Proclamation as Revelation:
The Gospel as a Means of Re-presenting Ethical Life

by

Derek Nicholas Knoke

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emmanuel College
and the Pastoral Department of the Toronto School of Theology
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology
awarded by the University of St. Michael's College.

© Copyright by Derek Nicholas Knoke 2014
Abstract
The field of homiletics has devoted much attention recently to socio-political power and interpretation in homiletical theory and method. In so doing, it has problematized many of the sources of authority and foundations upon which preaching has depended. This thesis attempts to build on findings in social science regarding power and interpretation in order to argue for proclamation of the gospel, not in spite of social science but because of it. The theological loci for this research is a doctrine of revelation, as a theological foundation for preaching. As such, this thesis looks at Barth’s doctrine of revelation and rejection of the *analogia entis* to posit a theological non-foundation “foundation” for revelation. That is, one which is relative but not completely arbitrary; a foundation that has no referent but has a goal. Then, Aristotle and Paul Ricoeur’s work on re-presentations provide a social scientific resource for this type of goal-oriented foundation. Their findings are put into conversation with Pierre Bourdieu’s socio-linguistic practice theory. Bourdieu’s practice theory—which deals with issues of power, language and interpretation—is an apt theory with which to read the Apostle Paul’s comments on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Paul employs relative measures to re-present and re-construct alternative possibilities for living in the Corinthian context.
From these theological, linguistic, socio-linguistic and biblical resources, the thesis will argue that homiletics is a means toward an end. Christian proclamation re-presents God’s action in Jesus Christ in order to generate movement toward ethical and political ends. Preaching that re-presents God acting in the world in Jesus Christ may be conceived as revelation; where people see God acting, God reveals God’s self. Recent homiletical theory and method will be examined, and markers of revelation will be offered. These markers will then be used to evaluate published sermons. The thesis concludes with suggestions for interpretation, ethics and the preparation of sermons based on a particular non-foundational view of revelation.
I am grateful to my parents whose support in my undergraduate and seminary degrees made it possible for me to do this degree. I am grateful to Cheryl Bridges Johns who encouraged me to think beyond the borders of the United States and who believed I could do this degree. I am grateful to Paul Scott Wilson, who took me on as a student and who never gave up on me. I am grateful to Katherine Selby for being a type of home for me when I was leaving the old places in which I previously found meaning and security. Finally, I am so very, very grateful to Caroline and Joel, my children. Their love; their dreams; the possibilities that lie within them make me want to be the kind of person and do the kind of work that might stimulate them to live inspired and be determined in their own lives.
Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter 1
Theological Perspective: Karl Barth on Revelation and the Imagination ......................... 10
1. Barth on Revelation .................................................................................................................. 12
   1.1 Barth on the Incarnation (CD 1/2, 1-201) .................................................................... 12
       1.1.1 God as Subject: The Freedom of God ................................................................. 13
       1.1.2 The Incarnate Word: Very God and Very Human .................................................. 14
       1.1.3 Implications ............................................................................................................. 28
   1.2 The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: Adjudicating Theological Claims ............ 30
       1.2.1 The Church as the Sign of Revelation ................................................................... 31
       1.2.2 The Incarnation as Method ..................................................................................... 36
       1.2.3 Implications ............................................................................................................. 39
2. Further Considerations on Barth’s Pneumatology ...................................................... 40
   2.1 Does Barth Have a Truncated View of the Spirit? ....................................................... 40
       2.1.1 Robert Jenson............................................................................................................ 41
       2.1.2 Alan Torrance ......................................................................................................... 44
       2.1.3 Implications ............................................................................................................. 52
   2.2 Barth’s Rejection of the Analogia Entis ....................................................................... 53
       2.2.1 Humanity Under God ............................................................................................. 53
       2.2.2 Did Barth Change his Mind? ................................................................................... 54
       2.3 Implications ................................................................................................................. 57
3. Barth and the Imagination ................................................................................................. 58
   3.1 World-Building and the Imagination: Re-presenting the World in Order to Change It ............................................................................................................................ 59
   3.2 Barth and the Imagination ............................................................................................. 61
   3.3 Doing the Impossible: How to Speak of Jesus without Proving God’s Existence ............................................................................................................................................. 65

Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 66

Chapter 2
Linguistic Perspective: Aristotle and Paul Ricoeur on Metaphor, the Imagination and Movement in Aristotle’s Poetics ............................................................. 69
1. Poetry and the Imagination: Locating Language and the Imagination in Aristotle’s Three Methodologies ..................................................................................................................... 71
2. Defining the Imagination in terms of its Purpose: Katharsis and Desire for the Good ................................................................................................................................................. 74
   2.1 Katharsis and the Good .................................................................................................. 76
   2.2 A Truthful Goal ............................................................................................................... 77
   2.3 The Good as Goal and Cause of Movement ................................................................ 79
3. Re-Presentation as the Means to the Imagination: Poiesis, Mimesis and Movement .................................................................................................................................................. 82
   3.1 The Relation between Poiesis and Mimesis ................................................................. 82
   3.2 Nature and Art: Movement as the Core of What-Is and What-Is-possible .................................................. 85
   3.3 Metaphor and Truth: Metaphorizing ......................................................................... 88
Chapter 3
Biblical Perspective: Power, Revelation and Contestations over Truth Claims in 1 Corinthians 12-14 ...................................................................................................... 93
1. Reading Scripture as a Re-presentation ........................................................................ 95
2. Methodology: Pierre Bourdieu and Practice Theory .................................................... 100
   2.1 Pierre Bourdieu and the Logic of Practice .............................................................. 101
   2.2 Practice Theory: Capital and Power ........................................................................ 102
   2.3 Language and Symbolic Power .............................................................................. 105
   2.4 Language, Symbolic Power and 1 Corinthians ...................................................... 108
3. Corinth in Context ........................................................................................................ 109
   3.1 Old Corinth (Leading up to 146 B.C.) ................................................................... 110
   3.2 Movement toward a Greco-Roman Culture: Contrasting Greek and Roman Culture in the Process of Hellenization (146 - 44 B.C.) .......................... 113
      3.2.1 Roman Cultural Capital; Greek Symbolic Capital ........................................... 114
      3.2.2 Hellenization and Religion ............................................................................ 115
3.3 A Brief History of Roman Corinth from 44 B.C. until the Second Century A.D .......... 117
4. Practice Theory and Speaking in Tongues ................................................................... 122
   4.1 Habitus and the Logic of Practice among Corinthian Christians at the Time of Paul’s Writing of 1 Corinthians ...................................................... 122
   4.2 Tongues as Subversive Speech ............................................................................... 124
      4.2.1 Contestation over the Official Language ......................................................... 125
      4.2.2 Tongues as a Technology of the Self ............................................................ 128
5. Theological Reading of 1 Corinthians 12-14: Alternative Constructions of Power by Means of Re-presentations ................................................................. 131
   5.1 1 Corinthians 12-14, Things Can Be Different Than They Are Now: From What-Is to What-Is-Possible ................................................................. 135
   5.2 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, A Love to Worship Capable of Producing a Worship that Loves: Re-presenting the World as a Sphere of God’s Loving Action .................................................. 139
      5.2.1 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 ....................................................................................... 141
      5.2.2 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 ..................................................................................... 142
      5.2.3 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 ................................................................................... 143
6. Revelation in 1 Corinthians 12-14: The Gospel as a Means for Other-ing Movement .................................................................................................................. 146

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 149

Chapter 4
Homiletical Perspectives: Preaching and Revelation in Homiletics since 1956 ............ 152
1. The Rise of the New Homiletic ...................................................................................... 154
   1.1 Preaching in Crisis and a Recovery of Words ......................................................... 154
   1.2 Revelation and Transformation ............................................................................. 155
      1.2.1 Paying Attention to the Form of Revelation: Design for Preaching ................ 155
      1.2.2 Renewal by Means of Preaching: The Eventfulness of Revelation ................. 156
1.2.3 Inductive Movement in Language Generates Transformation ........................................ 159
1.3 Implications ......................................................................................................................... 160

2. Loci for Revelation .................................................................................................................. 162
2.1 Scripture and Revelation: Uses of Scripture Prior to the NH ............................................ 162
   2.1.1 Constructive Theological Interpretations of Scripture .............................................. 163
   2.1.2 Experiential Interpretations of Scripture ................................................................. 169
   2.1.3 Contextual Interpretations of Scripture ................................................................. 170
   Excursus: Critique of Mystery beyond Language in Rose’s *Sharing the Word*: A Case Study .......... 173
   2.1.4 Implications ................................................................................................................. 175
2.2 Revelation and Metaphor and Narrative ............................................................................ 175
   2.2.1 Imagination and Revelation ....................................................................................... 176
   2.2.2 Theological Movement and Revelation: Law and Gospel Structure in Language ............... 179
   2.2.3 Testimony and Revelation .......................................................................................... 182
   2.2.4 Implications ................................................................................................................. 183
2.3 Power and Revelation: Preaching and Unjust Systems ....................................................... 184
   2.3.1 Revelation and Social Analysis ................................................................................ 184
   2.3.2 Critique of McClure: Exposing and Deconstructing Arbitrariness vs. Constructing What-Is-Possible in the Imagination ......................................................... 188

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 191

Chapter 5
Proclamation as Revelation: Manifestations of Revelation in Preaching .................................. 193

1. Markers of Proclamation; Markers of Revelation .................................................................. 197
   1.1 Can It Get Us Where We Want to Go? Building a World in the Imagination by Means of Re-presentations ................................................................. 197

2. Proclaiming the Gospel: Re-presentations and Revelation in Published Sermons. 201
   2.1 Frederick Buechner’s Sermon: “The Road to Emmaus” ................................................... 201
   2.2 Paul Scott Wilson’s Sermon: “Futile Acts of Faith” ......................................................... 206
   2.3 Henry Mitchell’s Sermon: “Living Epistles” ................................................................. 209
   2.4 Fred Craddock’s Sermon: “Doxology” ............................................................................ 212
   2.5 Claudette Anderson Copeland’s Sermon: “Tamar’s Torn Robe” ...................................... 216
   2.6 José Míguez-Bonino’s Sermon: “Much Will Be Required” ............................................. 220
   2.7 Christine M. Smith’s Sermon: “Resisting the Powers of Death” .................................... 222
   2.8 Implications ....................................................................................................................... 226

3. Adjudicating “Good” and “Evil” .......................................................................................... 229
   3.1 Constructing a Good ......................................................................................................... 229
   3.2 But Is It Ethical? .............................................................................................................. 231
   3.3 Productive Hermeneutics ............................................................................................... 232

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 233

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................... 235
Introduction

I grew up as a Southern Pentecostal and started my doctoral work as one. Much changed along the way, but I have remained interested in human claims to divine revelation.¹ My desire to make Pentecostal-style claims to speak for God in my own preaching² drove me to search for answers—when and how can a preacher make claims in the confidence that they come from God?

The natural overlap for me, regarding this question of making claims for God, was the discipline of homiletics. And it was homiletics that brought me to Emmanuel College and the University of Toronto. I came to Toronto in search of answers to the question of revelation for preaching, and while the answers I thought I would find have changed, the questions are much the same. My hope and belief is that, while the answers I discovered may be unexpected or unconventional, they do offer promise for the task of Christian preaching.

This study examines implicit theories of revelation in preaching. Preaching has been described as both the Word of God and the words of humans, something divine and human.³ As something divine and human, preaching depends on the “author” or “origin” of revelation (God) doing something to make God’s self known. Preaching depends on revelation.

The term “revelation” is a complex concept. As a religious term, it involves:

(1) the origin or author of revelation, who brings us into contact with the Wholly Other…, (2) the means or instruments that give the insights…[e.g., visions, sacred books, etc.], (3) the content [e.g., the gospel], (4)

¹ Whether the claim that scripture is revelation or the claims to revelation made by persons in scripture—i.e., the Corinthian Christians with their spiritual gifts and the Apostle Paul’s response to them—and those made today by preachers, particularly present-day Pentecostals who claim to speak for God
² Pentecostals do not necessarily correlate their preaching with divine revelation. However, speaking in tongues and interpretations of tongues is considered to be a Word from God. Discernment by the hearers (of preaching and of interpretations of tongues) is always called for to adjudicate whether God has spoken or not. But the possibility that God may speak through preaching or tongues and interpretations is a very real expectation and hope of a Pentecostal worship service.
³ Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man.
the...*recipients* or *addressees* of revelation [e.g., priests, prophets, etc.]. ..., [and finally] (5) the *effect on the recipients.*

For long periods, homileticians assumed revelation had taken place and that it was the content of preaching. However, one can no longer assume the existence of revelation as an out-there reality apart from the subjects who name it (preachers) and the contexts that those subjects inhabit (the church). Until recently in Western culture, the subjects (preachers) possessed positions of power within social and political structures.

