some agency of LIFE, of LIVING THOUGHT, hid under the forms of words and institutions, and historical events.” For Bushnell, human beings are designed in part, to be a mystic being. Decisively Jesus Christ himself affirms the mystic element in his teachings. “There is something of a mystic quality in almost every writing in the New Testament.”

Since this is the nature of Christianity, it follows that the Christian message is to be apprehended not by the intellect but the imagination. This is the point of Bushnell’s article, “Our Gospel, a Gift to the Imagination.” Since all religious language is metaphor, it follows “that all the truths are going to be given to men by images; so that all God’s truth will come as to the imagination.” In speaking of imagination, Bushnell identifies it as that “power in human bosoms, which reads the types of the creation, beholding the stamps of God’s meanings in their faces, the power that distinguishes truths in their images, and seizes hold of images for the expression of truths.”

The gospel is also said to be offered to faith. Faith is the function of the imagination and not of the understanding. The imaginative insight and the trust of faith are synonymous. “What is given to faith is put forth in some fact-form or symbol to be interpreted by the imaginative

---

229 Ibid., 94.

230 Ibid., 95.


232 Ibid., 105.
insight or the discerning powers of faith.” To apprehend divine truth by the imagination or heart involves trust and reception, and hence the truth enters as a power of life.

Varying the figure, Bushnell states that the truth of the images is to be perceived by a “right beholding.” To rightly behold the image is to have a receptive imagination:

Ingenuity will miss it by overdoing; mere industry will do scarcely more than muddle it; only candor, a graciously open, clean candor will find it. We can take the sense of its images, only by offering a perfectly receptive imagination to them, a plate to fall upon that is flavored by no partisanship, corrugated by no bigotry, blotched by no prejudice or passion, warped by no self-will.

The “perfectly receptive imagination” of which Bushnell speaks is faith. Moreover, he states “If faith has to do with the infinite, if life is the presence in the soul of the infinite, how clear it is that opinions can compass no such matter.”

Bushnell takes into this poetic understanding of theology the central doctrines, persons, and events of Christianity. For example, just as God’s revelation in nature, history, and Scripture is said to be “metaphor upon metaphor,” so the figure of Jesus is said to be “God’s last metaphor,” the master image in human history of God’s mystery and a personal symbol calling for an imaginative, life-transforming appropriation from the reader of history. While Bushnell’s poetic theology is developed most explicitly as an alternative to the rationalism of the

---

233 Ibid., 96.

234 Ibid. In making a sharp contrast between “faith” and “opinion,” Bushnell writes “One (faith) imports liberty, and the other (opinion) a certain dictational right as respects thinking. In one there is a perceiving by trust and the soul-welcome of trust; the other is a notional perceiving or thinking, without perhaps any soul-welcome at all.”

235 Ibid., 105-06.

236 Bushnell, God in Christ, 338.

New England orthodoxy of his day, he offers it as an alternative to other theologies as well. That is to say, as we seen earlier, his understanding of language as the pivotal vehicle of thought and spiritual truth and how to get the knowledge of God through language lead him to this insight. According to Bushnell, Unitarians are just as guilty as the orthodox of an unimaginative interpretation of the Christian doctrine. That is, Bushnell insists all kinds of literalism in theology are problematic: Theology is best understood and practiced as an art form.

Essentially, religion is Life. Separated from the Life of God there is neither theologian nor theology. Isolated from the Divine Life theological symbols appear contradictory and absurd, and the Bible becomes a dead book. The Life of God is indispensable to a formulation of theological symbols as well as to our ability to apprehend the truth to which the theological statements point. Language is essential in this progress. When what is offered by the imagination is received in faith, the Life of God enters into the life of the individual. The experiential element, the essence of religion for Bushnell, is necessary in all theological endeavors.

4. Comprehensiveness in Theology

Bushnell’s approach to religious language leads him to “Comprehensiveness.” In his essay “Christian Comprehensiveness,” Bushnell undertakes to investigate “the causes out of which religious oppositions arise, and to suggest the true remedy.” He contends that five different schools arise in the conflict of opinion. First, two extremes oppose each other. Then a neutral school appears in a way that includes “men of the fence” who, seeing something excessive in the two extremes, “settle themselves down as nearly midway between the poles as

---

The fourth school is comprised of liberals who differ from the neutrals in having more generous aims: “For while the timorous neutral is engaged to settle his position midway between the extremes, the liberal is extending an equal indulgence to both. The former is moved by prudence to himself, the latter by charity to others.” While the virtue of the neutral is moderation, that of the liberal is tolerance. Bushnell appreciates the liberal spirit, but adds that too often such a spirit is accompanied by indifference to truth.

Bushnell is particularly interested in the fifth method – the method of comprehensiveness. “There arises up now a man, or a few men, who looking again at the two extreme schools, begin to ask whether it is not possible to comprehend them; that is to receive, hold, practice all which made the extreme positions true to their disciples?” Christian comprehensiveness does not take up a position midway between the two extremes. Recognizing that the extremes stand for no more than the two poles of truth, it rather embraces the truth in both. The comprehensive method does not destroy contradictions, but it allows them to stand while offering our mind to their impressions and allowing it to gravitate toward the whole truth. Comprehensiveness is possible only because theological language is given under forms, and because the unity of truth is given inwardly rather than in propositions. In other words, for Bushnell religious language itself is metaphorical. The tenstive process of the metaphor harnesses two opposites and creates the third possibility - comprehensiveness. It may be called dynamic or something that

\[239\] Ibid., 398.

\[240\] Ibid., 399.

\[241\] Ibid., 400-401.

\[242\] Bushnell, God in Christ, 71.

attempts to transcend pluralism. Bushnell’s view of comprehensiveness is understandable only in the light of his theological method and his view that Christianity is fundamentally the experience of divine Life.\textsuperscript{244} Christian comprehensiveness is his attempt to transcend theological disputes and theological differences. A comprehensive spirit is grounded in symbolism and the inspiration of God.

5. Comprehensive Understanding on the Work of Christ

For Bushnell, Christology is a kind of case study that shows the comprehensiveness of theology. Through his reflection on Christology, the focus is placed on Jesus Christ as an expressive symbol. It means that Christology is possible only as we recognize the misrepresentations within our representations, and the person of Christ is just such a finite relativity – the form of God given in and to the finite. As a gift to the human imagination, Christ is the last metaphor.\textsuperscript{245}

On the doctrine of the atonement, for example, there was a severe conflict between the orthodoxy and Unitarianism in Bushnell’s day. While the orthodox approved an “objective view” that conceived the work of Christ as effecting a change in God’s dealings with sinful humanity, the Unitarians advocated a “subjective view” that regarded the work as effecting a change in the disposition of sinful humanity toward God.\textsuperscript{246} Presumably for Bushnell, there were also the third

\textsuperscript{244} “Besides, if we are ever to have any sufficient or tolerably comprehensive theology, it can never be matured, save through the medium of an esthetic elevation in the sensibilities of our souls, which only the closest possible union of the life to God can produce.” \textit{God in Christ}, 308.

\textsuperscript{245} Refer to Bushnell, “Our Gospel a Gift to the Imagination,” 101; Duke, \textit{Horae Bushnell}, chapter VII. The Character of Jesus.

(neutral) and fourth (liberal) positions as well. The problem was that no single view could understand the comprehensive meaning of the biblical writings.

His own reflection on the topic began with the acknowledgement that the Bible itself suggested both extremes. Many passages clearly indicated that the work of Christ was designed to reconcile humanity to God. Yet many others contained different statements – “altar forms” of language such as sacrifice, offering, propitiation – which asserted some sort of transaction between the Son and the Father, independent of any human response to it. Thus the conflict between the orthodox and Unitarians came in part from one-sided, selective appeals to the range of biblical material on the subject. “The real problem is to find a place and a meaning for all that is said concerning him – to effect a union of the two sides.”

Bushnell’s solution is to integrate the two views into a subjective-objective account, which speaks of Christ as a moral influence rather than as a moral example. In order to “reclaim and restore” the objective language of the Bible, it is necessary to recognize that the subjective aim of Christ’s mission “could not be effectively realized, without the second, or objective view, in which his whole work is conceived in the altar form, and held forth to the objective embrace and worship and response of faith.” The blending of the two views within the Bible itself is to be read as an artistically powerful whole:

It is more a poem than a treatise. It classes as work of Art more than as a work of Science. It addresses the understanding, in great part, through the feeling or

---

247 Bushnell, God in Christ, 189-90.

248 Ibid., 190.

249 Ibid., 192.

250 Ibid.
sensibility. In these it has its receptivities, by these it is perceived, or perceivable. Moving in and through these, as a revelation of sympathy, love, life, it proposes to connect us with the Life of God.\textsuperscript{251}

The blending of the two views within theology is therefore to be sensitive to the peculiar expressive power of biblical language. And since the meaning of art cannot be exhausted by a simple formula, proposition, or summary, an appropriate understanding of the atonement will be akin to literary criticism designed to increase one’s appreciation of the story.\textsuperscript{252}

6. Homiletic Appropriation of Bushnell’s Theology

Bushnell’s preaching style, quite as much as the style of his theology, is to provide an alternative to dominant practices of his time. In particular, he seeks a way between two extremes: the dull doctrinal discourses of the Protestant orthodox and the manipulative, urgent pleadings of the Protestant revivalists. In his judgment, neither extreme cultivated a life of spiritual growth. And neither lifted before the minds of the congregation the imaginative wonder of the Christian tradition. Preaching should be an art form that stirs the symbolic consciousness and invites one to undertake the pilgrimage of faith. To achieve those ends, the minister should not hesitate to make his/her own personal presence felt in the pulpit, and he/she should carefully develop linguistic strategies. Above all, he/she should strive to complete the gifts of direct expression, lively images, and a tone of persuasion.\textsuperscript{253}

\textsuperscript{251} Ibid., 204.

\textsuperscript{252} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{253} See Horace Bushnell, \textit{Building Eras in Religion} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1881), especially “Pulpit Talent” and “Training for the Pulpit Manward.”
The “four canonical talents” cultivated in the seminary classroom – high scholarship, metaphysical and thinking talent, talent for expression or style, and talent of manner and voice for speaking – are not to be ignored.254 At the same time, “a disproportionate interest in the direction of speculative theology” is picked out as a vocational hazard to be avoided at any cost.255

Yet Bushnell holds that authentic preaching is more than mere eloquence; it is, essentially, a call to faith. When devoid of that essence, preaching is not preaching at all but ethical oratory.256 Crucial to effective preaching, Bushnell maintains, is the “individualizing talent” for speaking in specific, indeed, quite personalized, terms.257

True preaching struggles right away from formula, back into fact, and life, and the revelation of God and heaven. It is a flaming out from God; it reproves, testifies, calls, promises; thinking always of the angels going up to report progress, not of the answers formulated for a catechism.258

Such discourse obviously requires more than erudition and a gift of tongues. What Bushnell has in mind is a sound knowledge of human nature and a “mysterious efflux” and “aerial development of one’s personality.”259 The sermon is to evidence learning and craft, but

254 Ibid., 185–193.


256 Ibid., 212.

257 Ibid., 196-98.

258 Ibid., 188.

259 Ibid., 193-207.
even more it is to be “momentum of private inspirations: that which makes a man a symbol, and a voice, and a power.”

A Christianity that is of the Life and Spirit would surely produce sermons that evince the life and spirit of the preacher. And since exegesis is a process of “discovery” through imaginative engagement, the sermon announcing the discovery would thereby initiate the process anew among its listeners. In this sense, preaching is to be exegesis in action.

III. Bushnell’s Legacy and Interpretation Theory

The foregoing sections have dealt with Bushnell’s socio-historical context from which his theology arose, his language theory, two theological methods: rationalistic and imaginative, the comprehensiveness of theology, and his homiletic appropriation. Briefly speaking, the crux of Bushnell’s theory is “to differentiate the logical and the poetic modes of language, to define the function of each, and to demonstrate the priority of poetic method. […] Bushnell would replace a scientific, logical, mechanistic, or abstractive ideal of language with an aesthetic, symbolic, organic, literary one.”

In this part, then, I will examine how his proposal of aesthetic theology was evaluated and developed after him, especially in the realm of contemporary aesthetic theology, and how his

---

260 Ibid., 244-45.

261 Duke, Horae Bushnell, 78.

project can be reevaluated in the dramatic nature of theology. In other words, the central question is whether Bushnell’s aesthetic theology is still viable in the twenty first century. For this end, I will begin with the “Biblical Theology Movement” that flourished between the 1940s and 1960s, because as a contemporary representative of the rationalistic method of theology the Movement is a good place to evaluate Bushnell’s position in the present. Second, I will examine two contemporary theologians, Sallie McFague and David Tracy, in terms of responses to the Biblical Theology Movement. My point is that it is possible to find elements of Bushnell’s aesthetic thinking and assumptions in both McFague and Tracy as representatives of contemporary liberal aesthetic theology. Lastly, I will argue that Bushnell should be understood as a precursor of dramatic theology not as a forerunner of the liberal aesthetic mind. Many liberal theologians regard Bushnell as the “American Schleiermacher,” or “the father of American religious liberalism” because of his claim of the plurality of (textual) meaning based on metaphorical nature of language and the variety of personal experience. His reputation, however, has always been based on his reformulations of orthodox and his anticipations of later liberalism. That is to say, his position is more or less puzzling. As a midway between the rationalistic mode of theology and the liberal aesthetic method, Bushnell’s aesthetic theology should be understood as an ancestor of dramatic theology that takes faithfully Scripture’s own claims, yet at the same time, creatively relates those claims to the interpreter’s contemporary setting. That is,

---

263 In my view, many of aesthetic natures are incorporated in the notion of dramatic theology. In speaking of dramatic theology, I mean the term embraces the nature of aesthetic theology and steps further from aesthetic perception to dramatic performance for today. It will be discussed in chapters five and six.

264 Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, 610.

265 Ibid., 613.

266 Duke, Horace Bushnell, 3.
in my view, Bushnell’s position is still influential and important from the perspective of dramatic theology that has been fully developed by contemporary theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar and Kevin Vanhoozer.

1. The Biblical Theology Movement

There is no easy way of evaluating and assessing a theological movement. The same is true of the Biblical Theology Movement because it is part of a trend in modern theology and in part in the development of biblical theology. That is, the Biblical Theology Movement is not a perfect synonym for the broad discipline of biblical theology. In my view, however, the Movement as a part of the development of biblical theology can be assessed as a representative of the contemporary rationalistic method of theology. The following features may serve as major points of issue that support my argument in an assessment of the movement.

According to Gerhard Hasel, the Biblical Theology Movement contains a number of key elements. These are summarized in six points: (1) it shared with general biblical study the hermeneutical basis of the historical critical method, although attempting to avoid the extremes of that method and moving thereby beyond the older liberal position, while still staying solidly


268 The uses of the term “biblical theology” vary in quality: (1) At times it designates a Christian systematic theology based on Scripture; (2) biblical theology may also refer to a discipline of biblical studies focusing on the inner biblical connections between the testaments; (3) it is also used in the sense of building theological bridges from historical-philological exegesis to theological and ethical issues in church and society. Refer to Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Nature of Biblical Theology: Recent Trends and Issues,” *Andrews University Studies* 32 (1994): 203-15.

within the liberal framework of the study of the Bible. (2) It was fostered and inspired by the neo-orthodox movement, largely adopting that movement’s view of revelation in which Christ is the supreme revelation of God. It accepted Scripture as a “witness” to the revelation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ. On that basis the members of the Biblical Theology Movement believed they could fight both extreme liberalism and fundamentalism. (3) It emphasized Hebrew thought and mentality and the distinctiveness of the Bible. It shared to a large degree the suspicion regarding the function of philosophy in doing theology. (4) It suggested that there is a “unity of Divine revelation given in the context of history.” It revealed that the issue of the unity of the Bible had been heightened by historical criticism, which drove an irremovable split between the theology of the various biblical texts (layers of texts, or books of the Bible) and the Bible itself. (5) It emphasized that the history of Israel became the church’s history and subsequently our modern history. Revelation took place in history without propositional content. (6) It worked with biblical archaeology, using archaeology for historical confirmation of biblical persons and events. Such confirmation proved to be increasingly illusive as archaeologists interpreted the Bible more and more in terms of ancient Near Eastern culture and religion with the aid of anthropological and sociological methods without calling on the biblical picture as a normative guide.

Since the mid-1960s, almost all of these positions have been challenged. In addition, the supremacy of the historical-critical method itself has been shaken. In 1973 Walter Wink announced that “Historical biblical criticism is bankrupt.”\(^{270}\) In sum, among the major factors of the Movement’s demise, we can point out that it simply failed because the Bible is not a history

book. The Movement as a contemporary rationalistic method of theology was committed to scientific, historical-critical, rational, objective, and logical approach to the Bible but failed to recognize the aesthetic nature of biblical texts and language.

After the Movement, biblical study has moved in many directions, a lot of new literary and socio-political approaches to the Scripture: structuralism, deconstruction, reader-response criticism, feminism, postcolonial criticism and so on. Except for socio-political approaches, we may call this movement the “literary turn” that is organic, aesthetic, metaphorical, and dynamic. In other words, practically we have two paradigms of interpretation: the historical paradigm and the literary paradigm. As a historical paradigm, the Biblical Theology Movement made an attempt to be historically objective. In contrast, the literary paradigm is commonly associated with critical literary theory, which challenges the historical paradigm, and provides plausible alternatives for modern readers. According to Carl R. Holladay, the literary approach has three distinctive features: “ahistorical view of texts,” “autonomy of the text,” and “meaning as aesthetics.”

To sum up, rather than seeing a text as the product of historical processes, the literary paradigm tends to view a text as a finished work, and since the text is not essentially connected to its historical setting, its author, to anything outside the text, it is autonomous and has its own voice. Thus, in the literary paradigm, meaning is found in the text and always occurs in the present not the past, thereby a reader’s interpretation is essentially an aesthetic act as one sees a work of art. As discussed in chapter one, in aesthetic attitude, the main concern of the observers is not to consider other side effects of aesthetic objects like socio-cultural, political,


religious values and the like. The critic’s concern is solely about aesthetic value. It goes with the slogan “Art for Art’s Sake only.”

Beyond contemporary biblical study, it is possible to find a “literary turn” in contemporary aesthetic theologies. Among many aesthetic approaches to theology, I will discuss the issue with Sallie McFague and David Tracy in the following.

2. Contemporary Aesthetic Theologies

Against the rationalistic method of theology like neo-orthodox theology and the Biblical Theology Movement, both McFague and Tracy attempt to be sensitive to the metaphorical and poetic nature of language and the diversity of personal experience. In favor of seeing human understanding not in terms of discursive and rational conceptualization but in a more open, dynamic, and metaphorical mode, McFague asserts that a metaphorical image of theology would play a pivotal role against the tendency to absolutize our concepts; furthermore, she says that it would help us to be open to a creative re-thinking. According to McFague, the metaphorical mode of theology might more effectively evoke faith-experience in our time. In the case of Tracy, while his “revisionist theology” mainly comes out of the transcendental questioning of Bernard Lonergan and the theological metaphysics, his dialogue with Paul Ricoeur on metaphor

---


and narrative leads him to be suspicious of the adequacies of a philosophical and rational theology defined purely in terms of critical reflection.\textsuperscript{276}

The difference between two theologians is which approach is better, the analogical or metaphorical? In her book, \textit{Metaphorical Theology}, Sallie McFague argues that the Catholic tradition seems symbolic (or analogical for contemporary Catholicism), whereas the Protestant is metaphorical; she writes that contemporary ecumenical theology emphasizes neither easy continuities nor radical discontinuities, but some form of both.\textsuperscript{277} She states:

> There are characteristic between those for whom experience in the world engenders primarily a sense of wonder and trust and those for whom it engenders primarily a need for healing and transformation. The first moves from an awareness of harmony, taking the negativities into account, while the second moves from an awareness of the negativities, reaching toward a future harmony. They are two “ways,” one not necessarily better than the other.\textsuperscript{278}

McFague maintains, in spite of the similarity of the two options, that the Protestant sensibility is more characteristic of our time and is the place from which many of us must do theology. That is, according to McFague, the metaphorical movement from disharmony to harmony is better than Tracy’s analogical approach that moves from harmony to disharmony.

I assume, however, both theologians have the same presupposition as the revisionist and contemporary aesthetic theologians; they have two sources of theology: “Christian texts and common human experience and language.”\textsuperscript{279} These two sources require a “critical correlation”

---


\textsuperscript{277} McFague, \textit{Metaphorical Theology}, 11-14.

\textsuperscript{278} \textit{Ibid.}, 14.

\textsuperscript{279} David Tracy, \textit{Blessed Rage for Order}, 43-45.
making theology a “second order reflection” about the Bible and common human experience and language. Such correlation radically affirms pluralism in theological formulations, for all theological claims are analogous to statements made about reality. That is, the reality is an inexpressible constant throughout the individual’s experience, but no single statement about the reality exhausts what the reality is. In order to do theology rightly, according to Tracy, theologians require either knowledge of tools of textual, historical, and sociological criticism, and they must grasp the role of presupposed principles silently guiding one’s reading that can lead one to a distorted reading.\textsuperscript{280} In this regard, such theologians may easily accuse conservative Christians of narrow literalism and failure to appreciate the figurative character of all experience.

Moreover, for Tracy and McFague, the authority of Scripture is not guaranteed by the Barthian claim that the Bible is the Word of God. The character of contemporary relativism is obvious in the changes that have occurred over the last two hundred years regarding the question of Scriptural authority. They accept the claim that according to historical criticism and aestheticism, Scripture is a text like other human texts: it was written from various points of view; it was influenced by the cultural, economic, political, and personal circumstances of its authors. Thus, this text can no longer be seen as an absolute one. For them, then, what is the status of the Bible? What is the authority of Scripture? What is the role of the church in reading Scripture? There are many ways to express the special place that the Bible has for those who accept its relative status. For Tracy, such a way is to see it as a “classic,” analogous to other classics that have gained authority because of their intrinsic power to express certain truths about

\textsuperscript{280} See \textit{Ibid.}, 47-56.
reality. Likewise, for McFague, the notions of model and paradigm are another way to see the Bible as relative authority. She understands Christianity as one paradigm among many and believes that the view frees Christians from idolatry and opens them to ongoing corrections from other resources including other religions. That is, the truth of the Christian model based on the Bible must be “judged” by a number of factors: its internal consistency, its capacity to comprehend the various dimensions of existence, its fruitfulness for understanding the depths and heights of existence, and so on. On the ground of philosophical-aesthetic stance that cuts off the Bible from the Author, both Tracy and McFague declare that Christian truth is relative.

3. The Necessity of Dramatic Method

Conversely, however, from the perspective of the conservative position, the contemporary liberal aesthetic model has several problems. Among them, I point out two major issues: (1) the theories and contemporary situations dominate the Scripture; (2) in a similar vein, the natural wins at the cost of the supernatural.

First, in the realm of general literary studies, at times we have looked at the regretful sigh of flourishing literary theories. Frank Kermode, by 2002, who in the early 1970s had introduced French theory to Great Britain, expressed his dismay at the way literary theory could turn into an “infinite regression.” That is, there is always a danger that, as literary theory becomes more and more important, the status of literature can be diminished. This happens in many ways.

---

281 Tracy deals with the notion of the Bible as the Christian classic in the second half of his book The Analogical Imagination.

Ideological criticism based on race, class, or gender often uses literature as a means to promote a social goal such as women’s liberation or black power. Likewise, the two sources of inherited tradition (Scripture) for one and contemporary experience and language for the other proposed by Tracy and McFague have resulted in contemporary experience becoming the dominant driving force of religious truth selecting and rejecting those elements in the Bible that it finds acceptable and/or offensive. That is, Christian faith is like “chameleon” and it has lost its identity and its truth. In other words, in spite of their claim of dialogue between the two sources, it seems that the Bible is subordinate to the critical theories and contemporary situation.

Moreover, secondly, in the contemporary liberal aesthetic model the natural overrides the supernatural. It is notable that Tracy indicates understanding of his contemporary situation as a theologian when he states:

Religious language does not present a new, a supernatural world wherein we may escape the only world we know or wish to know. Rather that language re-presents our always threatened basic confidence and trust in the very meaningfulness of even our most cherished and most noble enterprises, science, morality, and culture. That language discloses the reassurance needed that the final reality of our lives is in fact trustworthy.

If one chooses the supernatural at the expense of the natural, the choice would be absurd in Tracy’s opinion. Then we have to ask if the supernatural has been adequately understood here. The Enlightenment distinguished between reason and a dimension beyond reason. The former is confined to empirical experience and governed by a closed system of natural law but the latter is a dimension beyond empirical experience, the supernatural or an illusory fantasy that could repeal natural law. However, such distinction eliminates our whole mental life, surely

---


284 Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 135.
constitutive of experience. In following the dichotomy, God plays no role in theology as the notions of inspiration and illumination get out of fashion.

To put it another way, it is still not clear how contemporary liberal aesthetic theology will be adopted and incorporated by communities that regard the Bible as the normative Canon for life and faith. That is, we need an alternative theological method that takes faithfully Scripture’s own claims, yet at the same time creatively relates those claims to the believer’s contemporary setting and theories of knowledge. I will call the method “dramatic theology.” In the case of Bushnell, he goes against the contemporary liberal aesthetic method and calls for precisely “the supernatural.” Bushnell writes:

If, accordingly, we speak of system, this spiritual realm or department is much more properly called a system than the natural, because it is closer to God, higher in its consequence, and contains in itself the ends, or final causes, for which the other exists and to which the other is made to be subservient. There is, however, a constant action and reaction between the two, and, strictly speaking, they are both together, taken as one, the true system of God.285

In this sense, we may need to reevaluate Bushnell’s theology not as a foundational stone for liberal aesthetic theology or the revisionist theology but as a prototype of dramatic theology that develops the aesthetic nature of theology with the authority of the Bible.

4. Bushnell and Dramatic Theology for Today

According to James Duke, it is interesting that despite all that liberal Protestant theology took from Bushnell, such as the importance of religious experience, the flexible view of doctrine,

---

and his anti-sectarianism, it did not take his hermeneutics. My thesis is that his aesthetic interpretation theory is deeply related to the dramatic nature of theology later developed by other theologians for which there are two reasons: (1) the value of divine Authorial intention for theological interpretation and (2) the distinction between explication and application in terms of genuine understanding. To this end, let’s begin with Bushnell’s aesthetic interpretation theory.

Aesthetic Interpretation Theory of Bushnell

For Bushnell, reading the Bible should be no different from reading Goethe. A wise interpreter is neither the orthodox one who “seize[s] upon some one symbol as the real form of truth and compel[s] all the others to submit to it,” nor the Unitarians who “decoct the whole mass of symbol and draw off the extract into pitchers of our own.” In this sense Bushnell’s interpretation theory is clear that “we call him [the author] the many-sided great man; we let him stand in his own chosen symbols, whether they be “pots or dishes,” and do him the greater honor because of the complexity and the magnificent profusion of his creations.” Then, we might say that in his interpretation theory, it is crucial to make an adequate positioning of the interpreter with the text. The wise reader is a “sympathetic” interpreter who will be open and receptive to the impressions coming from the text. The interpreter will refrain from any hasty judgments, admit the many-sidedness of the text, and celebrate a multiplicity of antagonistic symbols. In doing so, the interpreter will “feel out” the comprehensive truth from the forms of

---


expression.\textsuperscript{289} However, despite the Romanticism of Bushnell’s statements about reproducing the inner experience of the author, he refuses to claim that interpreters could or should enter into the inward life of the author except through the expressions given in the text. He does not advocate reconstructing the process of creation that produced the text or explaining the text by conducting psychoanalysis of the author. “Sympathy, intuition, insight, divination – these are acts by which the interpreter makes an effort to understand that which an author has made an effort to express.”\textsuperscript{290} In fact, in placing major emphasis on the authority of the divine Author in determining the meaning of the Bible, Bushnell speaks of an “ascent into meaning.”\textsuperscript{291} The aim of interpretation is not so much the “determination” of meaning, that is, an act that the interpreter imposes upon the text, as it is an aesthetic experience that the interpreter undergoes. Rather, the interpretive task is to access the divine meaning through forms or images given by symbols.

When we compare Bushnell’s theory to Nicholas Wolterstorff’s authorial discourse interpretation, we find many similarities.\textsuperscript{292} Drawing on speech act theory, Wolterstorff develops a special theological hermeneutics in his book, \textit{Divine Discourse}. With the help of speech act theory, he argues that the Bible \textit{is} the Word of God and that the Bible becomes the Word of God again and again in various times and places. When we read the Bible or hear it in preaching, no matter who is involved as a speaker or a writer, it is God by whom we are addressed. His authorial discourse interpretation is to set off from romantic psychologizing of Friedrich

\textsuperscript{289} Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{290} Duke, \textit{Horace Bushnell}, 38.

\textsuperscript{291} Ibid.

Schleiermacher. As artistic communication is for Bushnell, (divine) discourse is for Wolterstorff. Discourse occurs when someone says something about something to someone. We have three elements here: (1) the first someone is the speaker or author; (2) the something about something is the content of discourse; and (3) the second someone is the interpreter or reader to whom the discourse is addressed.

In a similar vein to Bushnell, Wolterstorff puts a great emphasis on the speaker (author) of discourse. The goal is not to re-feel or re-enact the inner psychic life of the author but to find out what the author is making. Likewise, in divine discourse, it is to discover what God is doing/saying, not to enter into the divine inner life. Wolterstorff states:

But even more important for our subsequent purposes is the fact that to speak is not, as such, to express one’s inner self but to take up a normative stance in the public domain. The myth dies hard that to read a text for authorial discourse is to enter the dark world of the author’s psyche. It is nothing of the sort. It is to read to discover what asserting, what promising, what requestings, what commanding, are rightly to be ascribed to the author on the ground of her having set down the words she did in the situation in which she set them down. Whatever the dark demons and bright angels of the author’s inner self that led her to take up this stance in public, it is that stance itself that we hope by reading to recover, not the dark demons and bright angels.293

In other words, Wolterstorff insists on the significance of the speaker to direct our attention to the discourse content. As the receivers of the discourse, the interpreters seek to find out what the author said, not what he/she intended to say, because the two do not always coincide. Wolterstorff appeals to speech act theory for divine discourse.

For Bushnell, the process of interpretation of the divine Word involves three essential elements – “symbol,” “imaginative receptivity,” and “ascent into meaning.” As mentioned above, in the aesthetic engagement with the text we can approximately reach authorial meaning

293 Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 93.
through images given by symbols. Symbols do not directly transfer meaning from one person to another. They elicit a response, and it is their meaning, subject matter, or truth: “What they [words] carry into our souls’ feeling or perception, or awaken in it by expression, is their only truth, and that is a simple state of the soul itself.” The engagement between text and reader transforms the subjectivity of the interpreter. In sum, based on his aesthetic interpretation theory, I argue that his hermeneutics is contrary to contemporary liberal aesthetic theology but is more akin to dramatic theology that stays with the divine Author, seeks the divine Authorial meaning, and applies it to contemporary situation.

The Participatory Nature of Theology in Bushnell

What should we do after finding the Authorial meaning? For Bushnell, based on the meaning, we are asked to communicate the truth of God for the contemporary situation. It is notable that his notion of understanding consists of explication and application. According to Duke, at this point Bushnell diverges from all his contemporary theology schools. Each school, like the uncritical, grammatical, grammatico-historical, and historical interpretations, results, in its own way, in an explication of meaning that somehow stands over against the interpreter’s situation and awaits appropriation. Whether an interpreter accepts the literal reference of the texts as their truth or an interpreter seeks to acknowledge the truth behind the literal reference, the outcome is the same: the mere explication is not sufficient for genuine understanding. In his interpretation theory, faith seeking understanding is faithful to the text and creative to the contemporary situation. On the ground of Authorial guidance, to be significant for contemporary

life, “the Bible must yield its meaning within the horizon of the present.” That is, an interpreter needs to respond faithfully to the text and apply creatively to the new situation. In this sense, Bushnell’s distinction between explication and application is similar to E. D. Hirsch’s meaning and significance, C. S. Lewis’ contrast between receiving and using texts, and Vanhoozer’s contrast between performance I interpretation and performance II interpretation.

Furthermore, in Bushnell’s theology, I find the continuity between the past and the future. Bushnell observes:

In the question of old and new, perpetually recurring in matters of religion, we have the bigot on one side asserting that nothing may be new, and the radical on the other, that nothing shall be old. And if Christianity be a vital power in the church, both are true; for the new must be the birth of the old, and the old must have its births, or die.

For Bushnell, life is in continuity between the past and the future. In this sense, he points out: “as finite beings we are always at a point between the past and the future, having one behind us and the other before us, and a most real and valid connection with both, with one by memory, with the other by some anticipative exercise in the nature of prophecy.”

In this assessment of the historicality of human existence, we find the improvisatory notions of dramatic theology: memory and anticipative exercise, which are virtually synonyms of

298 See Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 165-68.
faithfulness to the old and creativeness to the new in Vanhoozer’s dramatic theology that will be explored in chapter five. When Bushnell asserts that “the future must be of the past, and the past must create a future,” he points out the importance of a firm grasp of the “real and valid connection” between past and future. That is, the real and valid connection as a dramatic task asks an interpreter to participate in faithful and creative performance in life.

Therefore, we may call Bushnell’s theology a prototype of dramatic theology, for his aesthetic engagement with the text is to seek divine authorial meaning through images given by symbols, and with the continuity between the past and the future Bushnell distinguishes the two notions: explication and application. In sum, Bushnell’s proposal of aesthetic theology opens the participatory nature of dramatic theology.

IV. Summary

In this chapter, I examined how Horace Bushnell made an alternative way against his contemporary theologies: he speaks of the centrality of language for human experience, the imaginative theological method, and the comprehensiveness in theology.

In the first section, I offered socio-religious background of Bushnell’s day focusing on why he was reluctant to follow contemporary theologies, such as Unitarianism and orthodox Protestantism. The reason why Bushnell was not satisfied with the theological systems was because those theologies were too rationalistic, ignoring the heart. After that, I have paid attention to the theme, “the centrality of language for human experience” that was the very key phrase for Bushnell’s theology. Without the linguistic turn, for Bushnell, it is impossible to be a

302 Ibid.
sincere theologian. Language is not just a tool for logic but a divine-human co-product that should be considered as the essence of human experience. The third section discussed how the linguistic turn is related to theological tasks: Bushnell’s imaginative theological method against the rational method, the receptive imaginative hermeneutics, the comprehensiveness in theology, the comprehensive understanding on the work of Christ, and its homiletic appropriation. Lastly, I examined the relationship between Bushnell’s aesthetic theology and contemporary theologies, respectively the Biblical Theology Movement as the rational method of theology, the revisionist as contemporary aesthetic mode, and the dramatic theology. While each school is claiming the fatherhood of Bushnell in its own way, I side with the third mode, dramatic theology. In his aesthetic hermeneutic theory, Bushnell reveals many dramatic natures: the divine Authorial meaning through images accessed by symbols, the distinction between explication and application for genuine understanding, and the continuity between the past and the future.

In sum, like modern critics, Bushnell was very critical of other theological approaches in his day. However, unlike the historical-critical scholars in the present, he recognizes that biblical language, like poetry, has a certain literary autonomy that provokes and shapes the answering imagination; therefore, the meaning of the text always emerges in the present. This approach is meaningful for preachers. Preachers do not have to give up the authority of the Bible while critically engaging in modern theories and disputes. In Bushnell’s proposal, one can find that based on the linguistic turn, the symbolic or metaphorical understanding of theology is a viable way to connect what the Bible “meant” with what it “means.”

For Bushnell, as Christian theology is Life and Spirit, preaching is also the life and spirit of the preacher intruded by the divine Life and Spirit. Thus his theology and preaching can be called “spiritually discerned art works.” Theology is not a fixed system but a poetic work in action. Accordingly, preaching is a theological poetic work geared up by language. We may say
that Bushnell’s aesthetic theology and aesthetic preaching anticipate the emergence of dramatic theology and dramatic preaching.

In what follows, I will turn to the New Homiletic that has focused on the aesthetic value of language and taken seriously the need of the listeners, but unlike Bushnell, seems to fail to keep God at the center of preaching.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE NEW HOMILETIC - IDEAS OF IMAGE, METAPHOR, AND IMAGINATION

Introduction

This chapter will examine the development of the New Homiletic, focusing in particular on the common elements in it. My central purpose is to identify some common features and evaluate them in terms of theological and rhetorical dimensions. My proposal is that while the New Homiletic is still valuable, it should be supported by a theologically and rhetorically balanced critique.

In what follows, I will first establish the paths by which the New Homiletic traveled. The common features of the New Homiletic are approximately found in a paper delivered by David James Randolph at the first meeting of the Academy of Homiletics in 1965. Randolph coined the term “New Homiletic” and described this new movement as follows:

A new preaching is coming to birth in the travail of our times. [...] preaching is being rejected as a habit and affirmed as a happening. The definition of preaching which is drawing on these horizons may be stated this way: Preaching is the event in which the biblical text is interpreted in order that its meaning will come to expression in the concrete situation of the listeners.  

Here and there I find some common elements by which the New Homiletic has been formed since 1950s: organic form, eventfulness of language, the influence of the New Testament studies on Jesus’ parables and narrative, the exploration of metaphor and imagination in philosophy and literary theories, and the turn to the listener. After examining each of them, I will

---

evaluate the New Homiletic overall. A special attention will be given to the loss of theology in the New Homiletics, especially the notion of event that moved from the Word-event to human experiential event.

I. The Development of the New Homiletic

1. Organic Form: H. Grady Davis – Design for Preaching

   Contemporary homiletics has deeply paid attention to the question of form, and homileticians have suggested many innovative proposals regarding sermon form. The new proposals about sermon design can be seen as reactions against the traditional approach to sermon form. That is, the debate about how the New Homiletic differs from the older model usually revolves around the question of sermon form. In a similar vein, the historical roots of the contemporary homiletical scene can be traced to two classic homiletic textbooks. In this section, my point is to examine the two text books. The first is John A. Broadus’ *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, published in 1870, which became the authoritative homiletic textbook in American colleges and seminaries for some eighty years.\(^{304}\) The second is H. Grady Davis’ *Design for Preaching*, which presents a new and contrasting approaching to preaching in 1958.\(^{305}\)


Lucy Rose observes in *Sharing the Word*, “Roughly, the first half of this century could be designated the Broadus era.” The strength of this book lies in the way Broadus blended the principles of classical rhetoric to the practice of preaching. Broadus advocates the formal and functional rhetorical elements for preaching. He lifts up the importance of arrangement, stating that arrangement is important to the speaker and also in regards to the effect upon the audience. He points to the necessity of unity, order, and proportion for good arrangement. Sermons are classified into three types: subject-sermons, text-sermons, and expository-sermons. He also emphasizes the functional elements of the sermon – such as explanation, argument, illustration, and application. His understanding about the formal and functional elements of preaching is a representative of the traditional homiletics, in which there is an assumption that the task of a sermon is to present to the listeners a clear elaboration of some idea or proposition. In terms of sermon form, according to the traditional homiletics, the central idea of a sermon is divided into its essential parts, and these would become the major points of the sermon. These points are then further divided into sub-points and arranged according to some principle of internal logic to create the overall sermon design. Even though in the traditional approach there are many

---


309 Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 10. For more detail, see 167-209.
variations, a common thread that runs through the traditional discussions of sermon form all together is “the notion of the sermon as an idea, or proposition, and sermon form as the expression of the internal structure of that idea.”

The second era began in 1958, according to Rose, with the publication of H. Grady Davis’ *Design for Preaching*. Rose explains that “Between 1958 and 1974 the earlier consensus that had looked to Broadus to define the task of preaching had dissolved and a new consensus had formed around Davis.” The basis of this claim comes from a 1984 study conducted by Donald F. Chatfield on textbooks used by preaching teachers. Chatfield found that “over half of the respondents named Grady Davis’s *Design for Preaching* as their textbook of choice.”

According to Paul Scott Wilson, since Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) and Frederick W. Robertson (1816-1853), Davis seems to have been the first person to bring insights from Romanticism and the arts to bear significantly on homiletics. Taking organic cues from the Romantics such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, Davis attempted to answer such questions: “What method do you propose to your students as they go about the task of preparing their sermons? Specifically, how does the text come alive from a basic statement of

---

310 For example, Halford. E. Luccock recognizes that the central idea can be organized in various logical patterns, such as the “ladder” type, the “jewel” type, and so on. See Halford. E. Luccock, *In the Minister’s Workshop* (New York : Abingdon Press, 1944). See, Thomas G. Long, “Form,” in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. by William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

311 Long, “Form,” 147.


truth about God to the living existential person-to-person relationship? Davis concentrates on the sermon, which is viewed as a natural, organic relation of form to substance. His organic approach is quite unlike the traditional homiletics who regarded sermon forms as fixed molds into which one can pour their certain content/substance. Davis states, however, that “any sermon has to be an idea first before it becomes a sermon.” That is, as the traditional homiletics firstly attempt to find a proposition for preaching, Davis also discusses the matter of idea as the first step to design a sermon. Davis claims that

A well-prepared sermon is the embodiment, the development, the full statement of a significant thought. Every thought is an idea. But a sermon idea is more than a bare thought. It is a thought plus its overtones and its groundswell of implication and urgency. It has more than the form of a thought; it has the energy, the life force of a thought. So it seems natural to speak of the idea of a sermon.

For Davis, it is true that the sermonic forms are dependent on the budding sermonic idea. However, a sermon’s form is not simply the anatomy of an idea like “three points and a poem.” The divergent point from the traditional approach is in his understanding of sermon as organic form/design. Davis claims that each sermonic form has to grow organically from the idea. It is like a seed growing a tree. Thus he breaks with the traditional terminology and approach of Broadus by describing a sermon as something that grows rather than something that is constructed. He abandons the standard terminology such as structure and outline, replacing them with “design” and “sketch.” “To design a sermon is more than to construct it. It must be

315 Davis, Design for Preaching, v.
316 Ibid., 41.
317 Ibid., 20.
318 Ibid., 21-22.
designed before it can be constructed." Davis argues that sermonic form is inside the main idea. In other words, each sermon contains the pattern for its own ideal form in its central idea. He articulates:

"There can be no real sermon without an idea, true enough, but there can be an idea without a sermon. The idea and the sermon belong together, but they are not always together. As there must be a plot, with characters and incidents, to embody the idea of a story, so there must be a plan, a movement from thought to thought toward a goal, to give body and shape to the sermon idea. This thought structure seldom comes ready-made with the idea. It has to be fashioned by work, skill, and taste, just as in any creation of the human intelligence."

For Davis, this idea grows in the process. The significance of his organic proposal lies in this transition of emphasis from product to process. That is, he compares the sermon to a tree. Preaching is like a tree. Its growth is an organic process. Davis maintains that, “The processes I have to describe seem to me to be more like the organic processes of biology than the mechanical processes of, say, carpentry.” Sermon forms that grow in the organic process are not to be the same in every sermon. Form is to be natural and organic allowing each seed of an idea to grow organically and variously. For Davis, in the process, organic form is related to organic unity of content and form. Content and form are inseparable, and form is an expression of content organically grown. “The right form derives from the substance of the message itself, is inseparable from the content, becomes one with the content, and gives a feeling of finality to the

---

319 Ibid., 21.

320 Ibid., 42. Concerning the relation of idea and sermon form, in addition, Davis writes that a good sermon idea should have some characteristics: “It must be narrow enough to be sharp,” “It must have in it a force that is expanding,” “It must be true,” “It must be loaded with the realities of the human heart,” and “It must be one of the many facets of the gospel of Christ.” See Ibid., 43-44.

321 Ibid., 18.
Davis also sees the need for unity and coherence in a sermon. There should be no unrelated materials or irrelevance between the parts and the whole. Each part should be related to the whole thereby creating an organic unity. Davis states

The thought generates the sermon, and the sermon embodies the thought, thus creating not a mechanism but an organism. An organism consists of parts or members in structural and functional relation to one another and to the whole. Knowing this, it seems natural to speak of the parts, divisions, heads, and points, of a sermon as structural arts, signifying their character as organic elements of a developing idea or thought.\textsuperscript{323}

Davis argues thought creates an organism in which all the parts of the tree are alive and related to each other. All parts are interdependent on each other. Without each other, the various parts cannot survive. Davis asserts that “That is all unity is: an impression of oneness and entirety, of an ordered relatedness of parts in a whole. Its opposite is fragmentation, partition, disorder. The effect of unity is never created by pure singleness. It is always a unity achieved out of plurality and diversity.”\textsuperscript{324} Here Davis also shows a possibility of creative and diverse sermon forms. That is, he stresses organic unity of plurality and diversity of homiletic form. In a poetic style, Davis elaborates organic form of preaching as follows:

A sermon should be like a tree.
It should be a living organism:
With one sturdy thought like a single stem
With natural limbs reaching into the light.

It should have deep roots:
As much unseen as above the surface
Roots spreading as widely as its branches spread
Roots deep underground
In the soil of life’s struggle

\textsuperscript{322} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{323} Ibid., 22-23.
\textsuperscript{324} Ibid., 35.
In the subsoil of the eternal Word.

It should show nothing but its own unfolding parts:
Branches that thrust out by the force of its inner life
Sentences like leaves native to this very spray
True to the species
Not taken from alien growths
Illustrations like blossoms opening from
inside these very twigs
Not brightly colored kites
Pulled from the wind of somebody else’s thought
Entangled in these branches.

It should bear flowers and fruit at the
same time like the orange:
Having something for food
For immediate nourishment
Having something for delight
For present beauty and fragrance
For the joy of hope
For the harvest of a distant day.

To be all this it must grow in a warm climate:
In loam enriched by death
In love like the all-seeing and all-cherishing sun
In trust like the sleep-sheltering night
In pity like the rain.  

Davis anticipated and sketched the course for many contemporary discussions on issues related to preaching, such as narrative, poetic language, inductive preaching, movement of thought, and particularly sermon design. Thus, many homileticians acknowledge that Davis’ book is a forerunner of new homiletical paradigms.  

Thomas Long likens Design for

\[\text{325} \text{ Ibid.}, 15-16.\]

\[\text{326} \text{ See, for example, Eugene L. Lowry, The Sermon: Dancing on the Edge of Mystery (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 12; Charles L. Campbell, Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 117-18; and Paul Scott Wilson, The Practice of Preaching (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 199-200.}\]
Preaching to a bridge which spanned “the gap between the traditional approach to form and those developments yet to come.”

Moreover, in Davis’ Design for Preaching, we can find a significant theology in preaching. Davis understands preaching to be an encounter with God in Christ. According to Morris J. Niedenthal, although theological substance does not receive thorough discussion in Davis’s book, Davis’ homiletical thought is shaped by theological concerns. Davis was influenced by the biblical theology movement of the 1950s and the neo-orthodox traditions of the Word of God represented by Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. Davis largely accepted the conclusions of their work. For example, by using the word *proclamation* as Gerhard O. Forde and Richard A. Jensen used it, Davis states that

[Proclamation] must take the form of life – not merely the messenger’s offer in God’s name, but God’s offer made directly and personally to the listener, an offer of life from the Source of life. If the proclamation does not take the form of an offer which God seriously means, the listener will not have the courage to embrace it wholeheartedly. The good news is sent to those who are without God and without hope in the world, who are either in despair of themselves or betrayed by trust in themselves. That is why its proclamation to them must take the form of promise – not a promise concerning God, but a promise made by God, a promise of forgiveness and help, of liberation and joy, of hope and of glory. If the gospel does not take the form of God’s own promise and pledge, the listener will not be won to trust that promise and act upon it with the full, confident commitment which is faith.

---

327 Thomas Long, “Form,” 147.


331 Davis, Design for Preaching, 110-11.
According to Wilson, Davis’ significance has to do with how theology is done in the sermon. With the help of the Romantics, Davis connects the sermon with what Barth and others discussed the Word of God as an event. In other words, for Davis, theology implies being encountered by God, and rhetoric/aesthetic is to design the sermon so that the Word of God as an event can be facilitated and experienced in the congregation. That is, for Davis, preaching is an artist’s rendering of a theological-rhetorical task. Moreover, the sermon should be appropriate for the preached text. Biblical texts should not just be attached to sermons; they should be their living source. In doing so, the ancient Word of God lives again in a new setting.

In sum, by articulating the organic idea of the Romantics and the theological essence of preaching as Word-event, Davis is both demonstrating and advocating that theology can be communicated in another form that is different from the strict propositional ways. The parts contribute to and are indispensable for the whole; and the whole is affected by each of its parts. The shape of the whole is influenced by the contents and rhetorical purpose of the biblical text. After Davis, new voices of sermon form begin to emerge and become a movement called “the New Homiletic.” This new paradigm for preaching revolves around the matter of the sermon form. In addition, the creation of an experience in which speaker and audience participate together is also the central element that unifies the paradigm shift. Since the New Homiletic is heavily influenced by the New Hermeneutic, in the next section we move to consider the New Hermeneutic that has shaped contemporary preaching as a performative language event of the Word of God.


333 Ibid.

334 Davis, *Design for Preaching*, 41-57.
2. Eventfulness of Language: New Hermeneutic and Word of God as Event

Contemporary homiletics has been strongly influenced by the New Hermeneutic that invokes the importance of language in preaching. In the second section, I will examine the New Hermeneutic, its positive impact on the New Homiletic, and later its negative impact in section four. I will also propose an alternative way to overcome the New Hermeneutic’s negative influence on the New Homiletic with the help of both theological genres and theological structure as plot in chapter six. The point of this section is how the New Hermeneutic promoted the idea of the “language event” or “word event.”