Many scholars in the field of homiletics have become less attuned to revelation and more attuned to socio-political power involved in interpretation and thereby also with questions of epistemology (whose interpretation? which interpretation?). In their explorations, some homiletical theorists have problematized both the content of preaching (e.g., the gospel) and the means or instruments of preaching (e.g., scripture, tradition, the church): do they have a verifiable connection to the “origin or author” of revelation (i.e., God)? The connections between scripture and God, or the gospel and God, have been deemed by some scholars as suspect. Theorists tend to use deconstructionist approaches in the task of preaching in order to keep it open and free of ideological closure and therefore unjust, arbitrary power relations. These alternatives tend to be rooted in social-scientific fields like ethics that are apt to be anthropocentric and employ methods that emphasize

---

4 Peter Antes, “Revelation: Religious Aspects,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 4, (Grand Rapids/Boston: Eerdmans/Brill, 2005), 672. Though the *a priori* foundation of “Wholly Other” foreshadows a critique which I raise later, particularly of homiletical theories and methods which emphasize revelation and power relations. For theological aspects of revelation—which will be treated in chapter one—see also, Stephen W. Sykes, “Revelation: Theological Aspects,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 4, 673.

5 I define the gospel as *God’s action in Jesus Christ to accomplish a (constructed) what-is-possible (an ethical) goal.*

6 Ibid., 672.

7 Examples include: John McClure, Lucy Atkinson Rose, Christine Smith, whose works will be treated in more detail later on. There, however, remains a very large contingent of homiletical literature which continues to uncritically assume and ascribe to scripture and doctrine the status of revelation. However, this project is primarily concerned with addressing the growing body of work in the field which addresses the problem of epistemic access to an out-there Being.
exposing and deconstructing. I will argue that deconstructionist approaches are based on faulty objectifications of revelation and are inadequate methods for homiletics. Instead, I suggest a constructive approach which employs a law-gospel structure as “metaphor writ large”, a method based in a non-foundational view of revelation. This is important because of the self-referential nature of language and socio-linguistics. A law-gospel structure offers a method to re-present the world in light of God’s action and thus treats the gospel as a means to an end rather than as an object.

This project explores implicit theories of revelation in preaching and how they relate to homiletical theory and method. By looking at theories of revelation and epistemology, this thesis attempts to look at the foundations of influential homiletical theories and methods. By doing so, one discovers possible weaknesses in many of the foundations of the more influential homiletical theories and methods and the need for greater clarity regarding one’s beliefs and assumptions about revelation and epistemology.

Social science has done much to expose the numerous systemic ways in which linguistic, social and political structures are arbitrary and rooted in power. Some social scientific descriptions of religion employ a deconstructionist method in that they seek to expose the power and arbitrariness behind human structures—structures which are experienced as rooted in some out-there reality. Pierre Bourdieu is an influential social scientist whose socio-linguistic practice theory has been used in the study of religion. For Pierre Bourdieu, they are merely the projection of human agency that has become objectified

---

8 Exposing religious claims to authority or truth as arbitrary systems of power and injustice.
9 Paul Scott Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, 99. The law-gospel structure is a theological embodiment of metaphor. Metaphor is the (narrative) re-presentation of the world which constructs the world it names.
10 By non-foundational, I mean a rejection of epistemology and an acceptance of relativity.
11 See my discussion of Aristotle and Ricoeur on metaphor and language and of Bourdieu on socio-linguistics.
12 The end/goal being an ethical end/goal; that is, a re-arrangement of systems of power.
(treated as an object) and then used by those with power to wield power within the contexts where these “objectifications of subjectivity” count as “capital” (i.e., have meaning and value).

Homiletical theories that accept the ways in which linguistic, social and political structures are arbitrary and rooted in power, tend to employ similar deconstructionist methods. That is, some homileticians question the proclamation of the gospel because they see proclamation and the gospel as ideologies that are entrapped in power relations.

The purpose of this project is to explore how the gospel can be a means of ethics, a vehicle for what-is-possible ethically and politically in the structures of society. Rather than treating proclamation and the gospel as objects whose truthfulness is adjudicated by their correlation to an out-there referent, preaching is a means to an end, a means to an objective. It is suggested that change, ethical movement (even movement toward an other) are primarily constructed (and not deconstructed). In similar vein, the gospel is an important vehicle for constructing and reconstructing the world by means of re-presentations. Christian proclamation re-presents the world (and generates ethical movement) when it imagines God as an acting subject in the world.

My thesis is, preaching is the means by which the world is moved toward an ethical vision of what-is-possible. Preaching that imagines God acting re-presents the “what-is”

---


14 In other words, preaching is a means to a goal; and the goal determines the means (however, one defines the goal or the objective). I use the word objective rather than “goal” or “end” (and I hyphenate it as object-ive), first of all, to highlight the fact that in constructing toward an end/goal, one does indeed construct an “object” (it does become an “objectification of subjectivity” as Bourdieu calls it, a subject I will treat later on). Second, I do so to show that the “object” (objectification of subjectivity, which is no independent object at all) is really an objective (goal/end) that is fluid, relative and open to new iterations.

15 See Paul Scott Wilson’s distinction between teaching and proclamation, in Setting Words on Fire.
reality of the world with a “what-is-possible” alternative. Preaching may be adjudicated by its ability to reach its goals, to generate movement toward the (constructed) goal of what-is-possible ethically and politically. Ethical inquiry can serve to critique and refine preaching’s goals so as to discern desirable visions of what-is-possible. As such, preaching that imagines God acting in the world in Jesus Christ may be conceived as revelation. Where people see God acting in the world, where this world is built or constructed through images, for them, God reveals God’s self.

Proclamation re-presents God’s action in the world; Christian proclamation images God acting in Jesus Christ. In this way, proclamation becomes revelation.

What is distinctive about this thesis is the following: first, where many homiletical theories and methods appeal to sources of authority (and revelation) for preaching as the means against which to adjudicate truth claims (e.g., scripture, the church, the Spirit, the person of Jesus), this proposal accepts social scientific critiques about the arbitrariness of social, political and linguistic structures (as closed-circuits of meaning) and the inherent power relations which these structures re-instantiate. Unlike most constructive approaches though, the goal (the what-is-possible) against which preaching (and truth claims) are adjudicated is not fixed. It is not a static thing or an unmoving object. Indeed, it is no “object” at all.

---

16 Aristotle, *Poetics*. 
17 This statement is circular; and it is intentionally so. This thesis makes an argument for the truthfulness of circularity—affirming the diagnosis of Bourdieu’s socio-linguistic practice theory but employing Aristotle and Ricoeur’s work on metaphor to offer a different prescription. It is suggested that theological foundations for this can be found in the Reformed theology of Karl Barth. As such, I seek to honour the contextuality and subjectivity of truth claims while demonstrating that these are also a mechanism for positive, ethical movement. 
18 Note the use of “becomes” rather than “is”. 
19 That is, it is not an autonomous object which exists outside time and space. Instead, it is fluid, relative, provisional. It is open to change. While it becomes an object (in that it can be heard, believed, etc.—see discussion of Bourdieu in chapter 3), it remains simply an objectification of subjectivity.
Second, where other homiletical theories and methods, which accept social scientific critiques about the arbitrariness of social, political and linguistic orders, take a deconstructive approach of exposing and critiquing the reigning order (and its power relations), this proposal employs a constructive approach of re-presenting and re-imaging those structures ethically. Truth is constructed by means of re-presentations, which is to say, revelation is imaged by means of proclamation.

To do this exploration, a doctrine of revelation is needed as the foundation for the practice of preaching. Chapter One will show how Karl Barth located his doctrine of revelation in the Incarnation. In Jesus Christ, God and humanity exist together in their totalities. There exists no overlap between God and humanity, only a meeting point in Jesus Christ—a meeting point that assumes all time and space. Of chief importance in this is Barth’s rejection of the analogia entis and his claim about the freedom of God so that God remains the subject and not the object of revelation. God is free to be the subject of God’s own revelation and includes humanity in that freedom.

Chapter Two will show how Paul Ricoeur, using Aristotle, found the “Real” in an “act.” That is, the “Real” is constructed by means of re-presentation (mimesis) in order to generate desire (katharsis) for a particular (constructed) ethic or good. If the human has no a priori access to God (but only receives the content—gospel—from the subject of revelation, God) and if human inquiry into revelation is limited to the human realm (described as it is by social sciences and with no epistemic access beyond the closed-circuit of meaning in which language is entrapped), then it is necessary to construct the “real”.

---

20 That is not to say that the new iteration (the new re-presentation) will actually be ethical but only that it will be the ethics that the present context desires or considers ethical (at the time).
22 Ricoeur, “Between Rhetoric and Poetics.”
23 See my, “Generating Movement in the Social Sphere.”
Ricoeur articulates how one can re-present (using *mimesis*) the world as a sphere in which God is acting in a particular way to achieve a constructed ethic or good in a way that generates desire (*katharsis*) for that ethic.

Initially attracted to 1 Corinthians 12-14 by my Pentecostal background—with its discussion of spiritual gifts and the issues surrounding discerning the Spirit amid contesting truth claims—but with a willingness to broaden my understanding of it, chapter Three shows how the Apostle Paul does precisely this. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, he looks at a specific contest between power and truth. I employ Pierre Bourdieu’s practice theory to identify power relations within Corinth and to read how Paul addresses them. There, Paul does not discard speaking in tongues as revelation. Instead, he retains the subversive nature of tongues against the dominant social and political order, and he reframes it in the context of love. Paul reframes power by constructing a world that is oriented toward the Other (and other) and not the self. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, revelation is not a content; instead it is a posture toward power and one an-other rooted in other-ing love. It is made possible by hope in one’s self being secured in God’s Kingdom. Revelation is assessed from the end (love or ethics) not merely the beginning (faith as content or ideology). This section will help to demonstrate the relative or fluid nature of Paul’s standards for adjudicating truth claims in 1 Corinthians 12-14. That is, Paul re-presents power in the context of love so as to generate desire (*katharsis*) for ethical, faithful living. Faith is not an object, content or ideology that some theorists might argue is used as a form of violence against the self. Instead, faith is a means to an end and that end is love, for Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

As such, Chapter One gives Barth’s theological method in which the human realm can be human (without presenting unverifiable theological truth claims as objectively true).
In Chapter Two, Aristotle and Ricoeur show us how language and even ethics are entrapped in power relations and as such change (and ethical movement) is generated by means of representations (objectifications of subjectivity) not primarily by exposing and deconstructing. The theological and socio-linguistic sections are placed prior to scripture for two reasons. First, I am doing a theological (Barth) and socio-linguistic (Ricoeur, Aristotle, chapter 2, and Pierre Bourdieu in the beginning of chapter 3) reading of scripture. Second, I accept the positions of some linguists, theologians, and post-colonial theorists that we cannot grant a priori authority to scripture. It too is ensconced in issues of power. I need to talk about those issues (theologically and social-scientifically) before the biblical section in chapter Three. Chapter Three shows how Paul employs faith (in God’s action in Jesus Christ, i.e., the gospel) in order to re-present power (with the goal being other-ing love) by means of hope in God’s coming Kingdom.

Chapter Four surveys homiletical literature from 1956 until the present to discover homiletics’ doctrines of revelation and to shed light on their foundations for preaching. This chapter chronicles the rise of the New Homiletic and then looks at three loci for revelation in homiletical literature: scripture, metaphor, and socio-political power. This section will help to demonstrate my contribution to the field by showing the following: first, it is unnecessary (and impossible) to establish a referent for revelation, and this state of affairs does not preclude the re-presentation of the world (and therefore proclamation) as the sphere of God’s action. Speaking of God in action creates its own referent even without

---

24 Scripture is not my beginning authority. I believe in using scripture in preaching because within the context of the world created by scripture (i.e., the church), scripture is authoritative. That is scripture is true for those who believe it is true (or at least, important for those who believe it is important, even if not “true”—which it depends on how you define true) and therefore must be treated as important within that context (this statement is intentionally circular).