In the rise of historical consciousness in the nineteenth century, the hermeneutic issue went beyond scientific explanation. Paul J. Achtemeier argues it as follows:

It is now regarded as self-evident and axiomatic that all intellectual achievements are limited by the historical period in which they took form and flourished. With that there comes the realization that it is impossible ever really to transcend the limits of one’s historical period, impossible ever completely to cease being the child of one’s own age. To take history seriously in this way is in effect to question the possibility of direct, undistorted knowledge of another historical period. Even when I make the effort to understand, say, a document from the first century in its own terms, it is still I as a twentieth century person who do that.335

With the recognition of a historical relativity of human understanding, the main concern of hermeneutics is changed from “what the objective meaning is” to “how then understanding is possible.”336 This recognition firstly comes from German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher. Before the influence of Schleiermacher in the 19th century, hermeneutics was simply the science of interpretation and was concerned only with the interpretation of literary documents. With

---


336 *Ibid.*, 16
Schleiermacher, there occurred the beginning of an effort to broaden the function of hermeneutics to include the process of understanding as a whole. It has come to be concerned not only with the simpler matter of translating the ancient text into language and thought modes of the contemporary day but also with the more complex issue of what takes place when one understands something.\(^{337}\) Thus, the purpose of hermeneutics in theology has changed. That is not merely for an exposition of the text or delivery of the objective gospel, but for the re-description of the meaning of the gospel for the Christian faith today.

The New Hermeneutic is concerned with the issue of what the gospel is to today’s believers and how it can be communicated. For this reason, Gerhard Ebeling comments that if the word of scripture were not interpreted in such a way that listeners find its reality in their place, it would lose its authenticity, become empty and powerless, and spell disintegration to faith and thought.\(^{338}\) He criticizes traditional language about God like this:

It is, moreover, unfortunately true that Christian proclamation has largely become a ghetto language. Seen superficially, to be sure, it has not by any means been driven out of public life; but in actual fact it has assumed the character of a group language for private use. The language of public life on the other hand, the language of the workaday world of politics, economics and industry, of science and culture, has been secularized and has become on the whole so technical that the word of God is entirely out of place in it. […] In consequence of this multiplicity such talk is made into a technical instrument for the cultivation of particular special traditions, and thus scarcely can it any longer profess unreservedly be the word of God – unless this claim, too, has shrunk to the status of a traditional label.\(^{339}\)

---


In order to renew the “ghetto language,” the New Hermeneutic assumes two presuppositions: firstly, as seen above, all theology is the process of understanding what happens to humans in the experience of being spoken to or addressed by an event; secondly, language has not a secondary and purely pragmatic function but is the very quintessence of human life.

Drawing on Martin Heidegger’s linguistic-existential awakening, the New Hermeneutic sees language is not just a verbalization that gives information about things, nor the objection of a hidden meaning. Rather, it is an “event.” Heidegger argues that language is the medium through which being announces or reveals itself. Achtemeier explains that in Heidegger’s philosophy of language, “language owes its existence not to man, but to Being, which summons language forth. Language therefore is the response to Being, it is the act of being-open-to-Being, of letting-be-manifest in response to the call of Being. Language is, as it were, the answering hail to the hail of Being as it opens itself to man.”

“Language is the arrival of being itself, both clearing and concealing.” In the development of these themes, Heidegger maintains that human nature is linguistic. The primary task of humans is to achieve understanding by answering the call of being within a language. Consequently, language is the “house of being” by which humans are to understand themselves and the world they live in. Then language is prior to thought, not thought to language. As Ernst Fuchs has expressed it, “Language is not the

---


abbreviation of thought; thought is the abbreviation of language.” In other work, Fuchs is precisely connected with the point of Heidegger’s linguistic philosophy:

Being emerges from language, when language directs us into the dimension of our existence determinative for our life. Is that the ‘meaning’ of the word of God? Then hermeneutic in theology would indeed be nothing else than the ‘doctrine of the word of God’ (Ebeling), faith’s doctrine of language. The reverse also is true: The theological doctrine of the word of God would be the question as to being in the horizon of Biblical language. The content of human historicness would then not be named questionability but rather linguisticality.

Language is essential to human existence and is the most significant character of our lives. Based on Heidegger, thus, Ebeling and Fuchs argue that language is an event. While Fuchs prefers to speak of “language-event” and Ebeling “word-event,” there is little significant difference between them. By language (word) as event, Fuchs and Ebeling refer to the occurrence of authentic human expression in which being is exposed. Language-event is the coming to expression of genuine being, authentic existence. Consequently, human expression is the occasion of the encounter between human and being in its fullness. Therefore, language-event is communication of human with Being itself, the ultimate reality that lies outside of humans. In this sense, language is no longer considered to be an object with meaning lying behind it. Rather, language itself speaks directly. Language does not consist of the verbal reporting of meaning content. Language is not necessarily talk. Language is more basically a


346 Robinson, “Hermeneutics since Barth,” 46.
showing or letting be seen, an indication in the active sense. Ebeling in the same vein declares that deeds can be words, and words are deeds.\textsuperscript{347}

This new understanding of language grounded the New Hermeneutic’s linguistic view of God’s saving action. The word-event of God’s salvation happens in the church’s proclamation, which is inaugurated by Jesus’ word. In other words, Fuchs and Ebeling argue that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ should be understood as language-event, any contemporary revelation of God in the ministry of the church is properly understood only as language-event, and authentic human existence is also revealed in the language-event. Ebeling claims that in divine language-event modern people experience God. He states that “in every word event there is present a depth dimension which is indicated by the word ‘God’.”\textsuperscript{348} In sum, from the New Hermeneutic we preachers have help in two ways: First it helps us to see preaching as God’s event not human discourse; second it urges preachers to seek to express the word in new linguistic forms so that language-event may happen anew.

With the influence of the New Hermeneutic, many scholars had been speaking of the eventful nature of the Word of God. This idea of event is central to Paul Scherer who was the professor of preaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Scherer states the matter as follows:

[God’s] Voice is forever associated with the act by which God confronts us, in Bible or in church, in worship or history or person. He is not intent on sharing conceptual truth. That must come later. It is not some saving measure of information he wants to impart; it is himself he wants to bestow: that not having


\textsuperscript{348} Ebeling, \textit{God and Word}, 29.
seen him we may meet him and know him and trust him and live our lives in him, freely and for love’s sake.’”

For Scherer, divine word as revelation is always a transformative event. Scherer states of God that “His word may be something spoken or something done. He says by doing, and he does by saying. Events become words.” In 1969 Randolph also brought the fruits of the New Hermeneutic to the preaching ministry: “The key to this approach is that its emphasis falls on what the sermon does, rather than what it is, it offers Christ.” Since 1971 when Fred Craddock published his landmark book, “As One without Authority,” the eventful nature of God’s word and the performative nature of the metaphor and language have become the essential elements in the discourse of preaching. Now preaching participates in God’s word-event. Through preaching Jesus’ living word is an event for today. In the preaching of Christ, Christ is present; in participation in the words, Christ is encountered; in the reception of him, life is transformed, people receive their lives anew. In addition, after the New Hermeneutic, homiletic’s concerns turned to narrative and plot “to reflect the way people experience life and God.”

In a similar way, in his more recent article, David Lose presents the implication of the New Hermeneutic to the New Homiletic as follows: (1) preaching is not a mere application of an exegetical answer, but moves from the event of the text to that of the sermon so as to mediate the


350 Ibid., 26.


353 Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 64.

354 Ibid.
eventfulness of the gospel. (2) Truth is redefined as an event to be experienced, not information to be grasped. (3) Language, image, and story have the evocative power that creates a world. (4) Preaching is more focused on the parabolic and narrative text. Lastly, (5) the New Hermeneutic’s desire to create a true self-understanding of listeners reappeared in the New Homiletic’s strategy of the experiential event of the word.\(^{355}\)

As a result of the New Hermeneutic, biblical scholars have paid special attention to the language of Jesus in the New Testament writings because Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God to come is in fact a language-event. In his preaching Jesus disturbs one’s picture of the world and challenges one to see the world in a new way. Such a disturbance of a person’s conceptual unity by the kingdom language of Jesus is what is meant by a language-event. While all the words of Jesus have the capacity to function in that way, there is one type of saying that makes the capacity most clearly, namely, the parables. For this reason, in the next section, I turn to the world of Jesus’ parables.

3. How Jesus Preached: Parable and Narrative Studies

Why are the parables important? Why have scholars and preachers generated a great number of books on Jesus’ parables? Generally speaking, there can be no historical doubt that Jesus spoke parables. According to Arland Hultgren, along with the biblical record that Jesus was crucified in the first century, Jesus’ teaching in parables is beyond historical doubt while other issues – resurrection, miracles, and so on – are matters of dispute or affirmations of faith.\(^{356}\) In


this sense, Hultgren argues that if Jesus Christ is the Revealer of God and the Redeemer of humanity, the crucifixion of Jesus is “the primary means of redemption” and the parables of Jesus are “the primary medium of revelation.” That is, for Christian theology, the two items of historical certainty are central. My concern, in this section, is not to examine a broad survey of Jesus’ parables but to articulate the distinctiveness of them as “the primary medium of revelation.” The main question is how Jesus preached in and through parables. In what follows, I will argue that the parables function as “extended metaphors.” Jesus aesthetically (or rhetorically) appeals to his listeners to participate in what the kingdom of God is like and thereby poetically creates something new. Scholarly interest in Jesus’ parables coincided with growing attention to art and language in homiletics.

The question of the distinctiveness of Jesus’ parables, however, is difficult to assess because the origin of the parables is not clear. The English word “parable” comes from the Greek word *parabole*, the term *parobole* is used frequently in the Septuagint, and it is the translation used for the Hebrew noun *mashal*. Before Jesus, antecedents of the parable or *mashal* are found in the Old Testament as well as in Talmud and Midrash. Thus, some scholars argue that Jesus’ parables are thoroughly Jewish. Their form, their style, and their patterns of thought are all Jewish. In a rabbinic parable, there are Mashal and Nimshal: Mashal is the parable itself and Nimshal is a follow-up instruction or explanation of the parable. The component parts of a Jewish parable are easily found in Jesus’ parables. For example, the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-9; Mark 4:3-9; Luke 8:4-8) receives an interpretation in the following passages.

---


358 For example, David Flusser argues that the parables of Jesus are similar to others; that the form was created by the sages of Israel prior to Jesus; and that he developed the form further. David Flusser, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (Tel Aviv: MOD Books, 1989), 66.
(Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:13-20; Luke 8:11-15). However, the discussion about the origin of Jesus’ parables is still debated among scholars. While David Stern, who compared the rabbinic parables to the parables of Jesus, has concluded that “Jesus used the parable in essentially the same way as the Rabbis employed the mashal,” James Breech has come to the conclusion that “Jesus’ parables were dissimilar from all extant contemporary stories.” Nevertheless, in the course of studying Jesus’ parables, scholars have acknowledged that there are distinctive elements in the parables of Jesus.

The attempt to describe more carefully the language of the parables at the literary level began with the study of Adolf Jülicher. Jülicher broke with the old tradition of interpreting the parables in allegorical fashion and argued that their point or meaning must be sought in the historical context of the teaching of Jesus. In his study Jülicher was strongly influenced by the rhetorical tradition of Aristotle and viewed the parables primarily as rhetorical devices rather than poetic ones. According to Jülicher, Jesus used the parables primarily to teach or to defend his teaching. For him, thus, there was a division of picture-part (Bild) and subject matter (Sache). In locating the parables in the context of Jesus’ teaching, Jülicher attempted to show the problematic nature of allegorical exegesis and to find general moral principles of universal application. That is, each parable is considered to have only one point of comparison. As a


successor of Jülicher, Joachim Jeremias also tried to find the features of a fundamentally Christian piety in a historical fashion.\(^{363}\)

A major turning point for parable research came with the “literary turn” in biblical studies. In the first issue of the journal *Semeia* in 1974, Amos N. Wilder, one of the most important practitioners in the turn, states:

One of the most interesting observations made in recent reviews of the history of biblical criticism is that some of the pioneers like Herder, Overbeck, Gunkel and Norden had wider concerns with language-forms and “how language works” than were pursued by their followers. Their widely humanistic scope and curiosities were narrowed in the sequel.\(^{364}\)

Through interdisciplinary work in the realms of structuralism and the philosophy of language, some scholars, including John D. Crossan, Robert Funk, Dan Otto Via, and Amos Wilder, brought a variety of literary theories into biblical studies and created a new framework for discussion.\(^{365}\) These interdisciplinary efforts concentrated on the parables of Jesus. Unlike historical criticism, which looks beyond the text into historical circumstances, the new approach started to bring the parables’ aesthetic qualities into focus and paid close attention to their language and arrangements.

**Parable as an Extended Metaphor**

In the literary turn to the study, the most distinctive features of the parables of Jesus are


two: *metaphorical nature* and *narrativity*. Let us take a look at the metaphorical nature of parables first. A parable is designed to picture an event. It is seemingly typical, nevertheless offers a glimpse of another world, which seeks to disturb the traditional way of looking at things. By giving a glimpse of a familiar world, therefore, it manifests a strangely different world.\(^{366}\) In so doing, the parable restores the character of action to language, by allowing language to seize reality, and to transform it into something new for the listener or reader of that language. In the parable, the true function of language becomes obvious. The parable is thus an “extended metaphor” that evokes strangeness from familiarity.

In other words, the parable seeks to expose the structure of human existence which is concealed by custom and convention, so that a human may again understand the self for what the human being really is. The parable seeks to provide a new angle of vision, so that the strangeness of a new world, a new way of understanding things, may be perceived through the everydayness with which the parables deal. The parables lead to familiar things that nevertheless are somehow, through that new way of looking at them, radically different. It is well articulated in Wilder’s writing:

> This is particularly clear in the so-called parables of the Kingdom like those of the sower and the mustard seed, in which Jesus mediates his own vision and his own faith. This understanding of Jesus’ figures of speech is supported by our modern discussion of the metaphor in literary criticism. A simile sets one thing over against another: the less known is clarified by that which is better known. But in the metaphor we have an image with a certain shock to the imagination which directly conveys vision of what is signified.\(^{367}\)

In a similar vein, Crossan also argues that there are two kinds of metaphor. On the one hand, according to Crossan, metaphor can be used as illustration, illustrating information one

---

366 Perrin, *Jesus and the language of the kingdom*, 158.

wishes to impart to others. In this case the metaphor is a pedagogical device, and “in any final analysis such metaphors are expendable.”\footnote{Crossan, \textit{In Parables}, 12.} In contrast to this, on the other, Crossan argues that “metaphor can also articulate a referent so new or so alien to consciousness that this referent can only be grasped within the metaphor itself.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 13.} Such a metaphor “contains a new possibility of world and of language so that any information one might obtain from it can only be received after one has participated through the metaphor in its new and alien referential world.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid}.} Crossan summarizes that “there are metaphors in which information precedes participation so that the function of metaphor is to illustrate information about the metaphors referent; but there are also metaphors in which participation precedes information so that the function of metaphor is to create participation in the metaphor’s referent.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 14.} In light of this distinction, Crossan asserts that figurative language has two quite different functions: one is to illustrate information so that information precedes participation; the latter is to create participation so that participation precedes information. “The former function produces allegories and examples, pedagogic devices which are intrinsically expendable. The latter produces \textit{metaphor} on the verbal level and \textit{symbol} on the non-verbal level. At their best they are absolutely inexpendable and even at their worst they are dormant rather than dead.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 15. Italics original.} According to Crossan, metaphor can appear as either parable or myth. To elucidate the distinction between parable and myth, Crossan uses a famous line from Marianne Moore and claims that “a \textit{parable} gives us “imaginary gardens with real
toads in them,” whereas “a myth gives us imaginary gardens with imaginary toads in them.” Thus, “a parable tells a story which on its surface level, is absolutely possible or even factual within the normalcy of life,” while “a myth tells one which is neither of these on its surface level.” With Wilder and Crossan, and other writings of the literary turn, it is obvious that metaphor is no longer mainly a literary figure of pedagogical strategy but a theological and hermeneutical category.

Parable as Narrative

In the literary turn biblical scholars also acknowledged that the Scripture itself is largely made up of narrative. As Christian theology understands the very nature of God, it comes to expression in a story. Stephen Crites argues that in its essence human experience is narrative. As James Hillman puts it, “One integrates life as a story because one has stories in the back of the mind (unconscious) as containers for organizing events into meaningful experiences. The stories are means of telling oneself into events that might not otherwise make psychological sense at all.” Studies on parables have concentrated not only on their metaphorical quality but also on how narrative analysis contributes to interpretation. The parables of Jesus should be also studied as short stories or narratives. However, when we attempt to unpack the parables in a narrative way, the complex notions of narrative theories interrupt our reading. Thus, it will be helpful to offer short guidelines.

373 Ibid., 15. Italics original.


Two literary critics Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg describe four elements of narrative: meaning, character, plot, and point of view.\(^{376}\) Since meaning and point of view emerge from the actual study of individual parables, both plot and character need to be clarified. Firstly, the plot is, according to Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, defined as “the dynamic, sequential element in narrative literature.”\(^{377}\) That is, the plot is the sequence of dynamic events in a story. The dynamic sequence is related to other elements of narrative. “Insofar as character, or any other element in narrative, becomes dynamic, it is a part of the plot.”\(^{378}\) Thus, the essence of plot is one or more conflicts that reach resolution and closure by the end of the story. Secondly, characters are actors/actresses in a story. In regard to characters in a story, a reader’s goal should be to get to know the characters as fully as possible from the data that the storyteller provides. According to Scholes and Kellogg, characters tend to be either a “static” and “flat” one, with undeveloped or typical traits, or a “developing character” that changes in narrative.\(^{379}\) In case of the biblical texts, there is little description in terms of attributes or feelings.\(^{380}\) The focus is on a character’s action. What people do indicates their characters.

In the writing of Wilder, we find the importance of narrative study for Christian theology. He states:

A Christian can confess his faith wherever he is, and without his Bible, just by telling a story or a series of stories. It is through the Christian story that God


\(^{378}\) *Ibid*.


speaks, and all heaven and earth come into it. God is an active and purposeful God and his action with and for men has a beginning, a middle and an end like any good story. The life of a Christian is not like a dream shot through with visions and illuminations, but a pilgrimage, a race, in short, a history. The new Christian speech inevitably took the form of a story. The believers wanted to tell the world the way of the world as they saw it.  

According to Wilder, the Bible has a plot – a “beginning, a middle and an end.” It functions in the same way as does a metaphor. It leads us through the phases of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation that Paul Ricoeur identifies for hermeneutics. Beginning in the conventional world its concrete and thoroughly ordinary details pull us deeply into the conventional world with all its conventional point of view. It then moves to the phase of disorientation. The story stops becoming a conventional story in a conventional world. According to McFague, “a deep crack breaks the surface realism and we glimpse something through it.” What is glimpsed is the reign of God. The reign of God “drives us more deeply into it, de-forming our usual apprehensions in such a way that we see that reality in a new way.” With the dynamic and sequential events in its plot, the biblical stories and the parables allow the listeners to see the new and unfamiliar context for life. In a narrative way of the stories the listeners or readers find themselves in the middle of the action. We all are in the middle of the ongoing drama. That is to say, the special feature of the stories, including the parables, in the New Testament lies in the fact that “they are not told for themselves, that they are not only about


382 The phases of “orientation,” “disorientation,” and “reorientation” come from Paul Ricoeur. I will mention Ricoeur later in this section.


384 Ibid., 70.
other people, but that they are always about us. They locate us in the very midst of the great story and plot of all time and space, and therefore relate us to the great dramatist and storyteller, God himself.\(^{385}\) Thus Wilder’s analysis of story (and parables) in the New Testament focuses on the individual and on action.

We see, then, that one of the earliest and most important rhetorical forms in the Church was the story. This is theologically significant. The new movement of the Gospel was not to be identified with a new teaching or a new experience but with an action and therefore a history. The revelation was in an historical drama. The narrative mode inevitably imposed itself as the believers rehearsed the saving action, including particular scenes of it that played themselves out in the marketplace or the Temple-court, at a dinner with guests or in a synagogue. The locus of the new faith was in concrete human relationships and encounters. Therefore the new community, living out a new kind of human and divine relationship, naturally rehearsed models of Jesus’ actions and interactions, since it was through these that the saving work of God had initiated its course. With this kind of a God the story was the proper kind of witness even more than the saying or the dialogue.\(^{386}\)

The gospel is identified not with a teaching or a religious experience but with an action or history of individuals. The stress on the individuals and on action over against teaching and religious experience is significant, for it is directly connected with the way of the parables. That is, the parables of Jesus urge the individuals to identify themselves with the wise or the foolish builder (Matthew 7:24-27), with the wise or the foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

Parables Reconsidered

With the help of the literary turn in biblical study, we may summarize the characteristics of Jesus’ parables as extended metaphor or metaphorical story as follows:

First, as Crossan asserted, the parables of Jesus are a call for participation in the story


Second, the subject of the parables is typically the familiar of everyday life. According to John R. Donahue, the realism of the parables is more or less clear. It is the point of contact between God and human beings in the everyday world of human experience. In his parables, Jesus does not speak God language, and even the language of his religious heritage, the Hebrew, is rarely quoted. The parabolic language of Jesus is therefore potentially available to all who have ears to hear.

Third, however, the familiarity of the parables is one side of the coin. In terms of image and subject matter, the parables are realistic, but in the unfolding of the parable, the realism is shattered. It means a prime key to the meaning of a parable arises when the realism of the parable begins to break down. In almost every case, the parable is seen as presenting a paradox, a seeming absurdity which conceals a deeper truth. For example, the one who loses life will save it (Luke 9:24). Donahue argues the paradoxical language of Jesus is an extension of the prohibition of images of God in biblical thought.\(^\text{387}\) So McFague calls her metaphorical theology iconoclastic.\(^\text{388}\) Paul Ricoeur is also concerned with the strangeness of the parables. He observes

---


that the parables follow a pattern of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. After describing parables as a combination of the narrative form with the metaphoric process, Ricoeur turns to the question of why parabolic language is “religious.” The language of the parables is paradoxical and exaggerated and at the same time, realistic. It is thus an instance of “extravagance which interrupts the superbly peaceful course of action and which constitutes what I have called the extraordinary within the ordinary.” For Ricoeur, the extravagance and paradox of the parables, and their ability to disorient and reorient our lives, is a sign that religious language “dislocates our project of making a whole of our lives – a project which St. Paul identifies with the act of ‘self-glorification,’ or, in short, salvation by works.” Donahue thus says, “It is this trait which transforms the parables into a poetics of faith. Parable thus provides a bridge between the proclamation of Jesus and the theology of Paul.”

Fourth, moreover, as an offer of the new world or new vision, the parable is meant to draw the listeners into its situation as a participant. Simply speaking, the parable is a question waiting for an answer, an invitation waiting for a response. The parables demand that the listeners participate in their reality. The participation is not merely to observe it, at a distance, as some new objective fact but to make the decision with which the present as the time of God’s presence confronts the listeners. In other words, growing out of Jesus’ understanding of God’s kingdom, and its coming into the present, the parables of Jesus show how one must act, what one must see, in the light of the kingdom. The parables are a way of looking at life, not definitions of


the nature of God’s kingdom.\textsuperscript{393}

Lastly, some scholars understand the life and death of Jesus himself as a “parable” of God which helps us to see the ways of God with us.\textsuperscript{394} For example, Crossan calls Jesus the Parable of God: “Jesus proclaimed God in parables but the primitive church proclaimed Jesus as the Parable of God.”\textsuperscript{395} If Jesus Christ is only a parable, he is just a fanciful character of a religious myth. However, in the discussion above, Jesus as a parable is also a historical reality. Thus, he is a living symbol or metaphor for God’s way, truth, and life. Incarnation as God-is-with-us is sometimes unfamiliar and unknown to us. It means consequently we look at the life of Jesus as a metaphor of God.\textsuperscript{396}

As seen above, the study on parables has been deeply related to metaphor or metaphorical story. Simply speaking, Jesus preached in and through parables the kingdom of God as a tensive reality. In the parables of Jesus, theologians and preachers have found a \textit{theological aesthetic} role model that is away from abstract propositions or information about God and brings the presence of God into the realm of the human in a narrative way. Theologically, the parable, the nonsense of God, stupefies this world’s wisdom and overpowers the world’s strength. Aesthetically (or rhetorically), the parable appeals to the aesthetic experience which leads the listeners to an appreciation of divine wonder. This understanding of metaphor and how story functions for Jesus would have deep impact on the New Homiletic in its own focus on narrative as opposed to

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{393} Funk, \textit{Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God}; 143. It is related to the existential argument of the New Hermeneutic.
\item \textsuperscript{394} McFague exemplifies Leander Keck and John Donahue as such scholars. McFague, \textit{Metaphorical Theology}, 200.
\item \textsuperscript{395} Crossan, \textit{In Parables}, xiv.
\item \textsuperscript{396} \textit{Ibid.}, 18.
\end{itemize}
illustration.

In the foregoing sections I have examined some foundational elements of the New Homiletic. That is, the New Homiletic puts emphasis on the inseparability of sermonic form and content (H. Grady Davis), the eventfulness of the Word of God (the New Hermeneutic), and new understanding about both biblical and sermonic languages as poetic movement, non-propositional linguistic work, and performative nature (metaphorical nature and narrativity in the parables of Jesus). There are a lot of helpful contributions to preaching ministry from the New Homiletic. However, when taken as a consensus movement, it can be argued that the New Homiletic has tended to regard the eventfulness of preaching as the listener’s experience at the expense of the Word of God. The theological roots of the New Hermeneutic eventually seemed to be obscured as the New Homiletic developed. Here I raise an important question as to how the role of human experience in relation to naming God is explained in the New Homiletic.

II. The New Homiletic and Loss of Theology: Event as Experience

As O. C. Edwards Jr. notes in his excellent work, A History of Preaching, the New Homiletic is not easily tied together by a common solution but rather a common reaction in part against cognitive homiletics, especially the propositional mode of preaching.397 The New Homiletic theories are diverse, yet they are united around this reaction, but the proposals come in a variety of ways. According to Eugene Lowry, in the New Homiletic we find inductive movement,398 story sermons,399 narrative sermons,400 trans-conscious African American


398 Craddock, As One Without Authority.
sermons, \textsuperscript{401} phenomenological movement, \textsuperscript{402} and conversational-episodal sermons, \textsuperscript{403} among others. \textsuperscript{404} In his book, \textit{A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletic Method}, Richard Eslinger also notes the existence of a “wild diversity” of homiletical options. \textsuperscript{405} While this diversity makes speaking of the New Homiletic uniformly difficult, nevertheless, as I already examined above we can trace the common elements of the movement: organic form, the eventful nature of preaching driven by the New Hermeneutic, poetic language in metaphorical process, and an increasing recognition of the literary character of the Bible. In this section, additionally, I will first give a short overview of the New Homiletic’s understanding of event as an anthropological experience followed by a discussion of the need to recover God in preaching. That is, within the


\textsuperscript{403} Rose, \textit{Sharing the Word}.

\textsuperscript{404} Lowry, \textit{The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery}, 15-38.

New Homiletic, the notion of event more and more has been becoming synonymous with experiential event in which the role of the triune God is often unclear.  

1. The Turn to the Listener: Naming God and Human Experience

According to Robert Reid, Jeffery Bullock, and David Fleer, the New Homiletic is marked by “the creation of an experience in which both speaker and audience are co-participants in an event of understanding.” That is, one of the significant common grounds among the New Homiletic theories is to give a central place to human experience in preaching. In reaction to old forms of cognitive and propositional preaching, which laid emphasis on ideas, the New Homiletic seeks to make preaching more holistic, involving the entire person. Consequently, the New Homiletic gives a new value to human emotions and experience in preaching. Indeed, preaching is often regarded as kind of “experiential-event,” in which the sermon seeks to create an experience for the congregation, rather than simply transmitting ideas. David Lose notes that “the New Homiletic’s experiential approach understands truth not as information to be grasped but as an event to be experienced. […] as such sermons seek to create an encounter between listener and Word.” Consequently, human experience has become the focal point of the sermon.

At this point, the category of human experience is quite central. Thus, the main question is not whether human experience should play a pivotal role in preaching. It should be essential in

---


408 Lose, “Whither Hence, New Homiletic?” 256.
preaching. The problem is, however, “what exactly do we mean by experience”? Experience is a concept that has many dimensions and is used in quite different ways. Thus, it is important to articulate the aspects of experience in the New Homiletic.

First, in the New Homiletic, the experience of the listeners is gladly accepted. In inductive or narrative or storytelling preaching, the concrete experiences of people take on significant roles in the movement of the sermon. But how does this function? The emphasis on human experience has to do with the accessibility and plausibility of the gospel. When preachers relate to familiar experiences and to ordinary everydayness, listeners can imagine what this is all about. In other words, preaching should be an experiential event for the listeners. While the traditional homiletics usually focused on how the preacher builds an argument, the New Homiletic focuses instead on how the congregation listen and how people experience spoken language. With the renewed understanding of language the New Homiletic attempts to invite the listeners to experience God in a new fashion. The turn to the listener is on the one hand justified rhetorically but on the other questioned theologically. That is, the issue raised an ongoing debate of how to relate both theology and rhetoric to the ministry of preaching.

---


412 In chapter one, I briefly examined the relationship between theology and rhetoric in preaching. See, chapter one of this thesis.
In many ways, as a result, the experiential event of preaching has been attacked in terms of theological and ethical issues. From an evangelical perspective, James W. Thompson gives a critique of experience, especially narrative preaching. He argues that narrative preaching will not build and sustain communities of faith because listeners shaped by narrative sermons will in the end, have no grasp of the reflective dimensions of faith and no comprehension of the argumentative discourse in the New Testament. That is, according to Thompson, as the emphasis on experience implies a turn away from cognitive-propositional preaching, narrative preaching limits the capacities of listeners to think rationally and reflectively about the faith and is reluctant to press demands for ethical change.\footnote{James W. Thompson, \textit{Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 9-14.} Another critique also comes from the presupposition of the New Homiletic itself. Narrative preaching may work well in a church that is informed but bored. That is, as Craddock claims, the experience in preaching can be a good way if “there is no lack of information in a Christian land.”\footnote{Craddock, \textit{Overhearing the Gospel}, 9.} However, now there is a lack of information, and it is not a Christian land. Drawing upon the work of Hans Frei, Charles Campbell also charges in a different way that in the New Homiletic, the story of Jesus is lost if a sermon starts with human experience.

What is important for Christian preaching is not ‘stories’ in general or even ‘homiletical plots,’ but rather a specific story that renders the identity of a particular person. […] Preaching in which Jesus is not the subject of his own predicates – comes in for critique. […] The story of Jesus, not the particulars of human experience, is the fundamental reality and starting point. Indeed, to begin with human experience is almost immediately to run the risk of using the story of Jesus as a myth; Jesus easily becomes simply the predicate of some human experience, and the ascriptive logic at the heart of the gospels is lost.\footnote{Campbell, \textit{Preaching Jesus}, 192-93.}
From the postmodern perspective, John McClure also raises questions: whose experiences are we talking about? Is it possible to talk about common universal experience? Are preachers domesticating the particularity of experiences when they speak of common experiences?\textsuperscript{416} Moreover, McClure argues that “God should not become too accessible, too easily located, too easily associated with symbols elevated to kerygmatic status within the tradition (as we have already seen), or associated with symbols that may derive their meanings from subtle juxtapositions with what are largely hegemonic forms of human experience.”\textsuperscript{417} In fact, McClure argues that preachers under the New Homiletic have committed more serious offenses of potential oppression and abuse of power to the listeners. While I am not fully convinced by any of these three critiques, I recognize that the notion of experiential-event should be reconsidered theologically, rhetorically, and ethically.\textsuperscript{418}

Second, more importantly, human experience seems to take priority over God in the divine-human relationship. In other words, the matter is “Does God’s revelatory act specify what justice and grace mean, or does human experience unfold what God’s grace means?”\textsuperscript{419} In my view, the matter of priority in the divine-human relationship is not just a problem of the New Homiletic but also postmodern homileticians. That is, postmodern homileticians attempt to save the New Homiletic from its experiential-event but they seem to solidify the status of human experience as priority over God. From the ethical concern of preaching, several scholars raise

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{416} John S. McClure, \textit{Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics} (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 55.
  \item \textsuperscript{417} Ibid., 81
  \item \textsuperscript{418} See, for example, Thomas G. Long, \textit{Preaching from Memory to Hope} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 18-26.
  \item \textsuperscript{419} Immink, “Homiletics: The Current Debate,” 115.
\end{itemize}
important issues to avoid hierarchy in preaching and to advocate the marginalized.\footnote{For example, among many books to discuss this ethical matters, refer to John S. McClure, \textit{Other-wise Preaching}; Lucy Rose, \textit{Sharing the Word}; Joseph M. Webb, \textit{Preaching and the Challenge of Pluralism} (St. Louis: Chalice, 1998); L. Susan Bond, \textit{Trouble with Jesus: Women, Christology and Preaching} (St. Louis: Chalice, 1999).} The church, especially in its preaching ministry, has not allowed the voices of many people to be heard that need to be heard. In this sense, preaching should be cautious in its use of taken-it-for-granted authorities to avoid being a monologic sermon. For them it should be somewhat conversational since the meaning for preaching arises out of the conversation of the community in its particular experience.\footnote{See John S. McClure, \textit{The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership & Preaching Meet} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995); Rose, \textit{Sharing the Word}.} While postmodern homileticians make important ethical claims, however, they seem to minimize transcendence without denying it, thereby diminishing God.\footnote{See Paul Scott Wilson, “Radical Postmodern: A Prophetic Ethics?” (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics, Memphis, Tennessee, December 2 - 4, 2004): 230-39. As a response, see Joseph M. Webb, “A Reply, both academic and personal, to Paul Scott Wilson’s “Radical Postmodern: A Prophetic Ethics?” (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics, Memphis, Tennessee, December 2 – 4, 2004): 240-49.} In other words, ethical awareness is highly important but at times puts human behavior and experience in the front and center of the ministry of preaching.

Mary Catherine Hilkert also contributes to this subject matter from the Roman Catholic perspective.\footnote{Mary Catherine Hilkert, \textit{Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination} (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1997).} For Hilkert, God’s grace is not beyond our experience but instead something “which is to be discovered in the depths of what is authentically human.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 49.} Edward Schillebeeckx, to whom Hilkert is indebted, once clarified his thought in \textit{Interim Report}, summarizing in one sentence: “Christianity is not a message which has to be believed, but an
experience of faith which becomes a message, and as an explicit message seeks to offer a new possibility of life experience to others who hear it from within their own experience." It is a very radical understanding of human experience. More or less, this understanding of human experience is disputable because, from his phenomenological study on human experience in biblical hermeneutics, Schillebeeckx radically separates human revelatory experience of the Jesus event from its following interpretation. Then, for him, revelation is just an anthropological event. In the case of preaching, it implies that the preacher indirectly speaks the Word of God in naming human experience. Put it another way, there is no direct encounter with the triune God.

As a sharp criticism on the priority of human experience, Campbell argues that the preachers of the New Homiletic primarily attempt to speak about God “by speaking of how God is reflected in human existence or experience.” Since human experience becomes the central role, God is mostly mentioned indirectly. “If the gospel cannot be evoked from experience, it cannot be preached.” That is, the New Homiletic and postmodern homiletics seem to attempt to draw out something that is already within the listeners. In sum, for many scholars associated with the New Homiletic, human experience becomes the central one and God seems to be minimized in the ministry of preaching.


426 Dupre’, “Experience and Interpretation,” 45.

427 Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 142.

2. The Need to Recover God

Why did the New Homiletic preaching become less theological and more experiential? The following study is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, it traces a possible way in order to explain the New Homiletic’s becoming experiential in relation to the New Hermeneutic. That is, there might be other diverse reasons that have affected the New Homiletic to be experiential event. In my view, it is possible that the loss of theology is to some extent related to the view of language in the New Hermeneutic. It is clear that the New Hermeneutic enormously influenced the New Homiletic and the discipline of homiletics radically changed. Some of this change may have been in negative ways when considered from the perspective of preaching as a vehicle for faith. My focal point here is that the initial meaning of word-event seems to be less focused in the development of the New Homiletic. The New Hermeneutic’s interpretation program was intended to revive theological importance of biblical study but ironically has been attacked in terms of its anthropological view. Likewise, the New Homiletic initially immersed itself into the word-event but has been harshly criticized for its experiential event. For this reason, in what follows, I will examine the view of language taken by the New Hermeneutic.

In the discussion of language-event, the New Hermeneutic theologians both Fuchs and Ebeling believe that because of its ancient thought forms and terminology, the New Testament text itself is the greatest hindrance to the word event through which revelation occurs. As pupils of Rudolph Bultmann, they are convinced that there are irreducible differences between the New

---


Testament worldview and a modern one. They believe that a theologian has no choice but to accept the language and thought forms of her own time.  

It seems a contradiction to say on the one hand that the New Testament text can give rise to a word-event that reveals the meaning of human existence, and on the other that the New Testament worldview itself is old-fashioned. According to some New Hermeneutic theologians, the text no longer speaks to modern people because of the outmoded thought forms in which its message is conveyed. Its value arguably can be maintained if a distinction can be made between the word-event of revelation and the linguistic medium, the text, through which it comes to expression. If the Word of God can be brought into language anew, as word-event, the interpretive task achieves a proper translation of New Testament meaning into the modern thought forms. The idea of separation between meaning and text mainly comes from Heidegger. In his examination of the philosophy of the later Heidegger, Achtemeier well articulates the separation between meaning and a given text in Heidegger as follows:

In fact, we must see something other than simply what the author intended, or at least thought he intended, if we are to respond adequately to the Being that seeks to open itself to us now in that text. […] Thus, to achieve authenticity as adequate response to Being, one must “retrieve” the origins of man’s response to the self-opening of Being, and in this way allow the origin (past) to come to him (future) now (present). […] “Retrieve” means no more nor less than the attempt to respond to the riches of the event of Being which the author himself did not, indeed could not, express. Thus, the only genuine retrieve means that the text must be understood differently than the author understood it. […] It is the unsaid in a text, forced to remain unsaid because the event of Being is historical, finite, and thus limited, which is the true object of such retrieve, for only in this can the event of Being come to us again for new expression in our language.

---


According to Robert W. Funk, Ebeling’s task of hermeneutic is also to go “behind a word which stands in need of interpretation to the language event which is presupposed therein.”

Here the separation between text and meaning is clearly evident. In the following passage Ebeling solidifies the point that the New Hermeneutic distinguishes the meaning of a text from its direct linguistic form.

Now however much the need for hermeneutic does in fact arise primarily from difficulties of understanding in the word event, it is nevertheless completely false to take this situation as the point of orientation for one’s basic grasp of the relation between word and understanding and of what is ultimately constitutive for hermeneutic. The superficial view of understanding turns matters upside down and must therefore be completely reversed. The primary phenomenon in the realm of understanding is not understanding OF language, but understanding THROUGH language. The word is not really the object of understanding, and thus the thing that poses the problem of understanding, the solution of which requires exposition and therefore also hermeneutic as the theory of understanding. Rather, the word is what opens up and mediates understanding, i.e., brings something to understanding.

Here Ebeling is using “word” in reference to the written language of a text. All in all, then, the separation between meaning and text, between word-event and the linguistic medium through which the meaning comes to expression, is crucial to the New Hermeneutic.

However, such a translation may not be a neutral transfer. While the New Hermeneutic seeks to express the word in new linguistic forms so that word-event may happen anew, the position collapses unless the distinction between meaning and employed words in the New Testament can be made clearly and systematically. It should be kept in mind that the position of the New Hermeneutic is paradoxical. For the theologians of the New Hermeneutic, consequently

---


a given text might be quite irrelevant to the word-event of revelation that they find inherent therein.

To the degree that the New Homiletic is influenced by the New Hermeneutic, it is possible that human experience at present takes priority over the written text. In other words, the role of the biblical texts eventually could become a mere catalyst for today’s word-event. For the word-event, a preacher’s interpretative task is firstly to separate the authentic meaning from a given text and then to pay much more attention to the accessibility and plausibility of the meaning for the listeners. How to refresh the meaning in modern thought forms is crucial to the New Homiletic and the best way is to employ human experience in the movement of sermon.

The New Homiletic and the New Hermeneutic recognize “the inherently dynamic content of words sets up an organic relationship between the text and the interpreter that inevitably leads to proclamation.”436 In a proclamation event in which preacher and listener are brought into contact with the Word of God, the event demands participation and transforms human beings in the moment of interaction. However, I wonder if in the interpretation process, the present sermon should come with more emphasis on the Bible as normative Canon. If we preachers separate the meaning from its given text in the process of interpretation, is the process really faithful to the Scripture’s own claims? We can end up with a “distilled methodology” that is not centered on the gospel.

In one of his four critiques of the influence of the New Hermeneutic on preaching, Lose draws on Robert Kysar who warns against theologies that are “swallowed up” by anthropology. What is often lost in the focus on human experience is an appreciation for the text’s ability to call into question the interpreter-preacher’s questions and insights, as well as those of the

congregation.\textsuperscript{437} For this reason, we preachers should reconsider the hermeneutical question of the location of meaning to avoid making preaching an anthropological experiential-event.

III. Summary

In this chapter, I attempted to identify some common elements by which the New Homiletic has been shaped since the 1950s: organic form, eventfulness of language and preaching driven by the New Hermeneutic, the New Testament study on the parables of Jesus and narrative, and metaphor and imagination in philosophical and linguistic discourse. From the study it was evident that the New Homiletic employs many poetic and rhetorical tools in order to evoke the Word-event and to transform the listeners through the encounter with God. However, perhaps in following the hermeneutic program of the New Hermeneutic, it is possible to fail in placing God center and front in the ministry of preaching. Instead, the listeners take priority over God. Preachers need to be fully aware of the situation of listeners and sensitive to the listener’s needs but not at the expense of God.

As the New Hermeneutic proposes, a theological task is to make a translation from the ancient worldview to the modern situation. However, the New Hermeneutic’s separation program between meaning and a given text tends to make both theology and preaching anthropological and experiential. The values of the New Homiletic will have more lasting effect if it can locate God at the center of preaching. Thus, my concern is how preachers can \textit{faithfully} take the Scripture’s own claims, yet at the same time \textit{creatively} relate these claims to the

\textsuperscript{437} Lose, “Whither Hence, New Homiletic?” 262; Kysar, “Demythologizing the New Hermeneutic Theology,” 221.
believer’s contemporary setting and theories of knowledge. That is, how to recover theology in preaching is the central question.

To this end, in the next two chapters, I will attempt to incorporate theology and aesthetics in preaching. My proposal is that preaching as a theological-aesthetic task can be developed as dramatic preaching based on a solid foundation of the Scripture as divine Script by using the analogy of drama. I will incorporate the role of imagery in the Gospel of John, the works of Horace Bushnell, Kevin Vanhoozer, and the values of the New Homiletic as essential elements for preaching dramatically. Dramatic preaching as faithful and creative performance will be discussed in two chapters.
CHAPTER FIVE: FAITH SEEKING CREATIVE UNDERSTANDING – KEVIN VANHOOZER

Introduction

If the Gospel of John is considered a written sermon, the text of John’s Gospel shows why preaching should incorporate both theology and aesthetics in its practice. By using various images, the author encourages his community members to follow the way of Jesus Christ in the midst of suffering. Simply speaking, for John the role of imagery is essential to unfold the drama of God. The two-level drama of the Gospel of John functions faithfully to the original message and action of Jesus Christ, yet creatively and relatively to his contemporary situation. The process is metaphorical.

Influenced by Romantic ideas, 19th century preacher Horace Bushnell responds to prevailing rationalistic theological forms with his imaginative theological method. Based on the linguistic turn and aesthetic hermeneutic theory that fosters the authorial meaning through images accessed by symbols, Bushnell reveals that theology is Life and Spirit while preaching is also the life and spirit of the preacher intruded upon by the divine Life and Spirit. For Bushnell, preaching is a spiritually discerned art work.

Since 1950s, the forming of the New Homiletic can be basically seen as an aesthetic movement against traditional propositional-cognitive approach to preaching. In the New Homiletic, various aesthetic dimensions - human experience, new understanding of language, the importance of story, the exploration of metaphor and imagination- are brought together in the ministry of preaching. The turn to the listener is an essential fruit of the New Homiletic. It is to
be regretted, however, that the New Homiletic seems to diminish God and to put human experience at the center of preaching. Moreover, the separation program of the New Hermeneutic between meaning and a given text through which the gospel comes to expression is to hammer a wedge into the crack between biblical study and homiletics. The operating question is how preachers can recognize both the divine Authorial meaning of the Bible faithfully and its contemporary significance creatively. The divine Authorial meaning is not the authorial meaning that is advocated by Romanticism in reproducing the inner experience of the author, nor is it that advocated by historical criticism in reconstructing the real meaning by blowing away the layers of traditional readings. Rather, the interpretative task is to access the divine meaning through forms or images given by symbols in the Bible. In chapter six, I will argue that aesthetic preaching should be developed as dramatic preaching in order to be faithful and creative.

The present chapter is an attempt to examine how to do theology as faith seeking creative understanding in the postmodern era with special reference to Kevin J. Vanhoozer’s book, The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology. In speaking of the word creative, I mean three categories: (1) the nature of human creativity, more specifically the aesthetic concern in philosophy and theology, (2) the way to construct theology creatively (theological methodology), and (3) how to creatively respond to God in our lives (theological ethics).

\[438\] Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine.

\[439\] Generally aesthetic concern is deeply related to human creativity, especially in this thesis, concerning the role of readers in literature. However, we do not have to make creativity the exclusive property of art and beauty. Reasoning can be also creative. Thus I focus not on “the nature of creativity” but on “the aesthetic turn in philosophy and theology.” In chapter one, I briefly examined the aesthetic concern in both philosophy and theology. See chapter one of this thesis.
In his book, Vanhoozer portrays the three kinds of creativity mentioned above in terms of theology. First, as a Reformed theologian, Vanhoozer is reluctant to accept the premise of the modern “aesthetic” concern in philosophy and theology, especially the danger of reading texts only synchronically. Second, he has a keen sense of postmodern thought, and his aesthetically sensitive theology is built on a solid foundation of the Scripture by using the analogy of drama. Vanhoozer *creatively* develops his orthodox theology with aids of other disciplines: drama theory, linguistics, and modern philosophy. Third, since theology is a living wisdom and not a speculative science, it is his thesis that his dramatic proposal can be the conjunction between right belief (orthodoxy) and wise practice (orthopraxis): *right judgment* (orthokrisis). 440

The first category of “creativity” was briefly examined in chapter one as the origin of an aesthetic turn in philosophy and theology. Vanhoozer pays attention to the authority of the Scripture against an autonomous “aestheticism,” which claims the Bible as a text is free from its divine Author. The separation of the authors from their texts was discussed with regard to aesthetic philosophy. The present chapter then consists of two major sections following the other two categories above. The first section goes to Vanhoozer’s suggestion, *theology as God’s communicative action*. It is explored how he creatively constructs the nature of theology as divine drama with the help of speech-act theory, special hermeneutics, and Hans urs von Balthasar’s theological drama. In the second section, I examine two important notions: *improvisation* and *creative understanding*. These two are at the heart of doing theology whenever we apply the old but authoritative script to today’s performance at new stages. In other words, “how do people answer God faithfully and creatively” is an operative question. My point

440 This is close to Hans Urs von Balthasar who shows a movement from theological aesthetics (*contemplation*) to theological drama (*action*). Vanhoozer’s work seems like a revised mixture of von Balthasar’s theological aesthetics and theological drama. It will be discussed later.
is that if the nature of theology is dramatic, preaching is also dramatic and dramatic preaching has a formative power to conform the listeners to the form of Jesus Christ. It will be fully discussed in the next chapter.

I. Theology as Divine Communicative Action

In this section, I will trace some threads to show Vanhoozer’s revised aesthetic concern for theology: speech-act theory, special hermeneutics vs. general hermeneutics, and the analogy of drama. His work can be called a well-done theological aesthetics.\footnote{It is remarkable that Vanhoozer maintains “What God was doing, is doing, and will do in Christ is the supreme criterion for dramatic fittingness, the supreme criterion for truth, goodness, and beauty alike.” Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 241. The similarity between Vanhoozer and von Balthasar will be discussed later in this chapter.}

1. The Return of the Author: Speech Act Theory

Against the demise of the author and authority in philosophy, literary criticism, and theology, Vanhoozer paves an alternative way via the speech act theory of J. L. Austin and John Searle. In other words, while keeping the aesthetic turn’s strength, Vanhoozer tries to preserve the authority of the divine Author. In his book, \textit{Speech Acts}, Searle argues that “a theory of language is part of a theory of action, simply because speaking is a rule-governed form of behavior.”\footnote{John Searle, \textit{Speech Acts: an Essay in the Philosophy of Language} (London: Cambridge University, 1969), 17.} He distinguishes three components of a speech act: the “locution” is the actual utterance; the “illocution” is what one does in saying something; the “perlocution” is the effect the saying has on one’s listeners. Of these three, the illocutionary act is the most important. Typical illocutionary acts include promising, asserting, thanking, and warning. These actions are
also mental acts, that is, intentions. Thus, Searle proposes that the speaker or author enacts her intention by invoking a convention that signals her intent. It means we cannot make words mean what we want; we have to follow the rules. For instance, we signal our intention of thanking someone by saying “Thank you.” Moreover, in some cases, it is necessary to know the original situation in order to understand the speech act. If I shout “fire,” I may be launching an attack in a battle or, alternately, I may be warning an audience to escape from a burning theatre. To properly understand what illocutionary act is being done involves knowing something about the original context.