25 In a personal conversation at the Academy of Homiletics, Luke Powery said that his definition of the gospel is hope. However, there is no hope without seeing God’s action (grace).
requiring an objective (humanly accessible) referent. And second, re-presentation of God acting (the construction of a world in the imagination) is an authoritative non-foundation “foundation” for proclamation of the gospel.

Chapter Five will conclude this study by naming markers of revelation derived from the above research. It will then use these markers to look at published sermons from a broad array of preachers. It will examine sermons to find examples of re-presentation (constructive) and deconstructive speech. Finally, it will respond to potential ethical objections to this proposal and suggest a productive hermeneutic to guide the preparation and evaluation of sermons.

\[26\text{ This is the difference between an objectification of subjectivity and an out-there object.}\]
Chapter 1

Theological Perspective: Karl Barth on Revelation and the Imagination

This chapter will provide a theological understanding of the doctrine of revelation according to Karl Barth. Barth’s emphasis on God’s freedom to act as a subject in the world and remain a subject of God’s own revelation presents possibilities that are both theologically viable (doctrine of grace) and social scientifically viable (theological statements are true within theology). There is a circularity to Barth that is open to both the proclamation of (universal) truth claims and the admission of contextuality (and therefore relativity) in those same claims. The question we will have to ask ourselves as we move through this material is, What context (the one created by the Incarnation or the one described by the social sciences) is the real context? In other words, Barth seems to suggest that revelation is contextual—relative to the Incarnation—but Barth then asserts that the Incarnation assumes all human contexts. Revelation is contextual; the context is the Incarnation; and the Incarnation assumes all other contexts. Revelation (and the belief that “God speaks”) is not true in and of itself, in any a priori way which can be established by humans in advance (analogia entis); it is true because after accepting (by faith, analogia fidei) that this context (the Incarnation) has assumed all other contexts (and so receives that “God speaks”), one can indeed hear God speaking. The circularity of it is that once you enter the world created by faith (believing that God speaks in the Incarnation), then you can hear God speak in the Incarnation.
Barth located his doctrine of revelation in the Incarnation; for him, the Incarnation is the single (and eternal) event in time and space of God’s self-disclosure which includes within it all past and future time and space. This chapter will first discuss the Incarnation as Barth’s way of maintaining the freedom of God as the subject of God’s self-revelation and the Incarnation as the point-of-contact between two totalities (100% human, 100% divine). For Barth, the Incarnation was more than theological content; it was theological method, a method which shaped his description of revelation and preaching when he said preaching is both the Word of God and words of humans.¹

The chapter then explores the role of the Spirit in adjudicating theological truth claims in the (100%) human realm, a realm which Barth says has already been assumed by God in the Incarnation. The chapter then joins the conversation on questions and critiques of Barth’s pneumatology and his rejection of the *analogia entis*. Regarding the former, it is suggested that Barth’s pneumatological detractors frame the question in ways which Barth would not accept because their questions depend on epistemological foundations which are (theologically) a violation of God’s free grace. Regarding Barth’s initial rejection of the *analogia entis*, it is argued that Barth maintains his rejection of it throughout his work² and that his ongoing rejection of the *analogia entis* helps explain how Barth can claim the impossibility of human knowledge of God³ and yet dogmatically insist on human speech/testimony to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Finally, the chapter interfaces Barth’s theology of revelation with metaphor and imagination in preparation for the next chapter on Ricoeur and Aristotle. I argue, for Barth,

---
¹ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. I recognize, first, for Barth, the content is Jesus Christ and second, as such, Barth’s method is his content. And this is precisely why I am locating the discussion in the Incarnation, rather than in abstract considerations of Barth’s notion of the Holy Spirit.
² I.e., Barth does not change his mind as some interpreters suggest.
³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight, trans., (New York: T & T Clark, 1938), 173. Hereafter this will be referred to as CD. Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogy Entis*. 

the gospel is a reality when it is attested as a reality. Because Barth remains inside the story, that is, inside the world of the gospel in which God is the acting subject, Barth is a theologian of the imagination who builds a world in which God acts. The gospel is the proclamation of God’s action, and this proclamation of God’s action is revelation, a revelation which does not need a humanly verifiable referent.

1. Barth on Revelation

1.1 Barth on the Incarnation (CD 1/2, 1-201)

John Webster says Barth’s theological project began as a problem with preaching: how do we speak of God? Behind the concern for speaking of God is a question of revelation. For Barth, revelation is an event of grace which exists in the free decision of God made once-for-all in Jesus Christ.

In Church Dogmatics 1/2, Barth asserts that God is the subject of his own revelation. Revelation is never “the predicate or object” of the human. God’s disclosure to the world is and forever will remain an act of God. Revelation is God’s “act, His [sic] work” and never belongs to the human. The point-of-contact remains on the side of God and never becomes an object in the hands of humanity, who can use their “knowledge” of God as a weapon of power against an other. Barth brings a simplicity and internal unity in his development of this idea, which becomes essential to his theological content and method.

---

4 John Webster, Barth, (New York: Continuum, 2000), 42.
5 Karl Barth, CD, 1.
6 CD, 1/2, 1-45; Webster, Barth, 20-45.
1.1.1 God as Subject: The Freedom of God

Barth says, God as the subject of his own revelation requires a reframing of the question of movement between God and humanity in revelation. He suggests “a better way of putting the question” about God’s movement to humanity (revelation existing “out-there”) and humanity’s movement to God (revelation happening “in-here”) is to ask about God’s freedom: God’s freedom “for us” and “in us”.

Barth says the answer to this question can be found in the Incarnation of the Word and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit because God’s revelation involves two parts: first, God’s self-manifestation (his Being as God, i.e., the existence part) and second, his manifestation to us (the Act of God by which humans respond; i.e., the happening part). Revelation, for Barth, is both the “thing” out-there (i.e., God’s divinity in Jesus Christ) and its reaching its goal (i.e., human confession and worship). Without these concomitant pieces, revelation fails to reveal. But together they are an event of grace.

And in both pieces, Barth says, God remains the subject. In the “reality” of Jesus as God and in human confession that Jesus is Lord, Barth contends God is the one speaking and acting—at least if it is an event of God’s self-revelation and not a false human claim (i.e., analogia entis). And the one, definitive place where these two pieces come together within God’s freedom (i.e., God as subject of his self-revelation) is the Incarnation—where God manifests God’s-self and where God assumes humanity and thereby humanity receives God. God remains the subject of his own revelation—both in himself and for us—in the Incarnation.

---

8 CD, 1/2, 2.
9 Webster, Barth, 170.
10 Barth calls them the objective and subjective sides of revelation. These terms carry so much baggage, they are difficult to be heard. Suffice for now that neither I nor Barth mean what they have come to mean in our scientific dominated age.
1.1.2 The Incarnate Word: Very God and Very Human.

When considering God’s freedom to be the subject of his own self-revelation in its distinct but inseparable parts, Barth turns to consider the Incarnate Word, who is 100% God and 100% human. Barth says, “the conception of the God-manhood [sic] of Christ...is of such decisive importance for understanding the nature of revelation” because it addresses not only revelation as it exists “out-there” (its self-manifestation and the 100% divinity of the Incarnation) but also how it is that revelation reaches humanity, that is, how it is received and confessed (the 100% human-ness of the Word). Very God and very human existing together comprise the Incarnate Word as God’s self-revelation.

There can be neither a division nor a synthesis of divinity and humanity in the Incarnation. To divide them would discard any theological point-of-contact between humanity and divinity and subvert God’s freedom in the human realm. To synthesize them would create a third theological reality—above, beyond or outside God’s freedom and thereby put revelation in the hands of humans.

Instead, the two—very God and very human—exist side by side. “To sum up: that God’s Son or Word is the man Jesus of Nazareth is the one christological thesis of the New Testament; that the man Jesus of Nazareth is God’s Son or Word is the other” Barth says of the New Testament, wherever we find the man Jesus, there is the divine Christ; and wherever we find the divine Christ, there is also the man Jesus. The Incarnate Word is both human and divine simultaneously without diminishing or impinging upon the other. That God is free for us in this way—the eternal Word who assumes the visibility of the Incarnate Word, Jesus

---

11 David Demson says, We are not dealing with 99% God and 1% human. We are dealing with two totalities. Jesus Christ is 100% God and 100% human.
12 CD, 1/2, 15.
14 CD, 1/2, 24-25.
Christ, and is thus the revelation of God to humanity in “familiar form”—is nothing which can be known in advance, which can be established through independent epistemological foundations. Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word of God and self-revelation of God cannot be known “on the ground of an analogia entis already visible to us” before we received and responded to it in gratitude.\textsuperscript{15}

This is so because God remains the subject of revelation in its human response but also because human response is never free from its union with divinity in the Incarnation. The Incarnation as the point-of-contact is the event in which God is the subject of God’s self-manifestation and the subject of God’s manifestation to humanity (human response). God’s self-revelation is a closed-circuit that reaches and includes humanity in an event of God’s freedom to reveal God’s self, which is an event of grace.\textsuperscript{16}

Two things follow: the eventfulness of revelation and the Spirit in the Incarnation, particularly given the fact that the human (response) is the work of the Spirit. First, we will look at the eventfulness of revelation.

1.1.2.1 The Eventfulness of Revelation: God’s Action as the Creation of Eternal Time

A. The Time of God’s Revelation. God’s revelation, says Barth, “is the event of Jesus Christ.” The Incarnation—the point-of-contact between humanity and divinity, the place where they come together underneath God’s freedom—is an event because it enters time.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} CD, 1/2, 37. The “reality” of God’s self-revealing in Christ is a conclusion not an assumption, for we have no access to knowledge of assumptions about God. Humans can control assumptions about God; CD, 1/2, 39.


\textsuperscript{17} CD, 1/2, 49.
Time exists only in so far as humans exist.\(^{18}\) To say that the Word became flesh is to say that the Word became time.\(^{19}\) That Jesus takes on flesh means that Jesus takes on time. As such, Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, “does not remain transcendent over time” and “does not merely meet it [time] at a point, but it enters time; nay, it assumes time; nay, it creates time for itself.”\(^{20}\)

Barth says that revelation is a present with a past and a future. God’s self-revelation in Christ Jesus “is never ‘not yet’ or ‘no longer.’”\(^{21}\) Revelation is at every moment a present because every event—in which Christ becomes manifest as true God and true man and thereby generates human faith, witness and praise—is an event of revelation—an event whose very possibility was created once-for-all in the event of the Incarnation in which God elected to assume humanity.\(^{22}\) Every present-tense confession is an event *within the event*, namely, the Incarnation.

Because the self-manifestation of God and human response to God are united and happen concomitantly (in the Incarnation), each time God’s free electing decision in time is received and attested in human words it becomes an event of God’s self-revealing, an event *which exists in and with (never independently of) God’s event in Jesus Christ*.\(^{23}\) It would be false to speak of present-tense *revelations* because all human response is an event inextricably united with God’s one revelation in Jesus Christ. This is so because the Incarnation already included and assumed humanity for all time.\(^{24}\)

---

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 46.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 50.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 50.
\(^{21}\) Ibid. 52.
\(^{23}\) CD, 1/2, 165.
\(^{24}\) McCormack’s point on this is extremely important. From eternity, God chose to have humanity within himself. This is how the Incarnation can be the revelation of the very possibility (and “reality”, for Barth)
Human reception and praise of God when it becomes an event of God’s self-revelation means a real human participation in the existence of God—a participation made possible and revealed in the Incarnation. An event of God’s grace becomes “the now and to-day of the Saviour.” For there is but one covenant, the covenant of grace in the Incarnation. “The right way to regard the Gospel story—the proclamation of the birth, death and resurrection of Christ—will accordingly be to recognise in it the temporal execution of an eternal counsel, so that its facts are eternal facts, the truth and effect of which forwards and backwards are extended over all periods.”

**B. God’s manifestation to us in Time.** How is it possible that present-tense responses in which humans confess Jesus Christ are events assumed by that one event—the Incarnation? Because revelation assumes not just humanity but in assuming humanity it assumes time. As Barth said, time exists only because humans exist. God is the subject of his self-revelation and revelation necessarily includes time because time is the experience of humanity, God as the subject of his revelation means that God is the subject of time. All time is God’s time—created by God, existing in God, coming forth out of God. Time—like humanity—is not a general, autonomous, out-there reality; instead time and humanity are created by God’s freedom (as subject of his own revelation) in the God-human, Jesus Christ.

For Barth, time—like humanity—is relative (to God); that is, it exists insofar as it exists within the world created by God in the Incarnation. Human reception of God’s grace transposes humans into this world of grace where God’s electing decision to assume
humanity becomes hermeneutically determinative. That is, the reception of revelation is reception of a set of interpretative lenses that place believers within a world of faith—a world which God has already built (created) in the Incarnation.

The event of revelation (Incarnation) “transposes” us into “real time” which is not “here but there...namely, into the time of Jesus Christ.” So then the event of the Incarnation is not a reality which becomes a revelation in “our time”, as though it became existentially real nor is it that many revelations happen throughout history when humans respond to and receive God’s self-manifestation. Instead, the Incarnation—in which God assumes humanity and time—determines and creates all past, present and future human response. In the Incarnation, “our time is really in His hands.”

The event of the Incarnation in time is not merely a single point-of-contact in a long line of history. Instead, the event of the Incarnation is the event in which God’s eternal assumption of humanity enters into human existence and reveals not only that God enters time but that in this moment of time (the Incarnation) God creates and fulfills all time. If pressed to identify this fulfilled time before Christ (time of expectation in Old Testament) and after Christ (time of recollection in the New Testament and beyond), it would be the forty days where Jesus let himself be seen in his resurrection power because it points to the purely present time of “the pure presence of God among” humans.

This is how it is possible for revelation that was present in Jesus Christ to be an event here and now. Jesus Christ was not a blip or an insert into time but was the self-revelation

---

29 Ibid., 66. The time of expecting revelation (Old Testament, Ibid., 86ff) and the time of recollecting revelation (after Jesus, Ibid., 101-121) are themselves “revelation-time” (Ibid., 86).
30 Ibid., 1/2, 67; Williams, On Christian Theology, 109, 123-125.
32 CD, 1/2, 114. Also, David Demson emphasizes the testimony that the disciples saw Jesus during these forty days.
33 CD, 1/2, 30ff.
of God’s assumption of humanity and assumption of time in order to create a new time and thereby a new hermeneutical world in which to live.\textsuperscript{34} This new time is not a universal, abstract, idealized time, but a “localised” and particular time that comes to us \textit{in concreto}.\textsuperscript{35} Yet the Incarnation is a time for all times because it, not the event of Creation (e.g., Genesis), is the event in which God creates time itself. The name of Jesus Christ which takes place in a particular time is the “one centre at which God’s free, utterly unique, concrete action has taken place.”\textsuperscript{36} All future testimonies to that time—the Incarnation—are a transposition of the human and their present-time into that concrete action of God in which he assumed humanity and time. The point-of-contact today is the point-of-contact then because the point-of-contact then already included and created all points-of-contact (past, present and future) because humanity existed in its totality within divinity in the person of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{37}

The task laid upon humans in their response to God’s free grace is to acknowledge and confirm that the fight in question has already been fought” by Christ. Christ has taken our place as sinners—that is, as those who turn away from God. The burden which lay upon us “is laid entirely upon Christ.”\textsuperscript{38} The Incarnation, then, is a once-for-all event that reveals God’s eternal electing decision and in which humanity responds and participates by the work of the Holy Spirit who generates praise and gratitude for the grace which God gives in Christ Jesus.

\textbf{C. Implications.} Since human response is the work of the Spirit, for Barth, and yet human response is created in the Incarnation, we need to look at the Holy Spirit in the

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 50-51. My point in making this is that regardless of whether or not that world has any external referent or even if the subject himself has a referent, there still exists a world into which “believers” can live, a world wherein “believers” can see things in light of the non-referential (non-foundational) world which is created by the one event of the Incarnation.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{37} Cf. McCormack, “The Doctrine of the Trinity after Barth.”
\textsuperscript{38} CD, 1/2, 112-113, 151.
Incarnation. To this topic, I turn. But first, to summarize thus far, there can be no human co-operation in God’s free revelation because God alone is the subject of his own self-revelation. Human response exists under Jesus Christ and not beside it. Human faith is thus not a co-operation with God but a response to God that has already been made possible by God’s decision in the Incarnate Word as very God and very human. Because the Incarnation is God’s electing decision to assume humanity while maintaining the complete distinction (and totality) of divinity and humanity, revelation includes both a divine self-manifestation and a manifestation to the human. And in this way, in the Incarnation, God is the subject of both his self-manifestation and the manifestation to humans (which creates human response under the Word). Time like humanity was assumed in the Incarnation so that present-tense confessions are not new events of grace but exist within the one event of God’s gracious self-revelation. I now must revisit how it is that the time of human response remains in God’s freedom, that is, remains an event in which God is the subject.

To do that I will now look at the work of the Spirit in the Incarnation, who creates human response now because of the work of the Spirit then. The latest piece (the assumption of time in the Incarnation which occurs because of the assumption of humanity) will help us understand how Barth has a robust, albeit implicit, pneumatology operative in the event of the Incarnation.


---

39 Barth says that Mariology is “the critical, central dogma of the Roman Catholic Church” because it purports this sort of creaturely co-operation with God. See CD, 1/2, 139-146. For Barth, it is God’s free, electing decision in Jesus Christ alone who assumes and therefore reconciles humanity to God. Mariology purports a human co-operation in which the human stands beside (rather than under) God’s freedom as the subject of God’s self-revelation, and this Barth rejects. Mariology is, for Barth, a key expression of the analogia entis. And his rejection of it is thorough and unremitting. See Johnson, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis, 23-25; Barth, “The Humanity of God.”

40 Johnson, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis, 162, 166, 168
Two things: first, in the conclusion of the Incarnate Word in CD 1/2, Barth earnestly defends the doctrine of the virgin birth because it asserts that God, by the work of the Holy Spirit, is the subject of human reception of revelation. Second, since revelation as an event is both out-there and in-here, the Holy Spirit as God’s action to assume humanity (and human reception) in the Incarnation means we cannot conceive of the work of the Spirit as occurring at different time than that of Christ.

The Holy Spirit in the Virgin Birth. First, the work of the Spirit in the Incarnation receives explicit treatment where Barth defends the virgin birth of the Incarnate Word as the place where God remains the subject in the human realm (in the reception of revelation).41 The virgin birth reminds the church that “God Himself has the initiative”; it is the “sign of his freedom…, the mystery of his action, …a preliminary sign of the coming of His Kingdom.”42 In his virgin birth and in his resurrection, the Incarnate Word is different, is a mystery that is marked off by God himself and “not by our [human] understanding.”43 The person and work of the Holy Spirit (not human co-operation occurring through impregnating Mary) marks Jesus off as a mystery, as divinity—a divinity that has chosen to assume humanity while permitting humanity to exist as a totality itself. In the assumption of humanity by the work of the Spirit in the conception of Jesus, God acts alone without the human as a “fellow-worker,” says Barth.44

The Incarnation, from Jesus’ conception to his resurrection, is a “self-enclosed circle”, a circle because it exists in God’s freedom.45 The work of the Spirit in conceiving

Jesus Christ forecloses the possibility of human co-operation in the event of revelation. Once

41 CD, 1/2, 173, 179, 181, 192; and Johnson, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis, 113.
42 CD, 1/2, 182.
43 Ibid., 182.
44 Barth says, “No one is left to be God’s fellow-worker”, CD, 1/2,“ 196; see also, Johnson, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis, 113
45 CD, 1/2, 183, italics mine.
we step outside of this circle or out from underneath it, we, as those who have yet to put on
the interpretative lenses of faith, have no access to it.\textsuperscript{46} That is, for Barth, once we receive
God’s self-revelation, then we have access to God’s self-revelation.

Rather than an \textit{a priori} possibility of an autonomous human discovery, the Holy
Spirit exercises God’s freedom in the human realm by his work in conceiving the Incarnate
Word.

The Holy Spirit is God Himself in His freedom exercised in revelation [the
event of the Incarnation] to be present to His creature, even to dwell in him
[\textit{sic}] personally, and thereby to achieve his meeting with Himself in His Word
and by this achievement to make it possible. Through the Holy Spirit and only
through the Holy Spirit can [hu]man be there for God, be free for God’s work
on him [\textit{sic}], believe, be a recipient of His revelation, the object of the divine
revelation.\textsuperscript{47}

Barth says the doctrine of the virgin birth is essential because it removes all human
agency at the point-of-contact between humanity and divinity. In the very conception of
Jesus Christ, the Spirit replaces the male so that humanity is always in the place of receiving
God’s freedom. The work of the Holy Spirit in conceiving Jesus Christ is the free event of
God in which God is the subject of his revelation as it reaches humanity.\textsuperscript{48} That is, the
Spirit’s work in the conception of Jesus Christ is that work whereby the Spirit makes the
human a recipient of God’s work and of revelation.

\textbf{The Time of Christ is the time of the Spirit.} Second, since revelation as an event is
both out-there and in-here, the Holy Spirit as God’s action to assume humanity (where God is
the subject of the in-here of revelation) in the Incarnation means we cannot conceive of the
work of the Spirit as occurring at a different time than that of Christ. Barth says, “The Word

\textsuperscript{46} But for Barth, no one exists outside of God’s freedom or outside of God’s revelation. God’s world
assumes our world and thereby creates the possibility for us to see God’s world.
\textsuperscript{47} CD, 1/2, 198.
\textsuperscript{48} Johnson, \textit{Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis}, 216-218, 221.
of God is not without the Spirit of God.”⁴⁹ By the work of the Spirit—God’s free work in assuming humanity by the penetration of the Spirit who precluded human participation in the event of revelation—all human confession throughout time is included and created by this work of the Spirit in the one revelatory event, namely, the Incarnation.⁵₀

Barth’s claim at this point is about how human response can be a work of grace and not an *a priori* possibility belonging to the human. First, in the Incarnation, God the Holy Spirit acts to make the impossible (knowledge of God) a possibility created by grace which humans acknowledge (or take up a set of interpretative lenses) and confess. Barth says, “God Himself creates a possibility, a power, a capacity, and assigns it to [hu]man[s], where otherwise there would be sheer *impossibility.*”⁵¹ Second, on the ground of what God Himself does through the Holy Spirit to prepare the human for God in the Incarnation (as an event of God’s action and therefore of grace) can God act as the subject of his self-revelation in human reception (and therefore confession of Jesus Christ) today.⁵² In the virgin birth, the Holy Spirit takes the place of the male and of all humanity in their searching after God so that *human reception itself* becomes God’s act (not humanity’s *a priori* inclination towards or knowledge of God) and therefore an event of grace.⁵³ The fact that, for Barth, revelation (in order to be revelation) must be both God’s self-manifestation and God’s manifestation to us means that Christology and pneumatology are inseparable and juxtaposed concretely in the Incarnation.

Since the Incarnation is the revelatory point-of-contact, the work of the Spirit in the Incarnation to assume humanity is the event of God’s manifestation to us (in-here). The

---

⁴⁹ CD, 1/2, 199. See also Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 102, 120, 123-125.  
⁵⁰ Ibid., 3, 132-171; and Barth, “The Humanity of God,” 52.  
⁵¹ CD, 1/2, 199, italics mine.  
⁵² Ibid. 199-200.  
⁵³ These points are developed further in Paragraph 16 (CD, 1/2, 203-210) where Barth discusses human freedom for God made a reality by the free action of God through the Holy Spirit.
Spirit with Christ in the Incarnation is the one event not just of God’s self-manifestation (out-there) but also God’s manifestation to us (in-here). This is logically necessary for both of these events to be included in the Incarnation if indeed the Incarnation is the single event of revelation and if both of them (Being and Act) are required for an event of revelation. So just as Jesus is purely present in the present-time by the Incarnation, so also the Spirit is purely present in the present-time by the Incarnation. For Barth, the “revelation” that happens now by the work of the Spirit when people confess Jesus is the same revelation that occurred in the Incarnation of the Word. To distinguish between “revelation” now and the Incarnation would be to violate God’s freedom because it would posit points-of-contact which then become objects in the hands of humans. The Spirit’s work now is not new work, rather the Spirit transposes those of us who confess Christ in the present into the Spirit’s work in the Incarnation wherein we become recipients of God’s self-manifestation in Jesus Christ. And this is so because the Incarnation is the once-for-all event of revelation, the once-for-all point-of-contact between humanity and divinity.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Barth is weak where his implicit doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation is unnoticed and where people seek points-of-contact (“revelation”) in the present that is distinct from the Spirit’s work in the once-for-all revelation event, namely, the Incarnation. Because the once-for-all revelation event (Incarnation) has two-parts and the Spirit works to assume the human in the Incarnation, the work of the Spirit is to confirm and testify to Jesus; for this reason Barth says the Spirit

---

54 This also partially demonstrates both how and why Barth’s rejection of the *analogia entis* is necessary. Cf. Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*.
55 Allow me to clarify my intentions: to claim a referent behind our theology is to claim a point-of-contact, and this Barth does not allow. Instead, referents and points-of-contact were assumed within this one event (the Incarnation) which includes both Christ and the Spirit for all time.