Similarly, if a written text is a speech act, it seems as doubtful to separate authors from their language and literature as it does agents from their actions. Authors belong to their texts, and are responsible for their illocutionary acts. Authority means both the right and the obligation of authors to be held responsible for their speech acts. And if the author is accountable for this speech act, both readers and interpreters are responsible for treating authors in ways that they deserve.\(^443\) In other words, “meaning is the result of communicative action, of what an author has done in tending to certain words at a particular time in a specific manner.”\(^444\)

Vanhoozer applies this speech act theory to the task of theology, especially with regard to the Scripture.\(^445\) He argues that “theology’s first principle is *God in communicative action.*”\(^446\)

\(^{443}\) Vanhoozer, “A Lamp in the Labyrinth.” 55.


\(^{445}\) For a more extended discussion about illocution and perlocution in theology, see Vanhoozer’s “From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts: The Covenant of Discourse and the Discourse of the Covenant,” in *First Theology*, chapter 6, 159-203.
What this means in practice is that Christians must neither think of God apart from the Scripture nor the Scripture apart from God. The first principle is a sensus scripturalis: the sense that the Bible belongs to God and hence is authoritative for the church. Moreover, divine communicative action is a Trinitarian event, but this does not mean that God communicates only Godself. According to Vanhoozer, God is doing more in the Scripture than simply “revealing.” God’s communicative acts include both deed-words like the cross and speech-acts like the canon. And with regard to the latter, divine discourse includes promises, commands, warnings, laws, and so forth. This is a key insight for rethinking the Scripture in terms of speech act theory. Paraphrasing Karl Barth, he writes “the triune God is the communicator, the communication, and the ‘communicatedness’ of Scripture: the doer, the essential content, and the dynamic effect of the diverse speech-acts that together make up the Bible.” Lastly, Vanhoozer states “what God does with Scripture is covenant with humanity by testifying to Jesus Christ (illocution) and by bringing about the reader’s mutual indwelling with Christ (perlocution) through the Spirit’s rendering scripture efficacious.” It means that the Bible is a divine communicative act that exists for the sake of covenantal relations. He concludes the task of theology is to relate to the

---

446 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 62.


450 Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 200.
Scripture as the means for encountering God in communicative action and for becoming communicants with Jesus Christ.

2. Special Hermeneutics vs. General Hermeneutics

Vanhoozer’s positive treatment of language and literature, speech act theory for theology, is deeply related to his hermeneutics. In his essay, “Discourse on Matter,” Vanhoozer contrasts Karl Barth’s special hermeneutics with philosophers’ general hermeneutics. After arguing that both Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur contend that the active agent in the event of understanding is the “matter of the text”: the Sache, which can be also called “aesthetic turn to the text itself,” he writes that his concern is “the turn to the Sache” in contemporary hermeneutics and the subsequent fate of authorial discourse: to what extent is the event of understanding intelligible without recourse to the notion of authorial discourse?”

For Barth, God is not an object of human reflection but an active subject. Thus understanding the Word of God is not something humans can do, for the event of understanding depends upon God’s making the Godself known and felt; but the presence and activity of God is never the secure possession of the human subject. Understanding, in the case of the Scripture, is a matter not of the interpreter grasping the Bible but of the Bible grasping the interpreter in a free and loving embrace. The biblical interpreter is less the active agent than the grateful patient of


452 Ibid., 4-5.
the event of understanding. Barth’s special hermeneutic is to “stand with the author.” Barth learns by reading the Bible that understanding in general means taking authorial words in earnest and in trust. He says “for the sake of better general hermeneutics it must therefore dare to be this special hermeneutics.”

It means the interpreter, of the Bible or any other text, is first and foremost a servant of the Word, one who attends it in the hope that it will disclose its “spirit,” its Sache.

In contrast, in his masterpiece, Truth and Method, Gadamer discusses the experience of truth that comes to us through the work of art. Gadamer argues “all encounter with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event.” From this point, Gadamer explores the similarity between art and play to prove the experience of art as an ontological event. He distinguishes the nature of play itself from the player’s subjective reflection, and acknowledges the primacy of play over the consciousness of the player, saying “play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play.” The structure of play

---

453 Ibid., 13. In case of biblical interpretation in practice, Vanhoozer suggests “figural interpretation” (typology) as a way of “interpreting with Christ” not about Christ. According to Hans Frei, “Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfils the first.” Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 221-24.


455 This understanding is closely akin to Horace Bushnell’s aesthetic hermeneutic theory discussed in chapter three.


457 Ibid., 102.

458 Ibid., 104.

459 Ibid., 102.
absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence.

Likewise, for Gadamer as general hermeneutician, understanding happens when we participate not in the Sache itself, but in a conversation about the Sache. Understanding is a matter of agreement with another about a specific subject matter: “Understanding is first of all agreement.” To interpret is to enter into a dialogue with the text and this dialogue has its aim not at the discovery of what was in the author’s mind but rather is a genuine engagement with the Sache. In this situation, interpreters have no control over the conversation. “Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition.” It is like a game, a language game controlled by the game itself.

Although Vanhoozer largely agrees with Gadamer, he sides more with Barth against Gadamer. He admits there are a number of aims interpreters can have: reconstructing the history of a text’s composition; finding the text’s function in the life of its original audience; exposing the distorting influence of the ideologies behind, and in, the text; learning more about oneself in light of the mode of being displayed in the text and so on. However, Vanhoozer argues that if the hermeneutics is ultimately a matter of discerning the discourse – what someone says to someone about something – in the text as work, the ultimate aim is discerning the discourse in the work, what the author said and did with regard to a particular subject matter. Moreover, Vanhoozer criticizes Gadamer’s famous catchphrase of “fusion of horizons” in terms of trustworthy conversation. If we want to participate in a trustful dialogue, love is highly required to promote

---

460 Ibid., 180.

461 Ibid., 290.

the conversation. However, considering the fusion of horizon, in the dialogue one can easily lose oneself in another. It becomes a monologue and not a dialogue.\textsuperscript{463} Therefore, citing Barth, Vanhoozer argues understanding requires love: not interest in a person in abstraction but interest in and patient attention to what the person is saying and doing. For Vanhoozer, understanding faith seeking is not to let the autonomous text play freely from the author but to explore what the author as dialogue partner is doing with the matter of the text, and the author’s perspective on the discourse.\textsuperscript{464} Then, truth emerges from the conversation between different voices. This is how Vanhoozer harmonizes the divine Authorial meaning with contemporary aesthetic concern in literary criticism.

Here we come to the questions: who is the actor/speaker in the Bible; what is the subject matter of the discourse; how to explain the relation of the human words to the divine Word in theology and so forth. These questions lead us to Vanhoozer’s metaphor of drama.

3. The Gospel as Divine Speech and Action

Based on his Reformed aesthetic mind, Vanhoozer begins his book, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, by asserting, “The gospel – God’s gracious self-communication in Jesus Christ – is intrinsically dramatic.”\textsuperscript{465} The neglect of this perspective, he argues, constitutes a major factor in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{463} This is the point why Vanhoozer is against both propositional and Gadamerian approaches. For Vanhoozer, the two are mono-typed ways. See, Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 269-70.
\item \textsuperscript{464} Vanhoozer, “Discourse on Matter,” 26.
\item \textsuperscript{465} Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, xi.
\end{itemize}
the widespread perception of doctrine as dull, weak, and unimportant. “Doctrine no longer plays any meaningful role in the life and thought of ordinary Christians.”

So Vanhoozer proposes a new paradigm for understanding theology based on drama as his structural metaphor. The various aspects of theatre are his hermeneutical lens through which he seeks to understand the wisdom of theology for contemporary settings. He summarizes the result as follows: “The present book sets forth a postconservative, canonical-linguistic theology and a directive theory of doctrine that roots theology more firmly in Scripture while preserving [George] Lindbeck’s emphasis on practice.”

To simplify Vanhoozer’s explanation on various topics, I want to focus on some important terms: “theo-drama,” “canonical-linguistic approach,” “performance I & II interpretation,” and “doctrine.”

Theo-Drama

Actually, the metaphor of drama, theo-drama, comes from von Balthasar who tries to solve the classic theological problem of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom. For von Balthasar, what lies at the heart of the gospel is not an idea or an ideal or an

466 Ibid., xi.

467 Ibid., xiii.

experience, but a dramatic action with speech. Following Hegel’s outline in his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, von Balthasar describes the way the *dramatic* perspective differs from the *epic* and the *lyric*. The *epic* point of view is that of the person who has not witnessed the events, but has carefully brought together all the appropriate information, and has been concerned that his or her own judgments and presuppositions should not influence the account. Generally, the epic perspective is to be detached, objective, factual, dispassionate, thorough, coherent, and mature. Unlike the epic view, the *lyric* perspective accepts that a storyteller is sure to be hugely influenced by a profound story. If the storyteller is authentically close enough to see events as they unfold, he or she will probably have a deep personal engagement in their outcome. The view that the narrator almost becomes part of the story makes the narrative all the more convincing as the listener disentangles the subjective from the more objective aspects of the account. That is, the lyric mode is emotional, personal, passionate, and subjective. The *dramatic* perspective synthesizes the strengths of the epic and lyric dimensions. Like the lyric, it does justice to the role of the subject in a way that events arise from the hearts, minds, and actions of people, rather than from impersonal external forces. Like the epic, it perceives an object that has reason and validity beyond the subjectivity of the involved observer.

Moreover, von Balthasar points out that the epic perspective is inadequate as a mode of theological discourse. It talks of key events as finished and completed. Epic can see it all from the perspective of a disinterested observer. It tells a story, but not a story that resembles the world as it is, nor the world that is part of God’s story. It ignores the absurdity of a detached

---


account of God, as if one had a broader view than God has. Von Balthasar is equally clear when it comes to the shortcomings of the lyric mode. For lyric, reality is not so much total objectivity, but intimate subjectivity. Both experience and expression are the key, and objective fact and reality are secondary. Like the epic perspective, the lyric mode is inadequate in its perception of the world and in its perception of God. In relation to the world it is exaggerated in its perception of the self-importance of what is, in the end, a creature. In relation to God, it drags God into the world’s process of suffering.\textsuperscript{471} Von Balthasar writes as follows:

\begin{quote}
We shall not get beyond the alternatives of ‘lyrical’ and ‘epic,’ spirituality (prayer and personal involvement) and theology (the objective discussion of facts), so long as we fail to include the dramatic dimension of revelation, in which alone they discover their unity.\textsuperscript{472}
\end{quote}

Von Balthasar’s notion of drama brings together the internal intentions and dispositions of acting characters with the external events and deeds of the story. Thus he synthesizes the subjectivity of lyric with the objectivity of epic. The apostolic witness is one whose life and faith speaks to believer (lyric) and unbeliever (epic), and whose experience of God’s prior action becomes part of the testimony. The authors of the New Testament write as apostolic witnesses in this dramatic mode.\textsuperscript{473}

Based on von Balthasar’s dramatic perspective in theology, Vanhoozer is against \textit{dedramatized propositions} in theology\textsuperscript{474} and also against \textit{untrained improvisation}.\textsuperscript{475} There is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{471} Ibid., 145-52.
\item \textsuperscript{473} Ibid., 152.
\item \textsuperscript{474} Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 269.
\item \textsuperscript{475} Ibid., 351. On improvisation, we will discuss later.
\end{itemize}
no acknowledgement about the epic, the lyric, and the dramatic perspective in Vanhoozer’s book. However, we may say while the dedramatized proposition is like the epic perspective, the untrained improvisation is like the lyric perspective. Arguably, the right perspective to do theology is dramatic. For him, the gospel is the triune “theo-drama” of redemption, which is God’s communicative action in Jesus Christ. Here, by “theo-drama,” Vanhoozer means that the substance of theology is dramatic because it concerns what God has said and done in Jesus Christ. The form of theology is also dramatic inasmuch as it concerns a word addressed by God to human readers and the people’s response. Thus the implication of “theo-drama” is that though the triune God is the primary voice and actor, the people of God have been given the privilege and responsibility not only of thinking God’s thoughts after God but also of speaking God’s words and acting God’s acts after God too. “The task of theology is to enable listeners and doers of the gospel to respond and to correspond to the prior Word and Act of God, and thus to be drawn into the action.”476

The distinction of Vanhoozer’s work from von Balthasar’s is that while von Balthasar suggests theo-drama as a means for resolving the problem of finite and infinite agencies, Vanhoozer construes theo-drama as a means for understanding “how God graciously brings covenantal blessings out of a situation of covenantal unfaithfulness.”477

Canonical linguistic approach

Vanhoozer’s book is subtitled “a Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology.” Then what does he mean by “canonical linguistic?” As we note in speech-act theory, language is

476 Ibid., 44.

477 Ibid., 50.
not simply a tool for information processing but a rich medium of communicative action and personal interaction. Likewise, God can use human language as a medium for divine communicative action. That is, in theo-drama, the divine script is the canonical Scripture, not any other things – community, practice, philosophy, cultural issues and so on. Vanhoozer writes that the canonical Scriptures are “the church’s script, the authorized version of the theo-drama, the constitution of the church, and the locus of authority when it comes to doctrinal direction for the church’s fitting participation in the ongoing drama.”\footnote{Ibid., 239.} He states that the Scriptures are “the supreme norm for Christian doctrine” and the “guardrails of tradition.”\footnote{Ibid., 113.} As such, they arbitrate conflicting views as to what God is like. Although God makes the Godself known in three ways: through creation, through Christ, and through the canon, it is important to note the canon comes first in the order of knowing; for without the canonical witness, we would not be able to know God truly either through creation or through Christ.\footnote{Ibid., 47, footnote #43.}

From the perspective of the gospel as theo-drama and the Scripture as canonical script, Vanhoozer also writes about the identities of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and canonical practice. “Jesus Christ is the content of the Scriptural witness, the one who interprets the Old Testament witness, and the one who commissions the New Testament witness. Accordingly, Jesus is both the material and the formal principle of the canon: Its substance and its hermeneutic.”\footnote{Ibid., 195.} And the Spirit is the dramatist who authors the script and directs the church’s
performance as canonical spirited practice. He “keeps the Word, who is Christ, the one who keeps ministering that Word to us.”\textsuperscript{482} Traditionally, concerning the Bible, there are two kinds of works of the Spirit: inspiration and illumination. In theo-drama, inspiration is the Spirit’s prompting human authors “to say just what the divine playwright intended.”\textsuperscript{483} Illumination is the work of the Spirit “bringing about understanding of Scripture among present-day readers,”\textsuperscript{484} or “making the communicative acts of the text efficacious.”\textsuperscript{485}

In this perspective, the Bible is a covenant document rather than a propositional handbook about truth claims as objective realities.\textsuperscript{486} As a covenantal document, the Bible is a performative act of the triune God that promotes Christian practice. It is the living vehicle of the Word and the Spirit. \textit{Sola scriptum}, accordingly, is Spirit-enabled participation in the Christological practices of Scripture.\textsuperscript{487} It is “less textbook than playbook .... for understanding the divine drama and for continuing participation in it.”\textsuperscript{488} As a result, Vanhoozer gives greater authority to the Bible over tradition.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{482} \textit{Ibid.}, 202.
\item \textsuperscript{483} \textit{Ibid.}, 227.
\item \textsuperscript{484} \textit{Ibid.}, 226.
\item \textsuperscript{485} \textit{Ibid.}, 67.
\item \textsuperscript{486} See \textit{Ibid.}, 5, 71, 132, 199, 301.
\item \textsuperscript{487} \textit{Ibid.}, 231-37.
\item \textsuperscript{488} \textit{Ibid.}, 145.
\end{itemize}
Performance I interpretation and Performance II interpretation

For Vanhoozer, the interpretative task is to access the divine meaning through forms or images given by symbols of the Bible. As mentioned earlier Vanhoozer’s divine Authorial meaning is not the authorial intention that implies we can get into the mind of the human author. The focal point of Vanhoozer is that the Bible belongs to God. Thus, the interpretative task of Scripture is foremost to access God’s communicative action, what God is doing and saying. Vanhoozer has established total supremacy of the divine Authorial meaning over its rivals: the text-centered, tradition-centered, practice-centered, reader-centered interpretation, and so on. It is explicit in his distinction between Performance I interpretation and Performance II interpretation.

For Vanhoozer, *performance* is “the operative concept, the connecting link that holds canonical script, doctrine, and church practice together.” However, the word, performance, seems to prefer the roles of a reader and actor to the roles of the author and playwright. It is the defect that Nicholas Wolterstorff points out in his book, *Divine Discourse.* For that point, supplementary explanation is needed.

---

489 *Ibid.*, 165. According to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the term “performance” has a “long history and wide range of meanings in everyday English usage.” These usages range from “high performance in technology and performance measures in management and finance to the legally defined performance requirements of contracts. Only recently has the word performance entered other languages, almost exclusively to designate performance art.” See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Performance Studies,” in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Henry Bial (London: Routledge, 2007). 47. In a broad sense, performance is “a broad spectrum of activities including at the very least the performing arts, rituals, healing, sports, popular entertainments, and performance in everyday life.” The term insists on being recognized not simply as an act or action, but as a self-conscious action undertaken by the performer that so often becomes accomplished and performed subconsciously. See Schechner, “Performance Studies: The Broad Spectrum Approach,” in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 7.

Theologically, the term performance has come into use, according to Trevor Hart, “as theology has sought models to help it understand better aspects of Christian faith’s own peculiar situation with respect to a text, a text which must be “brought to completion” through forms of embodied action in which it is “interpreted” faithfully for a world (and not just a world) which looks on as it does so.” See, Trevor A. Hart, *Faithful Performance: Enacting Christian Tradition*, 2.

490 Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, chapter 10, “Performance Interpretation.”
In postmodernity, the turn to performance – toward the idea of an incomplete, fluid work in progress – is simultaneously a turn away from the idea of the finished, complete work in itself. Both postmodern literary theory and postmodern cultural anthropology use the performance metaphor to make the point that both texts and cultures are not given but rather social constructions in constant flux. In cultural studies, that means an interest in how cultures are structured by certain forms of ritual play. For biblical studies, it means that “How does the church use Scripture?” not “What does Scripture mean?” has become the operative question.\footnote{Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 168-69.}

Vanhoozer, thus, makes a distinction between Performance I and II interpretations. Whereas Performance II interpretation is ecclesial (or generally cultural) performance interpretation like George Lindbeck’s cultural linguistic approach in which the church’s habitual use/performance of Scripture is seen to be constitutive of the literal sense, in Performance I interpretation (the canonical linguistic approach), “the grammar of Christian faith is embedded and enacted in use of language in the canon, not the present community.”\footnote{Ibid., 167.} In this latter view, what is authoritative is the divine authorial use; the community thus performs the word and will of another.

According to Vanhoozer, Performance II interpretation is not interested in finding out what authors said and did with their words. In contrast, Performance I interpretation is essentially a matter not of authoring but of “answerability,” of acknowledging what the playwright is doing in the many voices in Scripture and of responding to it in an appropriate manner.\footnote{Ibid., 180.} This distinction between Performance I and II is thus similar to C. S. Lewis’ contrast between

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
“receiving” and “using” texts: “When we ‘receive’ [a work of art] we exert our senses and imagination and various other powers according to a pattern invented by the artist. When we ‘use’ it we treat it as assistance for our own activities.”494 For me, the difference of Performance I & II interpretations seems to come in part from Hirsch’s sharp distinction between meaning and significance. He claims that the failure to understand the difference between them “has been the source of enormous confusion in hermeneutic theory.”495 Meaning and significance are distinct items in the process of interpretation:

**Meaning** is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. **Significance**, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation or indeed anything imaginable.496

Meaning and significance, therefore, represent a dichotomy between two distinct concepts: one static, the other dynamic. In Vanhoozer’s terminology, meaning is Performance I interpretation and significance Performance II interpretation.

In conclusion, by arguing the primacy of Performance I interpretation against Performance II interpretation, Vanhoozer preserves the authority of the author with special emphasis on ecclesial practice as a performance of answerability: acknowledging and responding.


Doctrine

Here I briefly summarize the meaning of doctrine in Vanhoozer’s drama of doctrine. Vanhoozer writes that “Doctrine is the bridge between the gospel as theo-drama and theology as gospel performance.” Theo-dramatic doctrine will bridge two “ugly ditches” in the church. One ditch separates theory from practice, and the other separates exegesis from theology. “The great irony of modern biblical studies, however, is that doctrinal considerations have been excluded from any significant role in the exegetical task, thus preventing exegetes from fully engaging with the primary subject matter of the biblical texts: the word of God.” Thus, the proper end of the drama of doctrine is not scientific theory but wisdom: lived knowledge, a performance of truth.

Theo-dramatic doctrine must be also both “evangelical” and “catholic.” Vanhoozer maintains that “the core ‘evangelical’ conviction is that God has spoken and acted in Jesus Christ, and that God speaks and acts in the canonical Scriptures that testify to him.” However, theology must be “catholic” as well, meaning “the whole people of God, spread out over space, across cultures, and through time.” Vanhoozer summarizes his proposal of doctrine as direction:

What emerges from such a canonical-linguistic, catholic-evangelical theology is not a set of timeless propositions, nor an expression of religious experience, nor grammatical rules for Christian speech and thought, but rather an imagination that corresponds to and continues the gospel by making good theological judgments

---


498 Ibid., 20.

499 Ibid., 26.

500 Ibid., 27.
about what to say and do in light of the reality of Jesus Christ... The hoped-for outcome of canonical-linguistic theology is nothing less than the missing link between right belief (orthodoxy) and wise practice (orthopraxis): right judgment (orthokrisis).\(^{501}\)

In sum, as having the vision for being evangelical and catholic, theo-dramatic doctrine will help the people of God to participate fittingly in the drama of redemption. In this section, we have looked over one side of the matter of right judgment: dramatic direction. In the next section, we turn to the other side: the Christian life as performance interpretation.

II. Christian Life as Faithful and Creative Performance

How are Christians to understand the language and action of the divine theatre? At a crucial juncture of the book, Vanhoozer proposes six criteria that enable a diverse church to participate fittingly in the canonically prescribed drama of redemption. The first three — postpropositional, postconservative, postfoundational — addresses theology as exegetical scientia. They enliven canonical practices and prevent the Scriptures from becoming “a source of data for a theoretical science.”\(^{502}\) The second three - prosaic, phronetic, prophetic - have special reference to the contemporary situation and to theology as a practical source of wisdom.\(^{503}\) In other words, there are two kinds of tasks for Christians to participate in theo-drama fittingly. If scientia as exegesis involves leading meaning out of the biblical text, sapientia involves carrying meaning on, going beyond the biblical text biblically.\(^{504}\)

\(^{501}\) Ibid., 30.

\(^{502}\) Ibid., 219.

\(^{503}\) Ibid., 240.

\(^{504}\) Ibid., 252.
Here I will focus on some aesthetic features that are found in the realms of *scientia* and *sapientia*: the form of Christ and the literary genres of the Bible from the *scientia* and the improvisation and creative understanding from the *sapientia*.

1. Theology as an Exegetical Scientia: the Form of Christ and the Literary Genres of the Bible

It seems that Vanhoozer is heavily indebted to not only von Balthasar’s theo-drama but also his theological aesthetics. That is, Vanhoozer develops his theology based on theological aesthetics, not aesthetic theology, toward theo-drama.\(^5\) He mentions in some places Jesus Christ as “a form of God’s Word” and “the literary forms of the Scripture as the form of Jesus Christ.”\(^6\) What does he mean by “form”? It will be helpful to examine the notion of “form” in von Balthasar’s theological aesthetics.

Hans Urs von Balthasar is one of the most important theologians who founded the nowadays popular term, “theological aesthetics.” Taking aesthetics as a starting point of his theology, he progresses to *Theo-drama* and *Theo-logic*. In his first volume on theological aesthetics, *The Glory of the Lord*, von Balthasar would like to see theology restored by focusing its attention on the neglected realm of “beauty.”\(^7\) For von Balthasar, revelation is not abstract but very concrete, and it makes God known to creatures in a way in which they can apprehend. “Form” (Gestalt) is, perhaps, the key word for von Balthasar to explain the divine revelation. The

---

\(^5\) As examined in chapter one, Hans Urs von Balthasar distinguishes the two terms, “theological aesthetics” and “aesthetic theology.” For von Balthasar, the former is to seek the glory of God, the most beautiful One, and is governed by Jesus Christ who is the primal *form* of divine revelation, whereas the latter is arbitrarily to reduce theology in aestheticism.

\(^6\) *Ibid.*, 5; 251; 253; 257.