This means “revelation” (theologically speaking) has already happened; any present-tense human responses are not “revelations.” Instead they are *realizations* (in the imagination?) of an event that has already happened but to which we have no access, which is “given” and can only receive.
remains “silent” about the Spirit’s own work.\textsuperscript{56} In other words, revelation cannot be in \textit{abstracto} (Being) which exists independently of its concrete expression (Action), namely, in the place (Incarnation) where God assumes humanity and reveals that She is for us.\textsuperscript{57} Who Jesus is (Being) is what Jesus does (Action); and what Jesus does is possible because of the work of the Spirit in the Incarnation. The very Being of Jesus does not exist independently from the human response to Jesus; and this human response is God’s action in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

\textbf{Implications.} For Barth, revelation without human response is not revelation. In order for revelation to really be revelation there must occur both God’s self-manifestation and God’s manifestation to us. We cannot speak of a God out-there unless we can also speak of a God who comes to us in-here. Revelation unites Being and Act so as to decenter and relativize static, out-there notions of an autonomous, objective (in the hard scientific sense) revelation.\textsuperscript{58} For Barth there is no revelation that does not \textit{happen}. If God speaks, humans hear, period. And if humans do not hear, then God has not spoken and there is no revelation.\textsuperscript{59} And the theological basis for this is that the Incarnation is the revelatory point-of-contact between God and humans—a revelation that is at the same time 100% God (God’s self-manifestation) and 100% human (God’s manifestation to us which creates our

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} CD, 1/2, 239, 241-242.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 37, Johnson, \textit{Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis}, 105.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Human speech about God is preceded by and dependent on the fact “God speaks.” And if God speaks, then for Barth there can be no doubt that humanity hears. If God speaks, then humans receive it—thus the equating of humanity to the Virgin Mary as recipients of God’s action. I would also note that while it may be an extended metaphor about God’s grace; the whole section on the Virgin Mary is repulsive and unjust in its portrait of women.
\item \textsuperscript{59} But it is that humans \textit{do} hear and respond (i.e., church) AND that God indeed speaks (i.e., the 40 days of the resurrected Christ), by which Barth objectifies what sounds very relative. That is, God speaks and humans hear. For Barth, the assumption of humanity in the Incarnation means that everyone hears, even if they do not acknowledge it yet, because all humanity exists in and under Jesus Christ.
\end{itemize}
response) — a response which is assumed and encircled by divinity and generated by the Spirit.\(^{60}\)

And because the Incarnation is both Jesus and Spirit which juxtaposes out-there and in-here, revelation is not a “thing” that can be tossed like a ball into the air which some people catch and others drop. For Barth, revelation touches humanity only because God touches humanity in the event of the Incarnation.\(^{61}\) Without these lenses of faith — i.e., from the “false” (theologically speaking) perspective of unbelief — humans have no access to God. An event of revelation must be not only God in God’s Being (God’s self-manifestation as God) but also God in God’s Act (God’s manifestation to us in the human realm) — the out-there Being of God and the in-here Action of God to generate human response.\(^{62}\)

It is only when people see that they exist under God (that their realm has been assumed by God in the Incarnation, that is, that God’s own Word has created this new way of seeing the world) that people can speak of God. And even here, for acknowledgement and confession of Jesus Christ to be an event of revelation, it (i.e., manifestation to us) must be accompanied by God’s act of self-manifestation. That is, even the act of the Spirit to generate human speech about God (confession of Jesus) is not autonomous from God’s self-manifestation in Jesus Christ.\(^{63}\) Christ and humanity cannot be separated; and therefore, Christ and the Spirit cannot be separated — at least from the theological perspective of faith.

By uniting the Spirit and the Word in the Incarnation, present-tense confessions of Jesus

---

\(^{60}\) For Barth, people today do not understand and respond in praise to God; rather God creates in people their response to God. God created that response in the Incarnation by the work of the Spirit. The point here though is that who/what something is (Being-ness) and what something does (Act) are inextricably connected in Barth’s doctrine of revelation. There is no abstract Being-ness that exists out-there independently of what it does/produces/accomplishes.

\(^{61}\) And in the Incarnation, God touches all people for all time.

\(^{62}\) But again, because it is very much in-here, for Barth, it is very much out-there.

\(^{63}\) From his early work in the Church Dogmatics and on through his later work there and elsewhere, for Barth, “apart from grace, all human speech about God is revealed to not actually be speech about God at all.” Johnson, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis, 26.
Christ are transpositions of the human into the event of grace—God’s electing decision in the Incarnation—a possibility that was already created and made real by the work of the Spirit in the event of the Incarnation.

Present-tense confessions of faith are not events of revelation in which something out-there is known, grasped and then passed on (like a ball is passed from one person to another); rather present-tense confessions of faith and worship are acknowledgments of a reality which precedes, creates and determines all time and all humanity. To “know” revelation, for Barth, is to acknowledge and confess a way of seeing the world as God’s world.64 Present-tense confessions therefore are confessions of Jesus Christ who assumed humanity by the work of the Spirit. For Barth, human confession is the putting on of lenses whereby one looks at the world as God’s world, at time as God’s time, at humanity as God’s humanity; and in this way—in this theological sense of confession based on faith in God’s all-assuming Being-in-Act—one can say one “knows” God.

Barth brings together Jesus and the Spirit in the Incarnation, even as he maintains a distinction between God’s self-manifestation (his Being and divinity) and God’s manifestation to us (his Action and assumption of humanity whereby the Spirit creates the possibility of human response). Therefore, any present-tense human confession of faith (regardless of how sincere or heartfelt it may be) is incomplete without its “objective” counter-part (confession of Jesus) and any theoretical prattle about Jesus is incomplete without its “subjective” counter-part (confession of Jesus). It is in the Incarnation that we see where and how theology brings these two pieces together in one, inseparable (and yet undilutable) event of 100% being (self-manifestation) and 100% act (manifestation to us).

---

64 CD, 1/2, 223; “The Humanity of God,” 46-47.
1.1.3 Implications (to Section 1.1)

In the next part of Barth’s doctrine of revelation in CD 1/2, The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Barth attempts to understand the church given the freedom of God for humans by the work of the Spirit in the Incarnation. But the foundation for the work of the Spirit (and the nature of the church) has been laid by the “togetherness of Spirit and Word” in the Incarnation. What follows about the Spirit and the church will be derivatives of this key insight from the Incarnation. The distinction between divinity and humanity as separate totalities in which the human realm has been assumed by the Spirit in the Incarnation (and the Incarnation as the revelatory event in its objective and subjective sides) is a methodological paradigm which unfolds as Barth conceives of the relation of revelation and the church (CD, 1/2, 203-454), revelation and scripture (CD, 1/2, 457-740) and revelation and preaching (CD, 1/2, 741-884). As such, in these God-assumed-realms of church, scripture and preaching, Barth completes and maintains his rejection of the *analogia entis* and thereby God as the subject of his own revelation.

It is truly remarkable that even if one takes the perspective of the autonomous, unbelieving human (which Barth discards by having God assume humanity), there are still two closed circles of very God and very human. So that both theologically (from faith) and philosophically (from the autonomous human), the Incarnation as totally God and totally human means the abnegation of points-of-contact because autonomous time like autonomous

---

65 Barth says, because “of the Holy Spirit is there a Church in which God’s Word can be ministered”, CD, 1/2, 198; and later also scripture and preaching with this same paradigm of God-human—i.e., human-under-God, i.e., human-interpreting-the-world-as-God’s-world (church-under-God; scripture-under-God; preaching-under-God).

66 CD, 1/2, 199, see Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, 102-105.

67 Barth’s commitment to a rejection of the *analogia entis* and thereby human response being under God in the Incarnation by the work of the Spirit is how humans speak of God in the present. CD, 4/1, 660; “The Humanity of God,” 44-47; See McCormack, “The Doctrine of the Trinity after Barth,” 104-107; Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, 162, 166, 168.

humanity has no access to this God who remains completely distinct from the (theologically speaking) “false” human claims to autonomy. Autonomous humanity (humanity which has not responded to and confessed God) has no access or claim to the divine side apart from its connection to God where God has already included the human—namely, the Incarnation. That is, from an anthropological position (not theological), Barth’s work here forecloses the possibility of either confirming or rejecting revelation by both the believer and the unbeliever!

The content of theology is the Incarnate Word, but this is also, for Barth, the method of speaking of God—a method which exists theologically, in God’s freedom (in which God assumed humanity); in which, that is, humans receive a set of hermeneutical lenses in which they come under (or enter this theological world) and “see” that they no longer have any autonomy from God. So whether viewed theologically by faith or from the (“false”) autonomous human side (e.g., from the social sciences), revelation exists beyond the reach of the autonomous human in their descriptions of religion.

For Barth and for autonomous human accounts, theology is something which exists in the imagination because that is where it happens—whether the positive imagination of faith or the imagination of faith which is denigrated by the social sciences. As a positive imagination of faith, Barth describes revelation as a reality-in-act\(^\text{69}\) which as such is capable of generating personal and social change. This possibility for justice and the common good by means of the imagination, from the social scientific side, I will argue, is a real possibility because it is a re-presentation of the world that is seen in action.

But before talking about the imagination, I need to discuss the notion of adjudicating theological claims, as this is often an implicit concern of theological discussion about pneumatology, and pneumatology is one of the most common critiques of Barth’s theology. It will become apparent that the *analogia entis* will need to be revisited.

1.2 *The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: Adjudicating Theological Claims*

The question that remains for us is how or whether it is possible to adjudicate from the human side whether or not a human response (and therefore the church and human words—scripture and preaching)—which exists under God’s free self-revelation—is a good or true witness to God’s self-revelation? In other words, is there anything objective, an autonomous referent, to which theology can appeal? However, I will first have to continue to ask whether or not it is possible for humanity to speak of God? I will suggest that for Barth, given his rejection of the *analogia entis* in favor of the freedom of God as the subject of his own revelation, *as human speech* God-talk exists in a closed-circuit that cannot be correlated with or include divinity.\(^{70}\) Regarding the initial question, for Barth, it is possible to adjudicate *theological* claims about God (or to critique human speech about God) based on its goal and subject (in this case, Jesus) *precisely because* we are dealing with two closed-circuits—God and human—which do not touch (except in the Incarnation).\(^{71}\) That is, theological claims can be adjudicated theologically and evaluated against their subject—Jesus—but that means also that theological claims have no claims to objectivity. Theological claims do not have a referent outside of theology and theological constructions.

---

\(^{70}\) Though, again, from the side of faith (*analogia fidei*) divinity can include humanity and God-talk.  
\(^{71}\) Webster, *Barth*, 170. For Barth, the possibility of a “positive” theology are given by the object and goal of theology, namely, Jesus Christ, God for us.
1.2.1 The Church as the Sign of Revelation

Barth’s discussion of the Holy Spirit in CD, 1/2, picks up the theme of God’s action in making humans “recipient[s] of His revelation.”72 And thereupon, Barth signals the ecclesiological locus for God’s self-revelation through the work of the Spirit. The Church is, for Barth, the “definite area” where God turns humans “into recipients of His revelation… [And] While God is as little bound to the Church as to the Synagogue, the recipients of His revelation are [bound to it].”73 And recipients of revelation are bound to the church because the church is not made up of *individual* believers who make an autonomous decision about an out-there object (or referent) that is open to their inquiry. Instead, for Barth, the church precedes and makes believers74; it is a world—built by the Incarnation, existing in God’s freedom—wherein a certain way of seeing the world in light of God’s once-for-all electing grace is acknowledged and embodied (and acknowledgement is theological knowledge, for Barth).