\(^7\) See, von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Seeing the Form* trans. Vol. I. This volume is his prolegomena.
beautiful object must have a form which is attended to and grasped by the person who knows the object as beautiful. The form is not the object or even the “form of the object” in an Aristotelian sense. He uses this term in a way which when beauty becomes a form, it is understood as being identical with Being, spirit, and freedom. Therefore, it is more the interior meaning and reality glimpsed via the exterior. For von Balthasar, Jesus is the center of the form of God’s self-revelation. The supreme revelation is the “form” of Jesus Christ – the whole pattern of divine truth embodied in an historical person and shining out through him into human history.

That Jesus is the center of the form of God’s glory suggests that there is more to recognizing God’s self-manifestation, after his ascension, than the historical Jesus himself. It means that Balthasar’s theology is less critical but more contemplative. The on-going presence of the Holy Spirit in the church carries the manifestation of the Lord beyond the historical limitations of the earthly Jesus. Every manifesting form must contain Jesus at the center in order to be, and to be understood as, part of the revealing form.

While sharing the agenda of Jesus Christ as the primal form of divine revelation with von Balthasar, Vanhoozer reframes the aesthetic concept of Jesus through the literary forms and genres of the Bible. That is, the form of Jesus can be firstly mediated through the form of the Bible, not through the form of the church or any others. The importance of the literary forms of the Bible as the mediation of the form of Jesus Christ is obvious in his distinction of postconservative theology from both conservative and postliberal theologies: Postconservative

---


509 Unlike von Balthasar, Vanhoozer calls the “form” of Jesus not static Gestalt but active Geschichte. It means “the form in which other parts of the theo-drama are ultimately to fit is the history of Jesus Christ, a history that represents the whole and complete divine action from creation to consummation: the Christo-drama.” Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 257.
theology differs from both its conservative and its postliberal counterparts by refusing to
privilege any one form, be it propositional (conservative) or narrative (postliberal), and by
avoiding a “substitution theory” of genre that seeks to reduce whole texts to a set of
propositions.\textsuperscript{510} In sum, every genre in the Scripture, not only narrative, does more than convey
information; each performs its distinct illocutionary act.\textsuperscript{511} In other words, form and content are
often inseparable.

What literary genres communicate is not simply propositional content but ways of
processing and organizing content into meaningful wholes: ways of thinking, ways of seeing,
and ways of experiencing. A biblical theology, therefore, involves more than summarizing the
propositional content of the Scriptures. It involves acquiring cognitive skills and sensibilities,
and hence the ability to see, feel, and taste the world as disclosed in the diverse biblical texts as
the mediation of the form of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{512}

Therefore, in exegetical \textit{scientia}, Vanhoozer writes “the aim of this apprenticeship is to
perceive the form of Christ at the heart of the theo-drama, and hence to cultivate the mind of
Christ. What is needed is not simply information but formation, intellectual, spiritual,”\textsuperscript{513} and
imaginative, for “it involves nothing less than training readers to undergo the hard formation of
following Scripture so that literary forms merge into forms of life, so that \textit{seeing as} translates
into \textit{experiencing as}, even, at the limit, into \textit{being as}.”\textsuperscript{514}

\textsuperscript{510} \textit{Ibid.}, 282-83.
\textsuperscript{511} \textit{Ibid.}, 283.
\textsuperscript{512} \textit{Ibid.}, 285.
\textsuperscript{513} \textit{Ibid.}, 251.
\textsuperscript{514} \textit{Ibid.}, 285.
In conclusion, with the form of Jesus Christ and the literary genres of the Scripture, Vanhoozer contends that as apprenticeship a faithful and creative exegesis moves from \textit{contemplation} to \textit{formation}.

2. Theology as Practical Wisdom: Improvisation and Creative Understanding

In this section, I will examine how Vanhoozer explains the next stage, from \textit{formation} to \textit{action} in applying wisdom, principles, and texts to new contexts. The key word is “improvisation.” After that, it will be briefly discussed that dramatic theology is the performance of church.

Improvisation

What is improvisation? According to dictionary definitions, to improvise is to do something extemporaneously, to compose and perform without preparation. However, in theatrical and musical theory, improvisation is not just to perform offhand. Improvising well requires both training (formation) and discernment (imagination). In other words, “fidelity” and “novelty” characterize improvisation. The specific situations of future performers or readers were never foreseen by the ancient writers. These situations call for creativity in those unique moments and the available material (the Scripture as theo-drama script) must be used, as well.

\footnote{See Webster’s dictionary or online merriam-webster dictionary, \url{www.merriam-webster.com}.}

This is what it means to improvise – to perform without previous preparation. In short, Samuel Wells writes as follows:

> Ethics cannot be simply about rehearsing and repeating the same script and story over and over again, albeit on fresh stage with new players. [...] Improvisation means a community formed in the right habits trusting itself to embody its tradition in new and challenging circumstances; and this is exactly what the church is called to do.”

Here, ethics can be actually “performance in action” in terms of Vanhoozer’s drama of doctrine. It is the dual polarity of “faithful formation” and “novel imagination” that give this moment the character of improvisation.

**Overaccepting**

In chapter two, I proposed that the author of John’s Gospel is a good improviser who writes the drama of God in the Fourth Gospel **faithfully** to the old tradition and **creatively** to the new situation. In other words, the author of the Fourth Gospel collects many resources and writes the text in a new perspective to direct his readers at that time in a dramatic fashion. John’s writing is a forerunner of both **overaccepting** and **reincorporating**.

Becoming faithful improvisers needs two skills: **overaccepting** and **reincorporating**. Here Vanhoozer is indebted to Samuel Wells. According to Wells, as examined in chapter two, **overaccepting** is a practice central to the biblical story, and especially the ministry of Jesus. It builds on the interpretive tasks of nurturing the continuity of tradition (theo-drama script) and thinking creatively for the future (new contexts). Overaccepting is a matter of incorporating

---


offers into a larger story, moving it forward by reconceiving it in a new and redemptive way. Wells argues that this is how God’s reign functions.

Biblically, overaccepting is the depth of God’s interaction with creation. God does not block or destroy His creation, getting rid of it for the sake of another. Instead, God “overaccepts his creation.”519 Ultimately, according to Wells, the significance of our participation in Christ’s action manifests itself when “Christians use their imaginations to see how the gifts of creation and culture fit into the story of the way God deals with the world, given that the fundamental decision has already been made – God’s decision for humanity and creation in Christ.”520 Elucidating our understanding of the paradox of Christ’s power, Wells writes that “his kingship rides not on the power of a horse but on the humility of a donkey. He does not block the people’s desire to acclaim him, nor does he accept their idea of kingship: he overaccepts and becomes the servant king.”521 Even the Cross is the greatest and most dramatic performance of Christ’s improvisation by overaccepting. In other words, Jesus Christ freely accepts the sin of the world, while giving back to creation the eternal life through his resurrection. He takes the burden of sin only in order to return the gift of eternity.

In this sense, overaccepting overcomes the two fears that often paralyze improvisers. The fear of accepting the offer is that the offer will disrupt one’s own plan, thus threatening one’s identity. The fear of blocking the offer is that one will take oneself out of the action and thus be made irrelevant. Overaccepting neither accepts offers on their own terms nor blocks them but

rather incorporates them into a broader narrative, thus allowing the actor to retain both her identity and her relevance.\(^{522}\)

The faithful improvisers are called to overaccept by taking the concerns and offers of others and finding ways to accept them by reconceiving them in the light of theo-drama. This is done with particular people by finding ways to draw them into the larger vision, seeing possibilities in them that they may not be able to see in themselves, and providing those signs of grace and love. In following the example of Jesus Christ’s overaccepting, this is to say that through the willingness to dramatically improvise with Christ, so as to share in the eternal performance, theology will come to realize and be able to perpetuate the reality of truth-event – Christ’s improvised performance.

Reincorporating

The faithful improvisers are also proficient in the activity of “reincorporating,” another term Wells and Vanhoozer deploy from improvisatory theatre.\(^{523}\) The improviser is one who seeks not to create novelty but to respond to the past, for the future is formed out of the past. That is, memory is more important for improvisation than originality. The improviser is like “a man walking backwards” who sees only where he has been, not where he is going.\(^{524}\) Improvisers thus need narrative skills: “Improvisers must keep the full picture in memory in


\(^{523}\) Vanhoozer regards “reincorporating” as “the most powerful narrative skill an improviser has.” In case of reincorporating, while Wells develops it more ethically, Vanhoozer does it theatrically. See Wells, *Improvisation*, 147-53, and Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 339.

order to move the scene forward effectively… An improviser’s powers of observation and memorization are keys to retaining this ever-growing assembly of ideas.”\textsuperscript{525} Just as improvisation has nothing to do with ad-libbing, so reincorporation has nothing to do with free association. By contrast, “reincorporation is about remembering and recapitulating past elements in the narrative in order to make of the scene a whole and unified action.”\textsuperscript{526}

For Wells, this task, reincorporation, affirms the value and indeed necessity of continually looking back and retrieving aspects of the story that have been left out or lost. It entails remembering the sins of the past as well as the lives of the saints. It also entails paying close attention to those who have been, and still are, marginalized as well as those who are at the center of power. Wells writes:

The church needs to maintain a lively memory, in which it recalls tales of the good and the bad, and especially of those who have not written their own history – the losers. The greatest improvisers […] did nothing more than reincorporate discarded elements of the story. To do this, one has to be part of a community that knows and lives the story. Remembering the sins of the past is as significant as remembering the saints.\textsuperscript{527}

This task of reincorporating the lost is a part of Christian life that is formed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our capacity of such reincorporation is a sign of becoming the faithful improvisers who pay attention to memory and to living life.

According to Vanhoozer, the theo-drama is itself improvisatory to the extent that the divine grace that propels the action does so by alternately offering to, overaccepting, and reincorporating the human response. The divine improviser, which is another name for God by


\textsuperscript{526} Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 340.

\textsuperscript{527} Wells, \textit{Improvisation}. 151.
Vanhoozer, thus shows Godself to be both faithful to the movement of the play and creative with regard to new situations. Theology is consequently a matter not only of thinking God’s thoughts after God but of improvising God’s improvisations after God.\(^{528}\) As a matter of fact, the biblical script is also a record of previous improvisations – of God, of the prophets, and of the apostles – that display creative fidelity. The best improvisation, like the best translation, is precisely the one that displays narrative continuity with what went on before.\(^{529}\) As seen in chapter two, the author of John’s Gospel is a good improviser who not only faithfully thinks the essence of the Gospel spoken and done by Jesus Christ but also creatively gives a new direction to new situation.

Creative understanding

Vanhoozer goes into Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of creative understanding with the notion of improvisation. Like the improviser who forgets nothing but responds new contexts with “ruled creativity,” creative understanding, similarly, is a matter of drawing upon the resources of the past for the needs of the present.\(^{530}\)

To understand a text or a thing creatively, we must do more than recover its original sense. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, it is a matter of understanding things in new contexts. Yet, unlike Gadamer, creative understanding neither forgets the two horizons – the past context of the text and the present context of the reader – nor fuses them: “Creative understanding does not

\(^{528}\) Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 341.

\(^{529}\) *Ibid.*, 344.

renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing.”

As seen earlier, Gadamerian “fusion of horizons” falls short of creative understanding and true dialogue, because instead of preserving the particularity of each of the two horizons, it collapses them into one. The fusion of horizons is actually monologic. In order to understand why Vanhoozer employs Bakhtin’s term “creative understanding,” it is required to construe Bakhtin’s essential terms: “dialogue,” “otherness,” and “outsideness.”

For Bakhtin, dialogue (or “dialogism”) is the most important notion. In the context of Neo-Kantianism, Bakhtin argues dialogue can be understood by the recognition of “otherness.” He says that dialogue does not consist in the communication of messages, nor is it an initiative taken by self. On the contrary, the self is always in dialogue with the other, that is to say, with the world and with others, whether it knows it or not; the self is always in dialogue with the word of the other. Identity is dialogic. “Dialogue” in Bakhtin does not ensue from a decision to assume an open attitude towards others, it is not the result of initiative taken by the “I,” the result of a

---


532 It will be worthwhile to compare Mikhail Bakhtin with Emmanuel Levinas. In both Levinas and Bakhtin, one responds or answers first and foremost to the other, rather than responding to or through an abstract system of ethical rules. For both, a response to the other that merely follows abstract principles is no ethical response at all. They attempt to rethink the social interaction of “I” and “other” in postmodern perspective. However, there are substantial differences between Bakhtin and Levinas. As Levinas clarifies in Otherwise Than Being, “I” am infinitely substitutable. He writes “there is nothing that is named I; the I is said by him that speaks…. Here uniqueness means the impossibility of slipping away and being replaced… This uniqueness not assumed, not subsumed, is traumatic; it is an election in persecution” (56). For Levinas, “Uniqueness is without identity. Not an identity, it is beyond consciousness, which is in itself and for itself. For it is already a substitution for the other” (57). See, Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence, Trans. Tlphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981). Thus, the other in Levinas’ word is different from Bakhtin’s otherness. John McClure employs Levinas in order to propose a postmodern ethics of preaching in his book, Other-wise Preaching. For a scholarly review of Bahktin and Levinas, See, David Patterson, “Bakhtin and Levinas,” in Literature and Spirit: Essays on Bakhtin and his Contemporaries (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988); J. Nealon, “The Ethics of Dialogue: Bakhtin and Levinas,” College English, 59-2: 1997.

disposition for opening to the other, but rather it is the very place of the I’s formation and manifestation. Dialogue is not the result of the I’s decision to respect the other or listen to the other. On the contrary, dialogue is the impossibility of closure, of indifference, the impossibility of not becoming involved and is particularly evident in attempts at closure, at indifference that simply prove to be tragic or comical. Therefore, in dialogism, the very capacity to have consciousness is based on otherness. More accurately, it is the differential relation between a center and all that is not that center. While in various versions of what has come to be called “logocentrism,” “center” has often been used as a name for the unreflective assumption of ontological privilege, Bakhtin says the center is a relative rather than an absolute term.  

The center that is represented by the single word “I” is exploited in language very much as the single eye of the fates is used in Greek mythology. In the myth, three old women all pass around the same organ. If they did not share their eye they could not see. In order for each to have her own vision, each must use the means by which the others see. In dialogism, this sharedness is indeed the nature of fate for us all. In order to see ourselves, we must appropriate the vision of others. In sum, it is only the other’s categories that will let me be an object for my own perception. I see myself as I conceive others might see it. In order to forge a self, I must do so from outside.

For this reason above, what Bakhtin calls “outsideness” is an important term. The term is not only spatial, but also temporal: it is only from a position outside something that it can be perceived in categories that complete it in time and fix it in space. In order to be perceived as a whole, as something finished, a person or object must be shaped in the time/space categories of

---

534 Ibid., 14-21.

the other, and that is possible only when the person or object is perceived from the position of “outsideness.” An event cannot be wholly known, cannot be seen from inside its own unfolding as an event. 

As a result, to understand creatively, it is very important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding – in time, in space, and in culture. Outsideness is not an obstacle to understanding but the condition of a deeper and more genuine understanding, a creative understanding. Bakhtin says “It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly.” Outsideness is thus the condition of dialogue and hence of understanding, for only dialogue can fathom the full meaning potential of a text. The notion “meaning potential” denotes a particularity within a temporal process that is not exhausted by its own moment of existence, and in this sense is not finalized. In hermeneutical practice, interpreting the text in new contexts thus becomes an occasion for exploring the potentials of the work in a way not available to its original authors and readers.

Vanhoozer, based on Bakhtin’s dialogism, develops the notion of creative understanding theologically. As the canon reveals the potential hidden in the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament, namely, Jesus Christ, theology seeks a deeper understanding of the potential meaning of the gospel implicit in the canon as a whole. “Creative understanding thus insists on the

---

536 Ibid., 30-31.
537 Bakhtin, “Response to a Question,” 7.
538 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 352.
normativity of the canon and on the necessity of outsideness in order to plumb the depths of its meaning.” In the same way, the wisdom of the doctrinal direction gleaned from Scripture is understood even more when we seek to continue the theo-drama in new scenes and situations. The development of doctrine is thus a matter of improvising with a canonical script.

In conclusion, Vanhoozer argues theology, like good improvisation, never forgets; doctrine must enable us to participate in the same theo-dramatic action to which the Scripture attests, or else it blocks the divine offer. Yet the form of our participation is not dictated by the past. Instead, the dialogue about how to continue the play in new settings leads to a deeper appreciation of the play’s potential, to the ways in which its meaning may be extended into new situations, and hence to creative understanding. So to speak, “theology is faith seeking creative understanding.”

Dramatic Theology as the Performance of Church

If theology has the nature of drama, church is a kind of theatre. That is, we turn to the topic of the artfulness of the church ministry, an ecclesiology. Concerning this matter, Vanhoozer gives us a good analogy of drama, following to some extent von Balthasar. As shown in previous sections, his thesis is that the understanding that faith seeks is dramatic.

For Vanhoozer, in the drama of salvation, church becomes the theatre. The church’s role in the drama of redemption is to present the body of Christ. The nature of Christ’s presence is at the heart of an understanding of the sacraments and church alike. Here, Vanhoozer raises a

540 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 353.

541 Ibid., 354.

542 Ibid., 407.
question, “the life of the church may consist of deed-words and symbolic actions, but is the church a sacrament?”543 His answer is “no” because Christ’s presence does not depend on the church’s performance. On the contrary, the church is an active mimesis of the body of Christ.544

Concerning the Trinity, the Father is the playwright and producer of the action; the son is the climax and summation of the action. Especially, Vanhoozer emphasizes the role of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who unites us to Christ, is the dresser of our biblical lines, and the prop masters who gives gifts (accessories) to each church member, equipping us to play our parts.545

While the Holy Spirit is the primary director who oversees the global production, it is the pastor who bears the primary responsibility for overseeing local performances. Vanhoozer explains the role of the pastor as follows:

Ideally, the pastor is also a theologian. In any event, the pastor is also a player in the drama who directs as much by examples as by precept. The director is the mediator between the script and the actors. […] The first commandment of the director is obedience to the text. […] The director’s work is primarily that of communication: to the actors about the meaning of the script and then, indirectly through the actors, to the audience about the meaning of the play. The church communicates the meaning of the play through its bodily action.546

In speaking of “directing is not dictating,” Vanhoozer presents the primary task of the director, after helping people to understand the play, is to help each player grow into his or her part. This is largely a matter of enabling the players to see their identity as “in Christ,” and perhaps of criticizing mechanical acting. His re-describing theology through metaphor “drama” is impressive and helps us to capture the sense of theology in the light of artfulness.

543 Ibid., 408.
544 Ibid., 409.
545 Ibid., 448.
546 Ibid., 449.
III. Summary

In chapter three, I explored that Horace Bushnell appropriated metaphor for theology, and in so doing helped to provide a theological rationale for story as a kind of extended metaphor. This present chapter shows that Vanhoozer builds on some of Bushnell’s understandings, and extends the notion of story to include drama, an ongoing action in which the congregation is enrolled. More specifically I examined the way of doing theology as faith seeking creative understanding in two categories: a methodology to construct a theology creatively, and then theological ethics as a way of responding to God creatively. In the first section, I dealt with Vanhoozer’s suggestion, *theology as God’s communicative action* with various aids of philosophy, theology and literary theories, and then examined two important notions: *improvisation* and *creative understanding* for today’s performance at new stages. In Kevin Vanhoozer’s works, especially *the Drama of Doctrine*, I find a solid theological foundation for preaching as a theological-aesthetic task. That is, the incorporating work of both theological and aesthetical dimensions for preaching can be seen in a dramatic fashion.

For Vanhoozer, theology is foremost God’s communicative action. In this sense, Christians must neither think of God apart from the Scripture nor the Scripture apart from God. The Bible belongs to God and hence is authoritative for the church. Moreover, God is doing more in the Scripture than simply “revealing.” God’s communicative acts include various speech-acts like promises, commands, warnings, laws, and so forth. In addition, while sharing the agenda of Jesus Christ as the primal form of divine revelation with von Balthasar, Vanhoozer reframes the aesthetic concept of Jesus through the literary forms and genres of the Bible. That is, the form of Jesus can be firstly mediated through the form of the Bible, not through the form of the church or any others. In his distinction of postconservative theology from both conservative
and postliberal theologies, the importance of the literary forms of the Bible as the mediation of the form of Jesus Christ is obvious. In sum, the Bible as divine script is not only to show the performance of triune God for humanity, but also to ask us to participate in the drama of God and to improvise creatively our own performance based on faithful reception of divine performance.

Simply speaking, the performance of Jesus Christ in the drama of God, his giving and receiving towards humanity is a model, a dramatic model that is not static, but the dynamic event of drama. That is to say, any interaction with God has to do with a dynamic drama of God. Then today’s performance should continually remind itself that the performance of Jesus Christ is the crux of today’s performance of the Church. In order for the performance of both theology and the Church to remain faithful, it must always have its gaze upon the life of Jesus Christ mediated through the Scripture. Thus, failure to recognize this dramatic nature of theology will lead to a discontinuity between theoretical study of theology and practical performance in public, and between yesterday and today.

My point is that if the nature of theology is dramatic, preaching should be also dramatic and the dramatic preaching has a formative power to conform the listeners to the form of Jesus Christ. In other words, dramatic preaching is to participate in the drama of God via aesthetic routes. Thus, the last chapter will discuss how preaching ministry as a dramatic perspective forms Christian identity in terms of aesthetic dimensions.
CHAPTER SIX: DRAMATIC PREACHING – COMBINING BEST OF THE NEW HOMILETIC WITH ORGANIC FORM, MOVEMENT, AND GOD

Introduction

In the previous chapters I have been considering preaching as a theological-aesthetic task that can be developed in the dramatic perspective. From the perspective of theological aesthetics, I explored the world of metaphor that is a profound means of doing theology aesthetically. Then picking up John’s Gospel to see how John delivers the gospel, I found the way that the situation of John’s Gospel is intertwined with the ministry of Jesus Christ. That is, John’s Gospel is a two-level drama that is faithful to what John has witnessed in the ministry of Jesus Christ, yet creatively gives direction to his community members based on his witness of Jesus Christ. In this sense, John is an excellent improviser. Similarly, a 19th century preacher, Horace Bushnell is also an important figure who takes seriously Scripture’s own claims, yet at the same time creatively relates those claims to contemporary setting by recognizing both metaphorical power of language and imaginative method of theology. Since the 1950s, the emergence of the New Homiletic has been an aesthetic movement against propositional-cognitive approach to preaching. In spite of its contributions, however, I proposed the need to recover God in preaching to keep God at the center of preaching. The alternative way to preach aesthetically is to follow the analogy of drama in which the previous chapter immersed itself.

In this present chapter, I will bring together all examined before in order to propose dramatic preaching that combines the best of the New Homiletic with organic form, movement,
and God. If preaching as a theological-aesthetic task is in fact dramatic, it attempts to participate in the drama of God, what God is doing and speaking in the world, and it helps the listeners to conform to the form of Jesus Christ. Put it another way, both participation and formation are important purposes of dramatic preaching. These two notions are different but inseparable. To participate in the drama of God is to be formed in the image of God or the form of Jesus Christ. Some characteristics of dramatic preaching must be intrinsic in effecting both the participation and the formation. To this end, the chapter consists of three sections: first, I will propose some elements of dramatic preaching in terms of both participation and formation. Dramatic preaching as a theological-aesthetic task is a Christian practice or performance for participation and formation solidified by the divine script of the Bible. Second, I will attempt to combine the aesthetic dimensions of the New Homiletic with theological dimensions of preaching: theological genres and theological structure. My premise is that when aesthetic elements of preaching like sermon forms, languages, imagination, human experiences and genres are combined with theological dimensions, dramatic preaching can be participatory and formative. Lastly, a sample sermon will be discussed in terms of dramatic proposal of preaching and will be followed by how to teach preaching in the dramatic perspective. This pedagogy for preaching is not a “teacher-centered” model nor a “learner-centered” model but a “learning-centered practice.”

I. Dramatic Preaching as a Faithful and Creative Performance

My purpose here is to identify how dramatic preaching is effective for the participation and the formation. However, it is not to give a set of rules that apply to all sermons, nor is it to name the components of good preaching. It is, rather, to take up some dramatic elements that may be employed in various ways and combinations. In what follows, based on two purposes –
“participation in the drama of God” and “formation,” I will present three dramatic features around preaching: formation of Christian identity for participation in the drama of God, faithfulness to the Scripture, and creativity for contemporary listeners.

1. Formation of Christian Identity for Participation

If the Christian life is “performance” in a divine-human theatre, we are in the realm not of propositions alone but of stories and action. To speak of action is to emphasize the role of the actor. It means that script and performance are equally necessary, though not equally authoritative. Paraphrasing Kant’s aesthetics, Vanhoozer writes “Biblical script without ecclesial performance is empty; ecclesial performance without biblical script is blind.”\(^{547}\) Homiletically speaking, *dramatic form without theological language can be blind, and theological language without dramatic form can be empty.*

Here the key word is “formation.” In theatre whether a performance is successful or not is determined by how well the actor/actress prepared his/her character. Likewise in theology, the successful performance of a believer takes place in a life lived and depends upon how she/he is spiritually *formed.* From the viewpoint of theo-drama, Vanhoozer writes “Doctrine serves spiritual formation by cultivating the right intellectual habits: habits of the theo-dramatic imagination.”\(^{548}\) Spiritual formation begins with recognition of what God has done for me and for all the people of God: “I am *called* (by the Father), I am *crucified* (with the Son), I am

\(^{547}\) Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 362.

conformed (to the image of the Son by the Spirit)." The ultimate aim of spiritual formation is to be “in Christ,” the identity of theo-drama. Vanhoozer sums up the point as follows:

Doctrine serves the project of spiritual formation by helping us better understand both the action and the actor in which and in whom we discover our true identities. Christians are persons “in Christ,” persons whom the Spirit unites to Christ and persons in whom the Spirit forms Christ. In comparison with this theological description of who we are, the prevailing identity politics of our time appears positively idolatrous to the extent that it assigns ultimacy to what is only of penultimate significance. Rather than reinforcing markers of secondary identity such as gender, race, and class, then theology should instead concentrate on spiritual formation: the formation of the life of Christ in his disciples through the ministry of word and Spirit. Doctrine provides direction for living in ways that are consistent with one’s true identity as a disciple and, in so doing, grounds the identity of the disciple in the identity of Jesus Christ.

Vanhoozer’s point is very clear and important. Doctrine is not just a matter of methods and procedures, but of habits: those propensities to see, think, and judge in particular imaginative ways that have been learned through an apprenticeship to canonical practices.

Here I raise a question, how are we formed? It is true that the Scripture and doctrine have formative and transformative power. But the concrete, and most important, vehicles to train our identities are worship and preaching. That is, both worship and preaching in dramatic settings are located in the place of “formation.” Thus, I will examine how those ministries, especially preaching, can form one’s identity in Christ more specifically in terms of theo-drama. Before examining preaching, in what follows, I will briefly look over the formative power of worship.

549 Ibid., 396.
550 Ibid., 392-92.
551 Ibid., 396. In his book The Hermeneutics of Doctrine Anthony Thiselton broadly examines the formative power of doctrine in terms of interaction between hermeneutics and doctrine. Thiselton, however, has an unsatisfied feeling about Vanhoozer’s work because even though Vanhoozer gives a few lines on the role of the Spirit, the role of apostolic tradition, the role of the church, the role of the canonical text, even on “otherness,” but he feels none of this engages with the resources of hermeneutical theory and practice. See Anthony C. Thiselton, The Hermeneutics of Doctrine (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Ederdmans, 2007), 80.
Formative Power of Worship

In his chapter “Forming Habits,” Wells presents the role of habit and training in relation to ethics. “The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton” - this is the Duke of Wellington’s famous reference. According to Wells, Wellington’s point was that Eton had played a pivotal role in forming the character and training habits of thought and action that influenced decisively the later moment of decision and action in battle. Wells observes, “The moral life is more about Eton than it is about Waterloo…. The heart of ethics lies in the formation of character.” He also adds, “The time of ethics lies in the formation and training.”

According to Wells, for Christians worship is the central practice by which the moral imagination is formed. It is the key form of discipleship training and constitutes character-forming habits of action. Intercessory prayer contributes to the formation of the virtues of patience, of persistence, and of learning to put oneself in the place of others. The sacrament of baptism is to learn the humble attitude toward God and appreciate Christ’s death and resurrection in a participatory act of identification with Christ. The shared meal of peace in the Lord’s Supper is to nurture the reconciliatory habit of living with others. Participation in the Eucharist fosters the habit of seeking to be formed in the image of Christ. Comparing worship with the training ground of the playing fields of Eton, Wells states that worship is like play within a game, it has its own rules and customs, and it also looks forward to eschatological fulfillment. Wells writes, “The benefits of worship […] are not necessarily helpful in this world. But they offer training for

---

552 Wells, Improvisaiton, 23-85.
553 Ibid., 73-74.
554 Ibid., 75.
entering another world, the kingdom of God. Heaven is the time when the game becomes reality. This is what it means for the kingdom to break in."555

It may sound disrespectful to describe worship as a game.556 But this would be a misunderstanding of the purpose of games. Games are, for example, a very helpful form of training. A game lasts for a short time. It is understood to be a suspension of conventional rules. It is a project, rather than a life’s endeavor. It is thus relatively safe. Because it is safe, one has the freedom to experiment, make mistakes, and discover hidden gifts and talents. By playing a game over and over again one may develop habits and establish skills. One may also perceive analogies with situations in conventional life to which those skills and talents may be transferred and applied. One may quickly see that games are a well-attested method of training for all kinds of practices, and that “worship is a game that trains us for heaven.”557 In a similar way, Gadamer also asserts:

We have seen that play does not have its being in the player’s consciousness or attitude, but on the contrary play draws him into its dominion and fills him with its spirit. The player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him. This is all the more the case where the game is itself “intended” as such a reality – for instance, the play which appears as presentation for an audience.558

This nature of play points to its similarity with worship. The work of worship has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The “subject” of the experience of worship, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of

555 Ibid., 85.
556 As we have seen earlier, Vanhoozer’s critique on Gadamer’s textual hermeneutics is right in terms of the authorial intention. However, I feel when we apply the notion of play to worship setting, Gadamer’s play is well fit into it because worship is an practice to presuppose the presence of the Spirit, that is, the divine intention. While when it comes to text-related interpretation, there is far distance between the author and readers, in the cases of the ministries of worship and preaching, we may call the Sache itself the Spirit.
557 Wells, Improvisaiton, 85.
the person who experiences it but the worship itself. This is the point at which the mode of being at play becomes significant. In sum, as indicated in the case of worship, both formation and participation are inseparable but distinguishable.

2. Faithfulness to the Scripture

In this section, more specifically, I will examine how the preaching event forms Christian identity from the dramatic perspective. In other words, my point is that dramatic preaching is to participate in the divine-human event and to help the listeners to conform to the form of Jesus Christ. According to Paul Scott Wilson,

Preaching is transformational because this is what it means to have a relationship with the Divine who is for us: Individuals are restored to what God intended, and communities are shaped and empowered for discipleship. Transformation may be something that preachers can assist, but it is God’s activity that is transformative. Such is the nature of God who encounters listeners in and through the proclaimed Word with life-changing power that makes saints out of sinners, and new creations out of the old.

God is to form our identity as the image of God (or the form of God), to reform our identity deformed by sin, and to conform to Jesus Christ by the Spirit in and through the proclaimed Word. The authority of formation belongs to God. Preachers in dramatic preaching are assisting witnesses through whom God is active and transformative. I believe that dramatic preaching should be faithfully formed by the Scripture first and foremost. Before delivering the gospel, dramatic preaching is required to be formed in the form of Jesus revealed through the Bible, not least his death and resurrection. It leads us to some sub-elements: the role of a preacher as the interpreter of the Bible, sermon language, and theological structure in a sermon.

559 Ibid., 102.
560 Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, 69.
Among these three elements, the last two will be discussed fully later. Here I focus on the first one – the preacher as the interpreter.

The Role of Preacher as the Interpreter of the Bible

In the Gospel of John, according to J. Louis Martyn, the author announces to his community that the Word’s dwelling among us and our beholding his glory are not events that transpired only in the past. These events to which John bears witness happen to both the original level of Jesus Christ and the contemporary level of the drama.\(^{561}\) In Martyn’s view, “their transpiring on both levels of the drama is, to a large extent, the good news itself.”\(^{562}\) Then, John suggests that his own community members live in continuity with previous generations insofar as they have all “seen” the glory of God (John 1:14). The community members now see the glory of God through old texts that “are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30).” In this sense, the role of John as the interpreter of old texts is striking that in his attempt, the Word was with God in the beginning, with ancient people in the past, and at the same time also with us right now in that the Word continues to speak and do as a communicative God that is “living and active” (Hebrew 4:12). If the Gospel of John is a role model, just as the ancient author, John, and his community lived in continuity with their predecessors, the present preacher and church community also lives in continuity with ancestors who gathered to worship and to listen to the Word of God mediated through the Scripture.

\(^{561}\) Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 143.

\(^{562}\) *Ibid.*
Then how did John bridge the gap between old tradition and his time? I am not a professional biblical scholar who studies how John interpreted the Old Testament in his writing. In my observation, however, the author of John’s Gospel is a faithful improviser who writes the drama of God in the Fourth Gospel, faithfully to the old tradition and creatively to the new situation. In other words, John collects many resources, studies them, finds a meaning, and writes the Gospel based on the new perspective when directing his readers. He is not freed from the divine meaning of the Old Testament, that is, the meaning/s attached to it by the community of faith. The most important hermeneutic rule given by John is the identity of the Johannine community on the basis of Jesus’ identity. John found divine meaning in the life, ministry, cross, and the empty tomb of Jesus Christ. In John, this is what it means to be faithfully engaged with his Scripture, the Old Testament.

It is similar with Horace Bushnell. For Bushnell, reading the Bible and finding its meaning is to give God the honor. In his interpretative theory, it is crucial to make a right positioning of the interpreter with the text. The interpreter is open and receptive to the impressions coming from the text. That is, the engagement between text and reader transforms the subjectivity of the interpreter. The role of the interpreter is not dominantly to control the interpretation process but to receive the authorial intention.

In this regard, the divine Authorial meaning is not the authorial meaning that is advocated by the Romanticism in reproducing the inner experience of the author, nor is it that advocated by historical criticism in reconstructing the real meaning by blowing away the layers of traditional readings. Rather, the interpretative task is to access the Authorial meaning through forms or images given by symbols of the Bible. The interpretation for preaching is not an arbitrary meaning-decision of aestheticism but an art work to be formed by the gospel of God’s
communicative action. It is good for spiritual growth. N. T. Wright writes the importance of reading and studying the Bible as follows:

Reading and studying scripture has been seen as central to how we are to grow in the love of God; how we come to understand God and his truth more fully; and how we can develop the moral muscle to live in accordance with the gospel of Jesus even when everything seems to be pulling the other way. Since these remain vital aspects of Christian living, the Bible has been woven into the fabric of normal Christian life at every point. 563

To participate in the drama of God and to form the listeners in preaching means, foremost, to engage faithfully with what God has done for ancestors recorded in the Scripture. The notion of the divine Authorial meaning is not a denial of historical-critical, socio-scientific, feministic, post-colonial, and literary treatments of the text. Rather, the main point is the interpretation for preaching is not a science but an art for performance. Put it another way, for preachers, the first principle of exegeting a biblical text is “with” and “for” Christ, not “about” Christ. Grounded in the context of the gospel of Jesus Christ, a preacher who interprets the text and proclaims his sermon is an artist of theo-drama. As observed in Vanhoozer, divine Authorial meaning can be performed in different settings in an improvisational fashion. It ensures the focal point of preaching is the Triune God. Thus, dramatic preaching is a faithful engagement to the Scripture.

3. Creativity and Contemporary Listeners

Now I turn to the creativity for listeners. As seen above, the creative preacher is not looking for new thoughts that have never been thought of before; rather, he looks for new insights that may have slept in the biblical text but have neither been awakened nor performed by the preacher and the congregation. As a sermon preparation task is undertaken, the creative

preacher is open to these new insights in the text. Discovering creative insights is fundamentally the result of the creative nature of interpretation. Creativity is not imposing new understandings on the text but discovering new insights within the text. That is, dramatic preaching that is concerned with performing the biblical text in the life issues of the listener can be creative. Such preaching understands the human condition, finds unique or special ways to deliver truth, and is open to new and fresh ideas in the text. Furthermore it is willing to experience new ways of thinking about articulating the meaning of the text to help the listeners perform the gospel in their own situation. Thus creative exegesis that leads to new insights from the text is both faithful to the text while at the same time discovering fresh meanings, understanding, or insights within the text.

Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of “dialogism,” Vanhoozer develops what the creative understanding is. According to Bakhtin, interpreting the text in new contexts becomes an occasion for exploring the potentials of the work in a way not available to its original authors and readers. Theologically speaking, it means that as the Scripture reveals the potential hidden in the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament, namely, Jesus Christ, theology seeks a deeper understanding of the gospel implicit in the canon as a whole. In a similar vein, the author of John’s Gospel is the person who discovered the meaning potential, Jesus Christ, from the Old Testament and witnessed Christ to his community. Bushnell’s imaginative theological method is also fitting in the creativity of theology. Metaphorical understanding gives him a diverse possibility of discussing God and theology. Homiletically speaking, creativity in preaching does not abandon the importance of propositional elements of sermons but seeks to reveal more than dry repetitions of didactic understandings. Creativity engages an understanding that is faithful to the text but expresses novelty in the way it is understood or expressed. This newness is influential for the listeners. In the case of John’s Gospel, the imagery plays a central role in
developing the drama creatively for the Johannine community. That is, aesthetic tools like imagery, metaphor, and figurative languages are the foundation for the drama of God and for the listening of the community members. The images employed by John are relevant and creative for his situation. In this sense, we preachers need to develop the “gospel-driven rhetoric” that is in dialogue with poetics, rhetoric, composition theories and the like not because of art for art’s sake but because of art for God’s sake.

According to Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, preachers not only require facility in interpreting biblical texts, they also require the ability to exegete their congregations. To interpret congregational contexts is helpful to address a creative preaching. That is, the exegesis of the congregation is essential in choosing “words” that convey dimensions of “the Word” and finding appropriate human expressions that relate aspects of divine intention. Tisdale suggests some questions to be considered in the exegesis: (1) the questions about God in a local congregation. What is the operative view of God within the congregation? Which person of the Trinity is most emphasized in a community? Is God viewed as immanent or transcendent? (2) The questions about human beings: Are human beings sinful? Do Humans have any potential to save themselves or are they totally fallen? Are Humans created in the image of God? (3) The questions about the church: Is the church considered as a hospital for the broken or as a saving life boat for refugees or as a subway station to wait for heaven or as a holy community of saints?

In this way, creative engagement with the text and the congregation is essential for dramatic preaching that participates in the drama of God and to form the listeners in the image of

---

564 Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).
Jesus Christ. As the task of biblical text exegesis is not a static or fixed work, likewise the exegesis of congregation is dynamic moving in flux. Therefore, creativity required to interpret both the text and the congregation is a means for dramatic preaching as a theological-aesthetic task.

II. The Practice of Dramatic Preaching

If dramatic preaching is to participate in the drama of God and to lead the listeners in conforming to the image of God, before delivery, the preaching should be formed by the form of the gospel. In this regard, sermonic genre and sermon form will be discussed with the reference to theological dimensions in this section. In what follows, I will propose two things: “theological genres in preaching” with regard to sermonic genres and “theological structure of preaching” in terms of sermon form.

1. Theological Genres: Teaching and Proclamation

In the New Testament we can find the words used for the concept of preaching. As the testimony given by Jesus, or by the early Christians, or by Christians today, witnessing involves a ministry of word, which becomes even more clearly a ministry of the Word of God when we begin to see that the very “event” is speaking, God’s speaking. God continues to speak in Jesus (the supreme witness), and in and through the church (the privileged witness) as well. Since the only link with the past stages of the Christ-event is through the faith of past generations of believers, the community must guard the traditions of that belief and bear witness to them from one generation to another.

For this reason, the most common verbs to describe the activity of preaching are kerussein, meaning “to herald or proclaim,” and evangelizesthai, meaning “to announce good
news.” Accordingly, the content of preaching is “proclamation” (*kerygma*) or “the good news, the gospel” (*euangelion*). Studies on the related verbal usage indicate that proclamation refers to the stage of first proclamation of the gospel; it is aimed at bringing faith into existence and leading to conversion and entry into the community. However, in the community, “teaching” (*didache*) emerges as an urgent task. It is to denominate that ensuing process of extending the understanding of the faith he/she has embraced. It adds further information about the person and activity and teaching of Jesus, more detailed instruction about life in the Christian community, its meaning and its demands.\(^{566}\) In short, in the ministry of preaching, we see that the dual aspects of proclamation and teaching remain central to Christian preaching.

H. Grady Davis, in his *Design for Preaching*, also argues that preaching has two purposes: converting non-Christians to Christianity and building up the faith of the believers.\(^{567}\) Davis believes that *kerygma* was used for converting and *didache* was used for instruction, but Davis argues that the difference is not a matter of content, only a matter of function.\(^{568}\) He writes that “Christians did not preach one message and teach another. In the New Testament the *kerygma* is the content of both.”\(^{569}\) Thus, preaching is for the proclamation of the gospel for conversion to the faith, while teaching is for the understanding of the implications of the gospel that is preached. “Teaching is needed in order to understand the meaning and the basis of new existence, to explicate the content of faith, to make life conform to faith.”\(^{570}\) *Kerygma*, therefore,


\(^{567}\) Davis, *Design for Preaching*, 106.

\(^{568}\) Ibid., 109.

\(^{569}\) Ibid., 123.

\(^{570}\) Ibid., 124.
is presupposed as the basis for teaching and even the content of that which is taught. The difference between *kerygma* and *didache* here is not a matter of content, but a matter of form and listener.\(^{571}\)

In a similar vein, Paul Scott Wilson also presents a clear explanation about the relationship between proclamation and teaching in preaching, developing various genres of each from the Bible and the history of preaching. According to Wilson, “the most powerful sermons may be those that combine teaching and proclamation, thereby nurturing a relationship with God, and do more than communicate about God.”\(^{572}\) That is, preaching should be recovered as a “dual art of teaching and proclamation.” Wilson says:

> Teaching provides what people need to know about who God is; it helps them recognize God in their own lives and the world around them. […] Teaching gives information *about* God for listeners to make sense of their experience of God, but teaching has limits. Teaching arguably stops short of providing people an encounter with God, though these matters are never fully in human control. Moreover, teaching leaves people with a sense of duty. […] Proclamation introduces people to God. Like a sacrament, it offers God to the people. Acts of proclamation speak the heart of the gospel to listeners in loving, passionate, infectious ways such that in and through them they encounter God.\(^{573}\)

> Preaching is not only communicating information, or speaking about the Bible, the gospel, theology, or even God; it also consists of proclaiming the gospel in the Spirit and in power. From this relationship between teaching and proclamation, it is obvious that proclamation builds itself up on solid teaching, emerges from it, and cannot do without it. Thus, Wilson deals

\(^{571}\) Davis adds an additional form of speech called “therapy.” See *Ibid.*, 127.

\(^{572}\) Paul Scott Wilson, *Setting Words on Fire: Putting God at the Center of the Sermon* (Nashville : Abingdon Press, 2008), 80.

\(^{573}\) *Ibid.*, xi.
with three theologians to help readers distinguish proclamation from theology, or proclamation from theological teaching: Emil Brunner, Gerhard Ebeling, and Gerhard O. Forde.\textsuperscript{574}

In the distinction of proclamation from teaching, preaching can be a theological and aesthetic task because the genres organically stem from the Scripture itself, manifest the theological essence of the gospel to be preached, and are interwoven with each other to appeal the listeners rhetorically and theologically. In and through both proclamation and teaching, preachers can do justice to the “objectivity which proceeds from the subject” as well as to “subjectivity which gains portrayal in its objective realization and validity.”\textsuperscript{575} That is, preaching requires \textit{cognitive-poetic imagination},\textsuperscript{576} in which the cognition in question makes full use of not only the intellect but also the imagination.

As a cognitive-propositional dimension in preaching, teaching has the function to be detached, objective, factual, dispassionate, thorough, coherent, and mature. The function of teaching is like the epic mode of theology. Proclamation, as a poetic-imaginative mode of the lyric, is emotional, personal, passionate, and above all subjective, theologically \textit{divine-subjective}. That is, the proclamation is not merely the preacher’s work in God’s name, but God’s offer made directly and personally to the listeners, for preaching does not belong to human performers but to the Triune God. God is the main performer/preacher. A good preaching, therefore, synthesizes the strengths of both teaching and proclamation. As a poetic-imaginative mode, proclamation in preaching does justice to the roles of the passionate human and divine preachers, the way that events arise from the hearts and minds and actions of the human and divine performers, rather

\textsuperscript{574} \textit{Ibid.}, 84-87.

\textsuperscript{575} Hegel, \textit{Aesthetics}, 1039. Cited from Ben Quash, “Drama and the Ends of Modernity,” 149.

\textsuperscript{576} Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 278.
than from impersonal external forces. As a cognitive-propositional mode, teaching in preaching as the epic mode perceives an object that has reason and validity beyond the subjectivity of the preacher. In sum, these two genres of teaching (the epic) and proclamation (the lyric) in dramatic preaching will help people to know God with their heads and to love God with their hearts. Consequently preaching becomes a theological-aesthetical task that participates in the drama of God and forms the listeners in the image of God.

2. Theological Structure as Plot: Trouble and Grace

Now we turn to the importance of theological structure as plot in preaching. It is truly important to use multiple poetic languages and propositional statements for preaching. However, sermonic language without theological structure/form is blind, for as Paul Wilson mentions, “preaching is an event of encounter with God that leaves the congregation with stronger faith and deeper commitment to doing God’s work.” That is, preaching is not just an aesthetic task but also essentially a theological work. It intends to place God at the center of preaching in terms of both its content and its form. The two, content and form, are inseparable. Actually each sermon has its own unique form. The sermon form is as important as the content. In spite of its organic nature of sermon form, however, preaching requires a solid theological structure of preaching as its grammar. Put it another way, preaching as the Word-event is best formed through theological plot. Then, the operative question is what the plot/grammar with which we preachers can shape a sermon form theologically and organically is.

As seen above, the Bible as a whole has plot, as do the various biblical stories and the parables of Jesus. With the dynamic and sequential events in its plot, the biblical stories and the

---

parables allow the listeners to see the new and unfamiliar context for life in a metaphorical fashion. That is, in the parables and stories of Jesus the gospel is delivered in and through theological plot. Likewise, proclaiming the gospel in our preaching is also required to employ theological plot through which Word-event happens anew.

According to Wilson, the movement from trouble to grace, which comes from the law/gospel school of homiletical thought, can be a theological plot to support many models and serve as a deep grammar of them all.\footnote{Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, 98. Wilson broadly examines the history of law/gospel school. For more detail, see Ibid., 73-100.} Among many contributors to the law/gospel school, Herman G. Stuempfe and Eugene Lowry should be mentioned. It was Stuempfe who delineated two kinds of law and two kinds of gospel: one on a vertical and the other on a horizontal axis.\footnote{Herman G. Stuempfe Jr., Preaching Law and Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).}

For Stuempfe, along the vertical axis, the law functions as a hammer of judgment, and the corresponding gospel is forgiveness. On the horizontal axis, however, the law is a “mirror of existence” that reflects the human fallen condition: accidents, illness, anxiety, and despair,\footnote{Ibid., 21-32.} and the correlating gospel is “antiphon to existence” that overturns the worldly expectations.\footnote{Ibid., 47-61.} His horizontal understanding helped preachers to describe the law as a situation of brokenness in the world and the gospel as overturning the powers of this world.

Drawing on Milton Crum’s “dynamic factors,”\footnote{Milton Crum Jr., Manual on Preaching: A New Process of Sermon Development (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1977), 19-21. Crum writes that “If the sermon is to move the listener, not only must the verbal content be structured with movement, but the verbal content must also contain Dynamic Factors which facilitate the movement” (Ibid., 19, Italics original). He identifies the “dynamic factors” as follows: symptomatic behavior; root;} Lowry develops a narrative plot in
which a sermon begins with a felt discrepancy and moves toward a resolution. Lowry suggests five steps of homiletical plot: upsetting the equilibrium – analyzing the discrepancy – disclosing the key to resolution – experiencing the gospel – anticipating the consequences. Later, in The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery, Lowry revises the plot by reducing five steps to four in one loop: conflict – complication – sudden shift – unfolding, and suggests the homiletical plot in terms of musical character: “One could speak of the basic musicality of any sermon. Music, after all, is also an event-in-time art form, with melody, harmony, and rhythm coming, sequentially. No one builds a song; it is shaped and performed.”

In short, the theological plot in preaching reflects the movement of the gospel, the movement of faith, from despair to hope, from exile to return, from crucifixion to resurrection. That is, in preaching theological plot can be understood as movement from trouble to grace. In his book, Telling the Truth, Frederick Buechner well articulates the movement:

The gospel is bad news before it is good news. It is the news that man is a sinner. […] That is the tragedy. But it is also the news that he is loved anyway. […] That is the comedy. Any yet, so what? […] the news of the Gospel is that extraordinary things happen to him just as in fairy tales extraordinary things happen. […] That is the fairy tale. All together they are the truth.

For Wilson, the movement is the structure of the sermon or the theological plot that is resulting consequences; gospel content; and new results. According to Wilson, Crum’s influence may be found in the works of Eugene Lowry, Richard Lischer, and Paul Scott Wilson. See Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, 87; Richard Lischer, A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981).