The key to understanding this is to remember that when Barth speaks of the church here, he is talking about humanity—that is, *all of humanity* which has been assumed by God in the Incarnation as a result of the Incarnate Word.75 The church, for Barth, is not a collection of autonomous individuals who have, of their own choosing, grasped their object, Jesus. Instead, the church is all those who live within the time created in the Incarnation; they are those who acknowledge and embody the “reality” (based on the Incarnation) that time is

72 CD, 1/2, 210.
74 CD, 1/2, 211.
God’s time, that humanity is God’s humanity, the world is God’s world. God (as subject of revelation) has already assumed the church and all humanity.\textsuperscript{76}

Barth says, “They [believers] are what they are because the Church is what it is, and because they are in the Church.”\textsuperscript{77} The world of the creature is bound to the church because the church is the place where the confession and hearing of Jesus Christ takes place and where God creates believers for himself.\textsuperscript{78} And so the church (like humanity) stands under and never beside or over Jesus Christ because humanity (and therefore the church) is assumed in the Incarnation thereby eradicating human co-operation with God.\textsuperscript{79} In other words, the church that confesses Jesus Christ is humanity who has received and responded to God’s self-revelation (who acknowledge Jesus is Lord)—for like the human the church has “no reality independent of or apart from Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{80} This response of confession and praise is itself created by God in the Incarnation when, by the work of the Holy Spirit, the human was assumed in the very God, very human—Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{81}

The method operative within the mystery of Christmas and the virgin birth (in which God acted as the subject in the conception of the Incarnate Word by the Holy Spirit) is re-appropriated in the mystery of Pentecost (the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit) in which God adopts humanity “in such a way that He Himself makes us ready to listen to [receive] the Word.”\textsuperscript{82} It is a \textit{re-appropriation of that method}, in that, here in the church, \textit{Barth maintains the distinction between divine and human as separate totalities} but insists that the position of

\textsuperscript{76} Cf. “The Humanity of God,” 62.
\textsuperscript{77} CD, 1/2, 211.
\textsuperscript{78} CD, 4/1, 661-662. Notice the circularity of this argument.
\textsuperscript{79} “The Humanity of God,” 47. Notice the continuity of thought regarding the human \textit{under} God and thus a consistent rejection of the \textit{analogia entis} from CD 1/2 through to CD 4/1 and finally on through Barth’s, “The Humanity of God” essay.
\textsuperscript{80} CD, 1/2, 214.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 213, 247-248.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 221.
faith under God provides a set of (albeit, anthropologically unverifiable) lenses whereby 100% humanity is read as existing underneath God’s divinity.

That revelation itself is the act and event of God’s self-revealing in Jesus Christ, the fact that revelation is the Incarnate Word means that “there is no new revelation.” And because there is no new revelation there are “no new signs.” Even though there could be new signs (in God’s free grace), Barth says there are no new signs because we as humans “could [not] have any knowledge of them.” As such we must be conditioned and determined by the once-for-all event of revelation in Jesus Christ and not invent new signs for God’s act of revelation. Therefore, the church remains the locus of God’s action to create human response and praise. But the church is never a subject or an agent alongside of God with any special epistemic access.

The church is the sign of revelation, given by God, wherein God reaches humans and makes them convinced of Jesus Christ. And confession and praise remain God’s free act by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. How the Spirit does this, cannot be explained. It is, Barth says, an “unspeakable mystery”; we can only “and must reply that it [human reception and confession of Jesus Christ] takes place by means of the divine sign-giving [the church].”

Human reception of revelation is a mystery; like the Incarnation itself, the human reception of revelation is a mystery that is true and possible in the freedom of God to assume humanity. As such, its reality and possibility cannot be known or “discovered” by the human from the human side; it can only be received and confessed with a leap, a leap between very

---

83 Ibid., 228.
84 Ibid., 228.
85 Ibid., 228; see McCormack, “The Doctrine of the Trinity after Barth,” 94; Cf. Torrance, Persons in Communion, and Jenson, “You Wonder Where the Spirit Went.”
86 CD, 1/2, 233; see also Johnson, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis, 216.
God and very human but who meet in the God-human, Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{87} The Incarnation as theological method, within this closed circle, becomes the means by which to adjudicate the locus of God-talk (the church) and theological language (but this is so within the theological world it constructs and inhabits).

As the Word is bound to the Spirit, so the Spirit is bound to the Word such that human reception—in its confession and praise of God—can be “checked.” That is, we can “know…and say something about” the witness of the Holy Spirit because it testifies to God’s self-manifestation (Jesus Christ) and reaches its goal, namely the adoption of humanity in God (God’s manifestation to us by the Spirit).\textsuperscript{88}

But this “checking” of human confession is an adjudication that comes from God’s side (in God’s assumption of humanity); it is an adjudication which exists in the closed-circuit of God (the 100% divine side) as the subject of his own self-revelation. \textit{The standard against which human claims about God are made is a standard that does not belong to the human.} As such, for Barth, even the adjudication of theology and claims about God are closed off to the human! The standard against which the church measures its speech about God is not just Jesus as the content of our speech (though Barth would say that), instead, the standard against which the church measures its speech about God is a standard which exists in the freedom of God and does not move from below to above (from humanity reaching for God). The standard exists beyond the grasp of \textit{autonomous} human access.\textsuperscript{89} The standard against which God’s self-manifestation and God’s manifestation to us is the Incarnation (i.e., God’s self-manifestation becoming God’s manifestation to us, and God’s manifestation to us

\textsuperscript{87} CD, 1/2, 235; and Johnson, \textit{Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis}, 186, 214.
\textsuperscript{88} God and humanity existing together under God; i.e., very God and very human; CD, 1/2, 236-237. This is an event within the once-for-all event of Jesus Christ and thereby an eternal-present point-of-contact between God and humans in which God remains the subject of his self-revelation. Cf. Webster, \textit{Barth}, 170.
\textsuperscript{89} Cf. Torrance, \textit{Persons in Communion}.
being God’s self-manifestation). The method for discerning and adjudicating speech about God then depends on God.\(^{90}\)

Indeed the *reason* that Jesus is the standard by which we measure our *content* is because the Incarnation is God’s *method* of revelation—because that is, the Incarnation is the event where “God speaks”; it is the once-for-all electing event of God’s self-manifestation and God’s manifestation to us, the place where Word and Spirit co-exist without impinging upon the other. *The Incarnation is content and method because the locus of the Spirit is primarily the Incarnation; the church is (like scripture and preaching) a derivative of the Incarnation.* A closed-circuit, yes—and while it is humanly impenetrable, it is also humanly indestructible.

From the standpoint of the human, the human outside of faith, the human who has not confessed that their humanity is assumed in the Incarnation and thus exists because of God and under God’s grace, “almost everything that we can say about [hu]man[s]…[in regard to revelation] tells against the possibility that God can be revealed to us.”\(^{91}\) From the standpoint of unbelief, it is impossible for humanity to penetrate the world of the divine.\(^{92}\) But when humans acknowledge Jesus as God, then Jesus becomes God to them. In this circular way, for Barth, by confession of Jesus, it is possible to know Jesus.

What literary theorist or social scientist is going to (or be able to) argue with that self-enclosed statement! Granted, they might say it is open to relativism, and *it is.* But to call Barth’s position relativism would mean that we would have to step outside of (and above) the world of God. That is, in Barth’s words, to call it relativism would be to transgress the freedom of God in her self-revelation and commit an act of disobedience.

\(^{90}\) CD, 4/1, 660; “The Humanity of God,” 40,44-46, 47.
\(^{91}\) CD, 1/2, 246, see also 267.
\(^{92}\) Ibid., 246.
1.2.2 The Incarnation as Method

Some important methodological observations. First, from the human side, there is no possibility for humans to penetrate revelation. It is free and beyond independent human access. Second, because it is free, it is an event in God’s grace. Revelation happens because God chooses to act and reveal God’s self. As an event of grace, what humans confess about God gets assumed into God’s self-revelation, that is, God’s manifestation to us is assumed by God’s self-manifestation (subjective in objective). The key in theology or God-talk, for Barth, is to make God the subject of revelation. As Paul Scott Wilson suggests, we proclaim grace when God is seen as the one acting.\(^93\) And we do this by making God the subject of our sentences. It is remarkable how often God is actually the subject of Barth’s sentences, especially when one compares Barth’s dogmatics with contemporary works in systematic theology (even those sympathetic to Barth).

Third, because we are talking about God and making God the subject, human confession and praise of Jesus Christ are (when they are an event of revelation) a reality and possibility which exists on God’s side, as such, when human words of witness are assumed by revelation, they become an event of God’s self-disclosure to the human because the human already exists within God. As human words, they are worthless (standing under judgment)\(^94\) but when in God’s freedom human words are assumed in the once-for-all event of revelation in which God is the subject, they exist on the 100% divine side of the


Incarnation. Human words, even faith itself, are negated as possessing any inherent possibility of disclosing God; God’s self-disclosure exists beyond human control.95

But when humans (exerting a “real” freedom) participate by faith (analogia fidei) in God’s once-for-all assumption of humanity (by confessing God’s once-for-all assumption of humanity), then it is possible for human words to bear witness to God’s self-revealing.96 But as “witness”, God-talk by humans is penultimate; it is witness to God’s own event, God’s own freedom that awaits assumption by God (i.e., divine assumption of humanity in Incarnation). Therefore, we are dealing with two closed-circuits of reality. The first circuit (and the one determinative for theology) is the one of divinity which has assumed humanity; the second closed-circuit is that of an independent humanity, which in and of itself has no objective, epistemological access to God (but which, for Barth, doesn’t theologically exist97). For Barth, God is God and the world is the world. The relationship is ethical rather than ontological.98

Fourth, because this is an event of God’s grace and confession/testimony by humans is not something we know (in the epistemic sense of an autonomous human) and is as such a closed-circuit existing on God’s side, human claims about God are subject to adjudication not based on anything from the human side; theological claims must be adjudicated according to

---

95 Johnson, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis, 30.
96 Barth, CD, 4/1, 650-662; “The Humanity of God,” 44-47.
97 Barth believes an independent human account of religious phenomena exists, formally speaking. For example, he accepts historical biblical criticism as having some merit. But where he discards it is in the task of telling us anything about God (or how to speak of God) because it’s a priori assumption is that of a (human/creaturely) world existing independent of God (i.e., the social scientific account depends on a human that does not exist under divinity—the Incarnation—and for Barth such a world, a world outside of the Incarnation, does not exist).

Barth is not interested in proving or establishing that God has assumed the creaturely world (i.e., the Incarnation), but he does think that theology must proceed as though this were the case without ever trying to (a priori) establish the existence of God (or God’s assumption of humanity) as an independent reality. That is, even the realm of God is a closed-circuit. It is a circle whose ending is its beginning and whose beginning is its ending; it is not linear.

98 Johnson, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis, 54.
the goal and means of theology—Jesus Christ, God’s self-revelation.99 Knowledge of God, Barth said, “means acknowledgement” of God. The “utterance or expression of this knowledge [given by God] is termed confession.”100 Confession—coming from the world built by faith—is the only kind of knowledge Barth permits. And for Barth this is “real” knowledge of God.

Regarding the third and fourth points above, Robert Jenson implies that the consequence of an undeveloped pneumatology (and the lack of an ecclesiological point-of-contact) is to give theology no recourse by which to adjudicate its own doctrine.101 If the standards for evaluating speech about God rest with God and come from God to reach humanity, then there is no way to say which claims are more right or faithful than any others; moreover there is no way to say whether or not God-talk is “real.” But Barth’s point is that God included the human and all that we, humans, think is “real”, that God created a world that is more real than the one we think is real.102

And this is ultimately, as Jenson notes, to place the agency and the subject of adjudicating claims outside and above the very human sphere. For Barth, God’s self-revelation always exists in a world outside and beyond the world of the human, which is what Jenson worries about but which Barth encircles with the assumption of all humanity within divinity in the Incarnation. For Barth, the attempt to “give” Christians “something to say” is to already accept an analogia entis, and Barth never permits this.103

99 See CD, 1/2, 236-237. Cf. Torrance, Persons in Communion, 36-40, 46; and Webster, Barth, 170.
100 CD, 1/2, 173; CD 4/1, 662.
101 Jenson implies that believers should be able to feel secure that there is indeed a referent behind the “givenness” of Jesus Christ as God’s revelation. See Jenson, “You Wonder Where the Spirit Went,” 303.
102 There is a below (not just an above) in God himself! See, Torrance, Persons in Communion, 160. God is the subject of the human response, and the place where this event happens once-for-all is in the Incarnation in Barth, CD, 4/1, 200-201; 1/2, 202-242.
103 Johnson, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis, 81, 8-11, 26-30.
The question humans (believers and unbelievers) will have to ask (or come to peace with) is, How far the world of God extends in the 100% human sphere? That is, is “our” world really God’s world? Or are we at least willing to believe that what we think is our world has been assumed by God in the Incarnation and is thereby really God’s world? time is God’s time? that we are God’s people? That is, are we willing to see the world in this way? For Barth, speech about God must limit itself; it must come under, and by so doing acknowledge (by faith without epistemic access) that it has been assumed by the closed-circuit of divinity in which God is the subject of his own revelation.