583 Lowry, Homiletical Plot, 29-56.

584 Lowry, The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery, 55.

conceived as a circle. In his earlier book *Imagination of the Heart*, Wilson writes about the structure of the sermon as a circle:

> We begin at the top and move down through the law or judgment. By the time we reach the lowest point we have also reached the depth of our awareness of our sin. The lowest point is the reversal point. From here on our direction is reversed as we develop the gospel or grace that overturns the world. The possibility of creating a spark is enhanced by the simple juxtaposition of these two movements.⁵⁸⁶

The tension of trouble and grace within a sermon shows that preaching as event is metaphorical in itself. “By juxtaposing trouble and grace, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, a third identity is generated, an identity of faith, hope, and love of God and neighbor.”⁵⁸⁷ So to speak, preachers are the sacred-metaphor-makers (that is the makers of metaphors that are for sacred purpose) who help the listeners experience the divine spark through polar opposites: trouble and grace. This is the theological structure of dramatic preaching.

Wilson develops the word-eventful plot of preaching more systematically in relation to the two kinds of proclamation. From the perspective of Brunner and Ebeling, Wilson says that while proclamation of the gospel is a goal and purpose of preaching, proclamation of God’s word of direction, correction, condemnation, and destruction is also possible.⁵⁸⁸ Using Brunner’s talk of God’s meeting us in the law and Ebeling’s double certainty, Wilson claims two kinds of proclamation, “One that is less complete or fulsome that functions to invoke the law, and one that functions to bestow the gospel.”⁵⁸⁹ It does not mean that God’s word is just law or trouble,

---


⁵⁸⁸ Wilson, *Setting Words on Fire*, 87-88.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 88.
or the word of law is the origin of Christian preaching. Wilson explains the intentions of two kinds of proclamation, law/trouble and gospel:

The term *trouble* avoids some of the negative and inappropriate associations of law and Old Testament and gospel as New Testament. The word *trouble* is broader than law: it includes human failure to obey God as well as the tragedy of innocent human suffering; in fact, it includes everything that points to the fallen nature of creation. *Trouble in its simplest definition puts the burden on humanity to act.* […] Even if we were literally able to do what is required, we would still resent the law and break it in our hearts. The law thus becomes our death sentence by our failure to keep it. By contrast, *gospel in its simplest definition puts the burden on God in Christ, who has already accomplished what is needed.* By his righteousness, he has fulfilled the law, and he gives us his innocence in exchange for our failure.\footnote{590}

Therefore, as an emotionally charged form of communication, proclamation is revealed in both trouble and grace. In the proclamation of trouble, God says, “You have sinned.” In the proclamation of the gospel, God says, “I forgive you.” In short, trouble and grace can be viewed as a theological plot and grammar underlying any gospel sermon.

It is also meaningful to see Luke Powery’s examination of the various manifestations of the Holy Spirit in preaching. In *Spirit Speech*, Powery researches the manifestations of the Spirit from African-American tradition: lamentation, celebration, grace, unity, and fellowship.\footnote{591} Here our concern is that the grammar of “trouble” and “grace” is linked to “lament” and “celebration” in that *lament* is a response to *trouble* and *celebration* is a response to *grace*. Powery believes that lament and celebration extend beyond trouble and grace in being actions of worship in and through the Spirit.\footnote{592} The linking of lament to celebration and viewing it as a sermon movement,

\footnote{590} *Ibid.*, 88. Italics original.


parallels law/gospel, trouble/grace, antithesis/thesis, exposing/envisioning sermon patterns proposed by others.  

In my own ethnicity, the similar pair of Han and Heung is found in various traditional arts. In Korean literatures and traditional theatres, Han, a deep feeling that rises out of the unjust experiences of people, is in most cases, juxtaposed with Heung, another feeling of merriment and joy. However, many minjung theologians have paid attention to only one side of Korean sentiments: Han. In homiletic literatures on Korean preaching, the tendency is also obvious. For example, both Jung Young Lee and Sangyil Park deal with Han as the exemplar of Korean sentiment and develop their own homiletic theories upon the cultural uniqueness of Han. It is my regret that in spite of their elaborate endeavor, there is no room for Heung. For them the Heung is just an outcome of resolving the Han. Said another way, their homiletic theories may be too anthropocentric, without enough room for God. God can become merely a medium for resolving the bad feeling of people. More detailed study will be required for developing the Korean ethnic grammar of preaching: Han and Heung. 

In this section my point is that even in Korean tradition as a unique ethnicity, there exists the similar grammar or plot of Han and Heung linked to “trouble” and “grace” from Euro-American and to “lamentation” and “celebration” from African-American traditions. It implies the theological plot of “trouble” and “grace” can be used in various cultural backgrounds for

593 Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, 71-100. 

594 For instance, Samulnori, which uses four folk percussion instruments: “buk,” “janggu,” “jing” and “kkwaenggari,” is music and theatre performed with these instruments. The performance delivers not only the grief but also joy with exciting rhythms of the music. Pansori, a song performance of one singer and one drummer on stage, has a plot moving from Han to Heung with sometimes crying and laughing.

preaching. Moreover, as mentioned above, this theological plot of preaching has the formative power to help people to experience God directly and to see their world in other-worldly terms in and through the preaching event. That is a crucial vehicle showing the form of Jesus Christ who died in trouble and rose again in grace and the essence of the gospel mediated though the literary genres of the Bible.

III. A Sermon Example & Pedagogical Suggestion

In this section, I will evaluate a sermon in terms of dramatic preaching. My choice for a sample sermon is “oldies but goodies” by Melito; the second oldest one in Christian history. After that, it will be discussed how to teach preaching in the dramatic perspective. My point is that as a Christian practice, dramatic preaching can be taught in a learning-centered practice.

1. A Sermon Evaluation

In what follows, I will attempt to explore an old sermon preached by Melito of Sardis around C. E. 165. This sermon was delivered at an all-night vigil on the Jewish Passover in a city that had a much larger Jewish than Christian population. The biblical text is Exodus 12 that is interpreted as a type of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.\(^{596}\)

First of all, in this sermon, Melito focuses on the text itself. For him, the text is not a spring board to discuss his own topic. Melito takes the text seriously and newly shapes it. In the first paragraph, it is clear what will be preached in what follows.

The passage dealing with the Hebrew Exodus has been read out and the words of the mystery have been explained: how the sheep is sacrificed and how the people is saved. So then, my beloved friends, open your minds to understand. Here is the

way in which the mystery of the Passover is new and old, eternal and involved in time, corruptible and incorruptible, mortal and immortal.

The sentence “How the sheep is sacrificed and how the people is saved” is like a so called “theme sentence.” As contemporary homileticians argue, by articulating a theme sentence, Melito clarifies how his sermon will be developed. He stays with the text and re-presents it in a fresh way. Melito describes, for example, the scene of dark deadly night when all the first born were struck down as follows:

If a firstborn child grasps a shadowy body with his hand, he cries out pitiably and fearfully with fright in his soul, “Whom is my hand holding? Whom is my soul afraid of? What darkness is it that encompasses my whole body? If you be my father, help me! If my mother, share my pain! If my brother, address me! If my friend, be well-disposed! If my enemy, depart! For I am a firstborn.” But before the firstborn had fallen silent, the great silence seized him as it said, “You belong to me, firstborn. I, the silence of death, am your fate.” Another of the firstborn, observing that the firstborn were being taken, denied who he was, lest he die bitterly. “I am not a firstborn. I was born the third fruit of my mother’s womb.” But [the angel] could not be deceived. He seized the firstborn, who fell face down in silence. In one fell swoop the firstborn of the Egyptians perished.

Without departing from the text, Melito’s description is fully creative and novel. He is even proficient in employing various genres in preaching. A significant portion of his sermon consists of the genres of “condemnation,” “lamentation,” and “celebration.” In the case of condemnation, Melito writes “Bitter for you the nails which you sharpened. Bitter for you the tongue which you sharpened. Bitter for you the false witnesses which you set up. Bitter for you the bonds which you prepared.” The genre makes the listeners feel naked before God. The genre of lamentation is also found in his sermon. “That was a fearsome sight to see: the mothers

---

597 Concerning the value of a theme sentence in preaching preparation, there is a debate between homileticians. Paul Wilson provides a helpful survey. See Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, 7-24.


599 Ibid., 16.
of the Egyptians with their hair in disarray, the fathers distracted, all wailing aloud terribly in
their own speech, “In one fell swoop we unfortunates have been deprived of our children, even
our firstborn offspring.” By using the genre of lament, Melito delivers the feelings of sorrow
and grief in the eyes of Egyptians to his listeners. It functions like Korean sensitivity of Han. In
Melito’s sermon, the genre of celebration is most fundamental. He proclaims the gospel in
celebrating the humbleness of Jesus as the lamb and proclaiming the victory of Christ against
death.

This is the one who was made flesh in a virgin, hanged upon the wood, entombed
in the earth, raised from the dead, lifted up to the heights of the heavens. He is the
speechless lamb. He is the lamb who was slaughtered. He is the one born of Mary
the beautiful ewe. He is the one who was taken from the flock and dragged to
slaughter and killed at evening and buried at night, who was not crushed on the
cross, was not dissolved into the earth, who rose from the dead and raised
humanity from the grave below.

Melito even concludes his sermon with a magnificent proclamation as follows:

This one is “the Alpha and the Omega,” this one is “the beginning and the end” –
the beginning which cannot be explained and the end which cannot be grasped.
This one is the Christ. This one is the King. This one is he who has risen from the
dead. This one is he who sits on the right hand of the Father. He bears the Father
and is borne by the Father. “To him be the glory and the power to the ends of the
ages, Amen.”

In addition, it is notable that he exegetes the Old Testament as “the prefiguration of the
truth” typologically and interprets it in a Christ-centered way synthetically. For him,
interpretation of the Bible is foremost “for” and “with” Christ, not “about” Christ. In this sense,
his interpretative task is akin to John and Bushnell. Melito writes that “the future
accomplishment may be seen to be more exalted in height, and stronger in power, and beautiful

\[600\text { Ibid., 9.}\]
\[601\text { Ibid., 14.}\]
\[602\text { Ibid., 18.}\]
in appearance and rich in its furnishing, by means of the littleness and corruptibility of the preliminary sketch.” Melito typologically connects the events of the Old Testament to Jesus Christ by observing that “He is the Passover of our salvation. [...] He is the one who was murdered in the person of Abel, bound in the person of Issac, exiled in the person of Jacob, sold in the person of Joseph, exposed in the person of Moses, sacrificed in the person of the lamb, persecuted in the person of David, dishonored in the person of the prophets.” Moreover, for Melito, there is no distinctive line between Israel’s history and his time. That is, as John writes his Gospel as a two-level drama that incorporate the ministry of Jesus and the situation of his community, Melito pays attention to the point that what God has done for the past is still being done by God for the present and will be done for the future. In sum, Melito’s sermon is an excellent example of dramatic preaching proving the phrase “oldies but goodies.” In the next section, I will provide a pedagogical thought with regard to dramatic preaching.

2. Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice

In this brief section, I will provide a draft of a preaching course in terms of dramatic perspective. Before the course description discussed, I want to discuss two things: the possibility of teaching preaching and the changing trend in pedagogical discussion.

“Can preaching be taught?” This is the title of W. Edward Farley’s article. In his article, Farley asks if it is possible to teach preaching. Arguing preaching is a repetitive and imitative art of an authoritative text and doctrine, he writes as follows:

603 Ibid., 10.
604 Ibid., 13-14.
Preaching, like art, calls for a subtle sensibility to what is going on. And because the gospel is good news for ever-new situations, preaching is always a going beyond what has been, involving a creativity that summons imagination and puts it to work. We must conclude, although tentatively and cautiously, that preaching does, in some sense, appear to be an aesthetic art.  

Farley’s focal point is whether aesthetic elements like experience, creativity, and imagination can be taught. He is suspicious of any pedagogical claims that there are techniques for developing creativity, emotional engagement, and imagination. However, he does not deny the possibility of teaching preaching. Actually, his concern is more with the theological dimension of preaching. That is, preaching is not just an aesthetic art but a theological task. According to Farley, “The primary corruption of preaching is the ever-present inclination to preaching something other than gospel – to replace gospel with scriptural texts, moralizing applications, autobiographical blab, and sentimental narration.” Consequently, his conclusion is that homileticians can help students develop some aesthetical elements and rhetorical forms that are essential for preaching and serve the announcement of the gospel in the ministry of preaching. Farley’s concern is akin to what I called “the gospel-driven rhetoric” and Resner’s “reverse-rhetoric.” In this regard, teaching dramatic preaching means teaching preaching as a theological-aesthetic task, in which aesthetic elements are understood in the context of proclaiming the gospel.

Moreover, Christian education scholars also support why teaching preaching should be recognized as a theological-aesthetic task without denying either theology or aesthetics. The

\[606\] Ibid., 175.
\[607\] Ibid.
\[608\] Ibid., 178.
\[609\] Ibid., 179.
recent education concern in curriculum is how to use art and imagination for education. The movement can be traced from John Dewey to Elliot Eisner to Maxine Greene to Maria Harris. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey explains imagination as a way of seeing and feeling with an integrated wholeness. Strange things become the most natural when a new thing is taken with imagination. Diverse and ordinary experiences merge into a new unified experience in imagination. Imagination is required in order for the mind and universe, and the old and new, to meet together. Eisner, in his book, *Educating Artistic Vision*, makes the claim that art is a product of intelligence and he adds that if education neglects the other half of intelligence, it should be corrected. Quoting Susanne Langer, Eisner focuses on the work of art being unique in human life and communicating genuine knowledge, so it cannot be a secondary purpose to achieve other goals. Works of art help us find meanings in other’s experiences in the world of vision. Art also fosters coalition by moving the emotions and expanding our consciousness. Eisner believes that art is able to bring out the whole intellectual potential, and that imagination is the human faculty that enlarges visual possibilities with the mind’s eye. Maria Harris, in her book *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, merges the concept of imagination into a whole teaching activity. Through imagination, people reach beyond reality. Imagination has the capacity to change reality. For Harris, a teacher who is incarnated with a religious imagination

---

613 Ibid.
enters into a relationship with students in the classroom, where teacher and students are equal conversation partners.

Before making a draft of a preaching course, another question should be considered. Among “teacher,” “student,” and “preaching” itself, which one is at the center in the learning process? Concerning this theme, some homileticians participated in a two-year consultation sponsored by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion and published a remarkable volume, *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*.\(^615\) In the collaborative work, a common sense is “the ministry of preaching should be understood as a Christian practice and that the whole task of teaching preaching be reenvisioned from this perspective.”\(^616\) In speaking of practice, James Nieman clarifies “a practice can be recognized as including common, meaningful, strategic, purposive actions.”\(^617\) That is, the pedagogical theory for preaching has moved from a “teacher-centered” to a “learner-centered” and to a “learning-centered practice.”\(^618\) New focus on the practice of preaching itself is not a denial of the importance of teachers and of the inner possibility of future preachers. Rather, it is a matter of critical learning about traditions and patterns of practicing preaching that have been developed over the centuries. According to Long, a practice-centered pedagogy is greatly beneficial for teaching preaching:

---


\(^616\) Ibid., 4. Italics original.

\(^617\) Ibid., 20. Italics original.

A focus on the practice of preaching provides a balance between commonalities and distinctive in homiletics; […] begins with a description and an understanding of actual performance; […] demands that the history and sociology of preaching be aspects of the student’s learning; […] allows for the naming of and training in standards of excellence; […] allows for the creation of pedagogical strategies designed to engender competent preaching.619

In what follows I will attempt to design a homiletic course with the premises of pedagogical philosophy above: as a sacred art or the gospel-driven rhetoric, preaching can be recognized as a theological-aesthetic task and well taught in focusing on the ministry of preaching itself.

Course Description

The title of this course is “Dramatic Preaching.” This course is designed to provide students with a solid foundation for preaching with regard to the dramatic perspective. Preaching the gospel is considered from theological and aesthetic perspectives. That is, the dramatic perspective is understood as a conjunction of theology and aesthetics. The course on dramatic preaching will help preachers become more confident in preaching as a theological-aesthetic task by incorporating aesthetic elements (creativity, imagination, metaphor, rhetoric, poetics, and the like) and theological dimensions (theological genres and theological structures). I believe the dramatic understanding about preaching is so important that it should be a part of an introductory preaching course. A course designed here, however, is a second level elective that would address the value of dramatic perspective related to preaching in more detail.

The main text books are three: Paul Wilson’s revised edition of The Practice of Preaching; Wilson’s Setting Words on Fire; Frederick Buechner’s Telling the Truth. While

Wilson’s *The Practice of Preaching* is helpful for some students who are not familiar with biblical preaching that locates God at the center of preaching and recognizes aesthetic elements in preaching (poetics, rhetoric, human experience, and narrative). *Setting Words on Fire* provides the distinction of the genres of “teaching” and “proclamation” in preaching. Thus, students can come to understand the dramatic perspective in encompassing both the lyric (proclamation) and the epic (teaching). Buechner’s *Telling the Truth* illustrates the importance of plot as theological structure in preaching and the artfulness of writing a sermon. Additional required readings are assigned in part each week.

As stated above, the course is taught by focusing on the ministry of the practice of preaching itself. Thus, it attempts to intermingle both practice and theory. Each week students will attend a two-hour session that begins with theoretical discussion for an hour followed by an hour of practical activities. All students are also required to participate in one small group that is designed to hone their own preaching skills through small group preaching, peer evaluation of sermons, and a group mission. In the case of a group mission, all small group members will prepare a twenty-minute performance of theatrical arts followed by critical evaluation of the performance and its application to preaching. This opportunity will lead students to the recognition of dramatic metaphor for preaching. The course could go by the following general format:

- **Week One: Dramatic Preaching**
  First hour: Introduction, course expectation, small group organization
  Second hour: Lecture
- **Week Two: Dramatic Preaching – the Bible as Divine Script and Faithful exegesis**
  First hour: Lecture
  Second hour: Finding exegetical insights from a biblical text and rewriting the text like a movie scene
- **Week Three: Dramatic Preaching – Aesthetic Engagements with the Scripture**
  First hour: Lecture
  Second hour: Individual Preaching and Evaluation (1)
- **Week Four: Dramatic Preaching – Uniqueness of Dramatic Preaching as Christian Art**
First hour: Lecture  
Second hour: Individual Preaching and Evaluation (2)

- Week Five: Dramatic Preaching – Creative Engagement with Preaching Tradition  
  First hour: Lecture  
  Second hour: Individual Preaching and Evaluation (3)

- Week Six: Dramatic Preaching – Creative Engagement with Theological Tradition  
  First hour: Lecture  
  Second hour: Individual Preaching and Evaluation (4)

- Week Seven: Dramatic Preaching – Creative Engagement with Local Congregation  
  First hour: Lecture  
  Second hour: Individual Preaching and Evaluation (5)

- Weeks Eight through Twelve  
  First hour: Lecture  
  Second hour: Group performance and Evaluation (1) – (5)

More specifically, as an example of each session, the following is a description of week four. During the first hour of week four, the instructor could review the uniqueness of preaching as Christian art. The operative question is that if we could state preaching as an art, what distinguishes preaching from other arts, especially in terms of rhetoric and poetics? Drawing on André Resner’s work, *Preacher and Cross*, the lecture might attempt to explain the terms “reverse-rhetoric,” or “gospel-driven rhetoric.” In order to appeal to students’ interest, it would be better to employ different video clips of same original script. For instance, 19th century French writer Victor Hugo’s famous work, *Les Misérables*, has been made into two different movies in 1998 and 2012, and produced on various musical stages. The videos could show artists’ different depictions of the same original, thereby illustrating the possibility of dramatic preaching that creatively re-presents the gospel based on the same divine Script over and over in different places and ages. The lecture could finish by discussion of how a preacher as an artist develops a dramatic sermon practically. During the second hour, some students will preach from their choice of biblical text by using dramatic perspective – faithful exegesis and creative engagement with a contemporary situation. Other students can write their journal on peers’ sermons applying the criteria discussed in the previous sections (the role of God, theological genres as teaching and
proclamation, theological structure as plot, and so on) to the sermons to determine if they preach aesthetically and dramatically. The students who preached would write a five page self evaluation to accompany their sermons, which should be handed in at the beginning of next class on week five.

IV. Summary

This chapter has sought to bring the theories of earlier chapters to the practice of preaching and teaching preaching by defining what it means to preach dramatically. In order to locate God at the center in the ministry of preaching without denying the importance of human experience, creativity, imagination, and contemporary situations, I attempted to identify common elements of dramatic preaching. Thus, I proposed two purposes of dramatic preaching (participation and formation), faithfulness to the Scripture, creativity for contemporary listeners, and two theological dimensions in preaching (theological genres and theological structure as plot). More specifically, in a sermon the theological genres, proclamation and teaching, should be interwoven to know God with heads and to love God with hearts. The theological plot from trouble to grace is a crucial tool showing the form of Jesus Christ or the essence of the gospel. In doing so, preaching can be a theological and aesthetic task that seeks to form both preachers and the listeners to the form of Jesus Christ and encourages them to attempt to participate in the drama of God. Consequently, I believe that the New Homiletic’s values (organic form, eventfulness of language and the Word, and transformative power of the Word) can be combined with theological dimensions. Furthermore, dramatic preaching is a means of formation and participation. After that, I used the characteristics of dramatic preaching to analyze Melito’s old but excellent sermon. Finally, I proposed a brief draft of a preaching course with some ideas that
informed my pedagogical philosophy for teaching preaching: the possibility of teaching dramatic preaching and the priority of practice-centered methodology.
The initial question for this project was “how might one fully affirm a dependence on God in preaching and yet call for the full use of all human aesthetic resources?” To answer the question, in chapter one, I have attempted to examine the relation between theology and aesthetics in general and between theology and rhetoric in preaching. The study of metaphor opened the possibility of aesthetic discourse in speaking of God. From the exploration of the Gospel of John, in chapter two, I discovered John gives direction to his community members based on the identity of Jesus Christ by employing various images. Actually the Gospel of John is an improvised art work that demonstrates a gospel-driven rhetoric. Chapter three then discussed Horace Bushnell’s language theory and his homiletics. In the study, for Bushnell, theology is nothing but Life and Spirit. Comparing Bushnell to modern rational and aesthetic models of theology, I argued that his aesthetic theology is still the viable method in a way of dramatic theology that incorporates theology and aesthetics to address the gospel of Jesus Christ. In chapter four, I examined the New Homiletic, an aesthetic reaction against traditional propositional and cognitive approach to preaching. In spite of its contributions, if the ministry of preaching is not just human discourse but the event of God’s Word, the need to keep God at the center of preaching is required. Lastly, thus, chapters five and six proposed that the nature of preaching is essentially dramatic because theology as a living wisdom is first and foremost God’s communicative action in the ongoing drama of God. I proposed dramatic preaching is faithful to the Scripture as the divine script and creative to the new situation in order to participate in the drama of God and to transform the listeners in the image of God. Summing up, I concluded that preachers can combine the New Homiletic’s aesthetic values with theological dimensions.
If the theoretical and practical groundwork of dramatic theology is taken seriously with the aid of the aesthetic turn in theology, it will be understood that preaching is not only an aesthetic but also a theological task. This understanding leads to the suggestion that preachers are the Church’s artists who carry out the intention of God’s revelation through human words. Preaching is the artistic creation of human communicative action in a specific time and place, a theological-aesthetic action that gives expression to the ineffable joy of the Word revealed in the Scripture.

On the one hand, preaching as an artwork encourages preachers to do the ministry of preaching artistically for and with the Gospel. It assumes that preachers are able to develop, illustrate, and create sermons to respond to the variety of forms in the Scripture as well as to fit into the aesthetic taste of diverse human situations and societies: races, colors, languages, cultures, ages, feelings, and the like. The importance of aesthetic elements in preaching cannot be ignored.

On the other, a preacher who seeks to be a faithful artist is located in relationship to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Aesthetic elements of dramatic preaching - creativity, imagination, and human experiences are essential but grounded in the realm of Jesus Christ. It calls for the gospel-driven rhetoric not individual self-satisfaction in an arbitrary aestheticism of rhetorical skill. That is, if a preacher attempts to be a dramatist or a poetic-theologian or simply an artist, he must begin by seeing that the Word of God coming from the Scripture is God’s art in action. Through the *art*-ful and *theo*-ful words of preachers today, God continues to convey God’s own salvation to humanity *calling* people co-workers of God, *overaccepting* their decline, *reminding* them of the grace of the Cross and the empty tomb, *conforming* them to the form of Jesus Christ, and *imparting* to them wisdom in order to *transform* the whole world into a new reality of the kingdom of God through the Holy Spirit.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

HOMILETICS


_____ *Christ in Theology: Being the Answer of the Author before the Hartford Central Association of Ministers, October, 1849, for the Doctrines of the Book entitled “God in Christ.”* Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1849.


_____.


_____.


_____.


_____.

_____.

_____.

_____.

_____.


_____.


_____.


OTHER RESOURCES


_____.*Is There a Meaning in This Text?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.