1.2.3 Implications (Section 1.2)

I have a slightly different agenda than Barth. I wish to look at Barth’s doctrine of revelation from the human side, namely, from the social-scientific side. Granted, on one hand, for Barth, an independent human account of revelation does not exist because (for Barth) only theology can disclose theology. But on the other hand, there are many who speak about religion outside of faith (social scientific ways of describing religion) and the church continues to ask about the possibility of God-speech (whether the theology of the academy or the preaching of the parish) in a world that is increasingly sceptical or dismissive of talk about God. This closed-circuit loop of reality in which Barth locates theology, I will argue, is a social scientifically viable way to do theology. This is important because it offers one way to understand and practice Christianity that does not depend on the existence of a verifiable referent.

---

104 For believers, it is the assumption of faith. For unbelievers, we will have to ask, How real are imaginary worlds? Someone asked me, “Is the story of Jesus true?” I said, “Of course it is. You are talking about it aren’t you?”
105 See my, “Generating Movement in the Social Sphere.”
However, before unpacking Barth’s notion of revelation and the Incarnation within the imagination, we must first note and address charges against Barth’s pneumatology. As is often the case, pneumatology is the locus in which theologians attempt to make analogies between God and humanity and thereby create space for human claims about God. This concern has occupied many Barthian interpreters and their agreements and disagreements with Barth need to be heard and responded to before proceeding.

2. Further Considerations on Barth’s Pneumatology

2.1 Does Barth Have a Truncated View of the Spirit?

Barth is consistently critiqued for having an inadequate pneumatology. Some accuse him of Christomonism—a conflation of the Trinity into the person of Jesus Christ. Alan Torrance says Barth is not Trinitarian. Robert Jenson celebrates Barth’s centering of Christian theology in the doctrine of the Trinity, but he laments what he calls Barth’s “practiced binitarianism.” He says Barth does not give the Spirit an independent agency alongside the Father/Mother and Jesus.

It’s hard not to raise one’s eyebrows at some of Barth’s statements regarding the Spirit. Such as, “We cannot say anything else about this work [of the Spirit]; we cannot speak about it in any other way than by repeating over and over the Amen [to Jesus] which has been put into our mouths by this work.” Or “the work of the Spirit is nothing other than the work of Jesus Christ.”

---

107 CD, 1/2, 239.
But, for Barth, the Spirit confesses Christ and nothing else because revelation is the Incarnation; the Incarnation is two-indivisible-but-distinct-parts (very God and very human); God is the subject of both parts; the Incarnation is the once-for-all event of God (and thus the one point-of-contact) in which God is the subject of both God’s self-manifestation and God’s manifestation to us; and finally the Spirit is joined to Jesus in this single event of revelation, the event which creates the (theological) reality and possibility of these two-parts, namely, God’s self-manifestation and God’s manifestation to us (i.e., God-talk).

2.1.1 Robert Jenson

One of the main concerns expressed by Jenson in his important essay is the perceived need for an agency of the Spirit operative within the church who acts as an authorized mediator for revelation. That is, Jenson worries, since the church is the locus of the action of the Spirit, if the Spirit is not an agent alongside of Christ, then the church is not an authorized mediator of God’s action in the world. Jenson expresses why he believes the church must be a mediator of the Spirit’s agency, “It is only in that I believe with the church that I share in that certitude in which I may rest my life.”

Jenson makes these charges because he finds in Barth that the Spirit is “the capacity of God...to evoke an echo in some subjectivity.” Jenson implies, by his use of the word “echo”, that subjectivity or human response is an emanation from a prior cause. Another interpretation, however, is offered by McCormack who says that the Spirit’s work is not an echo which is different (and separate) from Christ’s agency but that the Spirit’s union with

---

109 Quoting Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (eventually Pope Benedict XVI), Jenson, “You Wonder Where the Spirit Went,” 303, italics mine. Jenson wants the Spirit to have agency so that subjectivity can be transcended, Jenson, 298. But Barth, as I will argue later, is not concerned with transcending subjectivity—at least formally from the human side. Instead, he says that to ask about this is a priori to grant the existence of an independent humanity apart from God’s free decision in assuming humanity in the once-for-all event of the Incarnation.

the Word in the Incarnation is the eternal assumption of humanity (and subjectivity) in such a way that there is no independent subjectivity (no independent humanity) and therefore no Spirit apart from the Word. In this way, for Barth, Spirit and Word are eternally united in their distinction.\textsuperscript{111} Granted, it’s a closed-circuit that collapses the neat dichotomy between out-there object or referent (God in God’s divinity) and in-here subject (humans’ unverifiable confession of God) of some modern approaches to theology, but on the other hand, it exists in the freedom of God who remains the subject of his revelation.\textsuperscript{112} The second implication of “echo” is the introduction of a distance in time. That is, Jenson’s concern with the time of the church assumes that there is time outside of the eternal time (the eternal presence) of God in the Incarnation.

But, for Barth, the Spirit’s work is not the cause of Jesus, nor is the Spirit’s time different than that of the Incarnate Word. Regarding causation, for Barth, Jesus is the cause of the Spirit but the Spirit is also the cause of Jesus; Being (God in God’s self as the 100% divine side) and Act (human response of God in the 100% human side) never exist independently but are always Being-in-Act. Jesus and Spirit exist together because God assumed the human realm for all time in the Incarnation.\textsuperscript{113} Regarding time, the time of the Spirit is the time of Jesus because the Spirit is the subjective side of revelation and the subjective side is assumed once-for-all in the Incarnation.\textsuperscript{114} God-talk is not an echo for

\textsuperscript{111} This is why knowledge is not an independent thing for Barth—in the hard scientific sense of observable data. Knowledge is confession; knowledge is preaching. Knowledge, for Barth, is united with worship. Worship does not exist independently (is not an echo of) knowledge; the two are forever united in the Incarnation (Word and Spirit) in which the Incarnation is method not just content. See McCormack, “The Doctrine of the Trinity after Barth,” 104-107.
\textsuperscript{112} One might wonder then, if one were to adopt and try to correct Barth based on Jenson’s concerns, if it is possible to run the threat of separating the Spirit from the Word and thereby relativizing the Word?
\textsuperscript{113} See McCormack, “The Doctrine of the Trinity after Barth.”
\textsuperscript{114} Questions of universalism would necessarily ensue, as they probably did in my earlier exegesis. Barth’s response, to whether he was a universalist, was, “This much is certain, that we have no theological right to set any sort of limits to the loving-kindness of God which he has appeared in Jesus Christ. Our theological
Barth; it is time-travel in order to allow oneself to be placed into an alternative world.

Speaking of God, for Barth, is like walking through C.S. Lewis’ wardrobe again in order to enter Narnia. Both the world of Narnia and its miraculous portal exist and happen by God’s grace.

Jenson believes Barth’s “practiced binitarianism” is a result of a Protestant resistance to the (Catholic) notion of the church as an agent (and adjudicator) of God’s action. Jenson perceptively notes Barth’s application of a Protestant principle of God’s freedom and grace, but one could ask about the place of any human element in religion for Barth. For example, in his larger treatment of the Revelation of God (particularly Paragraphs 13-18) Barth speaks of the “abolition of religion”—abolished in so far as it exists as an independent institution apart from coming under the freedom of God. For Barth, the witness of the church enters into God’s self-revelation when the human institution is assumed by the free God in the Incarnation. So long as the institutional church exists under God’s freedom (i.e., God as the subject of his own revelation), then the church does indeed become an event in God’s self-revelation. But when the church (as it did/does in Roman Catholic practice, according to Barth) asserts co-operation with God’s free self-revelation (rather than participation in God’s eternally decisive work), then it becomes an instrument of the antichrist. The same is true for Barth regarding scripture. Scripture is a witness to God’s self-revelation. But

---

duty is to see and understand it as being still greater than we had seen before.” Barth, “The Humanity of God,” 62.


Religion as a human endeavor of self-justification is abnegated, for it is “the name of Jesus Christ [that] creates the Christian religion.” See CD, 1/2, 346. True religion is an event of grace that belongs to God (and not to humans or to the church). But the church is the locus of true religion so far as it acknowledges and lives out of the fact that the truth it testifies does not belong to itself but to the free, untameable grace of God. And in the same way, preaching is a faithful witness to Jesus Christ so far as it acknowledges and lives out of the fact that the truth we testify to does not belong to us but to the free, untameable grace of God.
independently, as human words alone, scripture is not revelation because scripture (as human words) does not exist out-there, independently of God’s decision in the Incarnation to assume humanity. Scripture, for Barth, is not an independent referent for revelation; its authority is in relation to God’s freedom as the subject of revelation that has its roots in the coming together of divine and human in their distinct totalities in the Incarnation. This, then, is how Barth retrieves and reads scripture as a witness to revelation without giving it any autonomous authority—that is, any authority in and of itself (as human words) apart from God’s freedom.

2.1.2 Alan Torrance

Alan Torrance makes a very nuanced critique of Barth that takes into account the socially constructed nature of reality. He notes that “participation within a community” is the necessary pre-requisite to the acquisition, usage and interpretation of a world. That is, Torrance understands the epistemic significance of context. Knowledge, philosophically and linguistically speaking, is socially constructed; knowledge is participation in the particular world or context in which one lives. Torrance suggests, then, that participation within the divine community determines the content of God-talk and the church is the context which (because it participates in the communion of Triune God, that is, in the context of the world of God’s revelation) makes interpretation possible because it participates in the divine communion wherein one acquires the skills of talking of God.

---

116 CD, 1/2, 527. As human words, scripture and preaching are depraved; it is only by “grace alone” that scripture (and preaching) can testify to God “in their fallible and erring human word.” CD, 1/2, 530.

117 Torrance, Persons in Communion, 344.
But Torrance wants point(s)-of-contact\textsuperscript{118} between God and humanity. He attempts to establish point(s)-of-contact on the basis that, unlike “the relativism of ‘post-modern’ theologies”, simply because we cannot step outside of our social and linguistic contexts “does not mean that the distinctions we make are simply arbitrary projections and are not grounded in the nature of things.”\textsuperscript{119}

Torrance distinguishes between the existence (God’s self-manifestation, i.e., the divine side of the Incarnation which for Barth relates to the Incarnate Word) and communication/reception of revelation (God’s manifestation to us, i.e., the human side of the Incarnation which for Barth relates to the Outpouring of the Spirit). However, Torrance envisions the two sides of revelation as a movement, from one (above) to the other (below), as though each had an existence apart from the other. That is, Torrance endorses a movement of communion (or existence of revelation) to communication (human reception of revelation).\textsuperscript{120} Because, Torrance says, communion within God (and existence of revelation)

\textsuperscript{118} I put parenthesis around the “s” in point(s)-of-contact to signal some ambiguity about Torrance’s position. He argues for present-tense success events of revelation that are produced by the Spirit within the church (that is, by the church’s communion within the prior communion of the Triune Persons). He is an astute interpreter of Barth and sees the once-for-all event of Jesus Christ as the point-of-contact (Ibid., 150). Yet given his concern for a mediated revelation through persons in communion (church existing in God’s Triune communion), it extends further than Barth’s notion of a determinative, once-for-all decision/election in the Incarnate Word. It is debatable, and I will therefore locate my engagement with Torrance elsewhere, namely, in Barth’s rejection of the analogia entis, which will receive more treatment in the following section.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 329, 344.

\textsuperscript{120} Torrance attempts to unite Being and Act in the Communion of God. He accuses Barth of “a foundational assumption of an absolute extrinsicity between the Being and Act of God and therefore between the Being of God and the epistemic processes in terms of which we interpret revelation” (Ibid., 68). First, Barth distinguishes between but does not separate Being and Act; see the following paragraphs. Second, Barth discards epistemic process because “knowledge” is no longer epistemology, it is worship (confession and ethics). Torrance’s concern for epistemology is an implicit and necessary assumption to his work. See the following paragraphs; also, cf. Ibid., 94. For Torrance, the point-of-contact is the participation of the human in the life of God by the work/action of the Spirit. This is where, for Torrance, God’s revelation touches humanity, rather than, as for Barth, humanity already participating in the life of God in the once-for-all event of the Incarnation. Ibid., 115-119.

In his discussion of Barth’s rejection of the analogia entis, Torrance seems to want to press the “participation” metaphor (participation of humanity in divinity through obedience/fait) so as to claim “epistemic significance” for faith. While this is philosophically coherent as theology, it is not philosophically coherent as philosophy. That is, it is philosophically coherent within the closed-circuit of God’s freedom—a freedom which includes the human, a freedom which is known to the human who lives by faith, but a freedom
is “prior” to communication (human reception of revelation), communion among the persons of the Trinity is prior to and determines the shape of God’s communication with humans (and the reception of revelation). The movement advocated by Torrance is linear, that is, he proposes that revelation is from-above-to-below. Employing earlier language, one might say Torrance moves from Being to Act as opposed to a Being which is constituted in Act.

Torrance says Barth’s later work places a primacy on the existence of the church for the theological task and that Barth’s later and greater appreciation for the church springs from his persistent refusal to address the question of the possibility of human knowledge of revelation. Torrance says, “For the theologian to ask such a question [about possibility of human knowledge] would imply either a) that there is, or can be, doubt as to whether revelation is known or b) that ‘insight into the possibility of knowledge of divine revelation’ can be expected from the ‘investigation of human knowledge.’” First, Barth rejects the attempt to measure and validate (or discard) the revelation event according to universal foundations. Second, Torrance reads Barth as rejecting the notion that there is any doubt about whether revelation is known.

which is inaccessible to the human who thinks themselves independent of God’s electing decision. As such, Torrance’s participation metaphor can only be epistemic in the realm of theology (and therefore a realm which is epistemically-speaking inaccessible to the autonomous human who tries to establish the existence of God-talk). Therefore, theology (as Barth saw) can and must discard the external evaluations of epistemology. Ibid., 154; Barth, CD, 2/1, 63.

121 Torrance, Persons in Communion, 1-6, 16, italics mine.
122 Barth is said to advocate a movement of revelation from-above-to-below. I’m suggesting (and this study has implied thus far) that although revelation belongs to God, for Barth, revelation does not move from above to below as much as the-below is assumed and adopted within the above-of-God. Revelation does not happen in an autonomous present-tense moment (after all there is no such thing as autonomous time when in faith one acknowledges that one is under God and has no autonomous humanity); rather revelation happens because it happened and because it happened it happens. In Barth there is no such bifurcation of time, no such duality of up-there and down-here. Instead, in his theology, Barth reads the down-here through the lens of up-there, distinguishing between the two but claiming the human for God, within the up-there realm of God’s freedom. That is, God is still the subject of the down-here, and he is the subject of his manifestation to us, precisely in the Incarnation. The church (like scripture and preaching) is a sign not a point-of-contact. Barth, CD, 1/2, 182, 221, 228.

123 Torrance, Persons in Communion, 11.
124 Ibid., 11, 27, 30-31; Barth, CD, 1/1, 196.
Comparing Barth and Torrance. Two critiques regarding Torrance’s assumptions, in what he sees as the first false option: first, Torrance assumes that Barth refused to address the (pneumatological) question of the possibility of human knowledge of revelation and that Barth’s reason for not addressing the question was because it would call into question the “fact that revelation has taken place.” But this is simply not the case. Barth did address the question. Even if most interpreters of Barth (even those sympathetic to Barth) find his pneumatology wanting, Barth answered the question by placing humanity under and within divinity. One problem may be, as John Webster said, that we ask Barth to do and say things that Barth never intended—possibly by framing questions in ways that Barth outright rejected.

Barth’s answer to the question was indeed to reject the possibility of human knowledge of revelation apart from faith. That is, Barth rejected the notion that one could stand outside of the world God created in and through Jesus (world-building) and yet still know God. So instead of granting the secular human account an autonomous existence and agency independent of or outside the Word, Barth acknowledged human reception (and the work of the Spirit) as distinct from the Word but asserted that human reception (and the work of the Spirit) exist indissolubly in and with the Incarnate Word—just as the Word necessarily exists with its corresponding human response, that is with its corresponding work of the Spirit.

Torrance argues that the indwelling of the church within the communion of the Triune God is an indwelling that is “grounded in the nature of things.” He suggests that

---

125 Barth, “The Humanity of God.” McCormack, “The Doctrine of the Trinity after Barth,” 94, 104-107, Johnson and Webster also see Barth addressing it. See Johnson, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis; and Webster, Barth.
126 See Webster, Barth, 71.
social constructions and contexts are not compromised by their particularity but that particularity is grounded in the nature of things such that “reality” can be discovered.\textsuperscript{128} For evidence, he cites the need to change and adapt our theories because “reality” may interrupt the processes (and paradigms) of our interpretations and force us to revise our hypotheses. That our constructions collapse, he says, is proof that there is reality beyond us which “imposes its pattern on us.”\textsuperscript{129}

Regarding Torrance’s suggested corrective to Barth, first, Torrance’s proposal is a philosophical argument about theology, a human attempt to humanly explain theology as having some ground in “reality” (whether one conceives of reality by appealing to the subjectivity of context or to the existence of a referent which imposes itself on us). And indeed, such an argument must be made if one is to assert points-of-contact between divine and human. But second, and more importantly, one might ask: although humans are constituted (have a there-ness) by indwelling a particular context that is socially constructed (as Torrance permits), is it the case that what interrupts our processes is something objectively out-there or is it too an objectification of subjectivity—another socially constructed context—whose there-ness is experienced as ‘real’ because it is ‘other’ and thereby experienced as foreign to our there-ness (within our context)?\textsuperscript{130} While human theories about the “nature of things” do indeed change (theories are revised), is it possible

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{128} Notice how Torrance seems to ground knowledge in the existence of and access to a referent.
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Torrance, \textit{Persons in Communion}, 344-346. Bourdieu might say that what “imposes its pattern on us” is not a true, out-there referent but another objectification-of-subjectivity.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Though the degree to which we experience the there-ness of an other probably depends on the amount of power the other has. That is, those who possess symbolic power and symbolic capital won’t feel the there-ness of the other as much; while those who do not possess symbolic power and symbolic capital will intensely experience the interruption of their processes by the powerful. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, \textit{Language and Symbolic Power}, Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, trans., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 37-42, 72, 106, 111, 128, 156.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
that this occurs by an engagement with an ‘other’—an other to which we have no epistemic access.¹³¹

The second critique: Torrance believes that Barth doesn’t ask the question about the possibility of human knowledge of revelation because that introduces “doubt” into “whether revelation is known.” However, the concern over “doubt” is a false structure and foundation which Torrance projects on Barth. Barth’s entire project dismantles the theological foundation of either belief or doubt. As Barth told Brunner, “I don’t believe in your unbelief.” God’s action (grace) not belief is determinative for revelation. The litmus test for the reception of revelation for Barth lies with God—not with any anthropological principle, even the principle of “belief” or “unbelief”. The testimony to the existence and happening/reception of revelation (a revelation which exists with God) is that a person worships—i.e., testifies to Jesus Christ and embodies the ethics of God’s Kingdom—not whether or not a person believes or doubts.¹³² Barth is not concerned with whether or not people believe; he is concerned with God’s grace and with human worship of God expressed in the ethics of Jesus. Barth wants people to see and live in the world already made possible by God in the Incarnation. Torrance’s concern about the introduction of doubt into revelation is alien to Barth. Indeed, it is this very foundation (as an independent human possibility) that Barth attempts to dismantle and discard (as disobedience) by asserting that Being does not precede Action but that Being and Action are distinct but simultaneous and inseparable.¹³³


¹³³ Cf. Ricoeur says the Real is in Act. “Between Rhetoric and Poetics,” 355. Torrance notes that God’s speech is act (Torrance, Persons in Communion, 32). That is, God’s speaking (self-revelation) in Jesus
Not only is Barth not concerned with the question of whether or not God exists; he is also not concerned with trying to answer whether or not the church exists. Barth maintains this position in his late work,

We do not need to engage in a free-ranging investigation to seek out and construct who and what God truly is, and who and what man truly is, but only to read the truth about both where it resides, namely, in the fullness of their togetherness [the Incarnation], their covenant which proclaims itself in Jesus Christ.134

Throughout his work, Torrance repeatedly sets up the existence of God as an a priori reality which he reads into Barth.135 The question of God’s existence and Being is a false question for Barth because it too is an act of disobedience, a transgression of God’s freedom by attempting to speculate about a world into which we humans have no epistemological access (by separating Word and Spirit and thus the Being and Act of revelation). Barth said, to ask about the “reality” of revelation “would already be to deny it.”136 The question for Barth is whether or not people witness to and worship God (ethics).137 Philosophically speaking, it...
would be more accurate to say of Barth: *when God creates in humans a witness to himself in and through the church, God and the church exist*. And when God and the church exist, God creates in humans a witness to himself in and through the church.\(^\text{138}\) As Joseph Mangina says, for Barth, “Revelation is possible because it occurs.”\(^\text{139}\)

Barth changes the field on which the game of theology is played so that concerns over repudiating or not-repudiating revelation is rejected as a false presupposition and analogy. Barth rejects the notion that revelation exists independently of its happening in the human. For Barth, revelation exists because it happens, and it happens because it exists. Word and Spirit are distinct but they cannot be autonomous entities, existing independently of one another. They are united: the existence is a happening; the happening is an existence.

The communion of language within the communion of God is, for Torrance, a “commandeering of language by revelation” so as to philosophically and epistemologically secure revelation as God’s revelation, free from “pre-determined conceptual classes.”\(^\text{140}\) For Barth the communion of God is the social context which provides the context and the rules for God-talk.\(^\text{141}\) But Barth might ask, How can one free God’s revelation from pre-determined human categories by using human philosophical and epistemological arguments?

Of course, Torrance’s concern, like Jenson’s and Garrett Green’s is: How, then, is it possible

\(^\text{138}\) Cf. CD, 1/2, 401-454; CD, 4/1, 643-725.

\(^\text{139}\) Mangina, 31. So the question, “Is theology true or not?” becomes a false question because what one first has to ask (or assume) is, “With what kind of truth are we dealing?”

\(^\text{140}\) Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 212. See also 326-333, where Torrance notes how people are socially constituted through language. There he points beyond the reductionist scientific impulse to find a referent for each linguistic sign. But he is committed to an ontology, a being-ness, which stands behind the sign. That is, even if it is a language game, for Torrance, there is a reality back there. The reality to which the sign attests is larger than the sign itself. As such, the larger reality (the communion of the Triune God) commandeers our language (sign) and uses the language shaped by faith to refer the church back to God and “our whole sense of the [God-given] purpose of the created order.” Ibid., 333. In this way, God-talk (sign) is capable, for Torrance, of actually referring to God.

Concerning the notion of a larger reality behind the sign, compare with treatments of metaphor and linguistics in Ricoeur, “Between Rhetoric and Poetics”; Hawkes, *Metaphor*; Bonneycastle, *In Search of Authority*; and even Bourdieu’s socio-linguistic practice theory.

\(^\text{141}\) Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 336.
for theology to know that it is not engaged in an intricate game of pretend, a mere figment of the imagination? But for Barth, from the human side, from an independent human account, within the closed-circuit of human philosophical and epistemological categories, we have no way of knowing. And Barth embraces this uncertainty and lack of access to referents or Being in and of itself.

However, for Barth, we can and do worship. There is a very real love and praise of God, so real in fact that it determines the church’s ethics and reshapes the whole world. For Barth as for Torrance, if you want to receive the grace which Jesus Christ gives, then you must speak of Jesus Christ.

2.1.3 Implications (Section 2.1)

Indeed, if Johnson and Webster are generally accurate in their reading of Barth on the analogia entis, it is possible that some of the concerns (the existence of God and means for adjudicating truth claims) summarized above already depend on certain epistemological foundations which we are discovering are (social) scientifically untenable, and which for Barth theologically, are a violation of God’s free grace. Barth does not reject the question of human knowledge; instead, he reframes and repositions it within the world built by God as it is seen and acts in the Incarnation. He does however discard the question of the existence

142 Green, Imagining God, 129.
144 Torrance speaks of indwelling the language. Torrance, Persons in Communion, 356.
145 See Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice; Language and Symbolic Power; Bell, Ritual; Eagleman, Incognito; Hawkes, Metaphor; Bonnycastle, In Search of Authority.
146 Garrett Green makes a case against grounding knowledge epistemologically, but he too attempts to protect his proposal from relativism, stating that the imagination tells us what something is “like” and thereby gives access to some thing, out-there which is otherwise inaccessible. See Garrett Green, Imagining God, 35-79. In the end, Green, like Jenson, wants “publicly identifiable controls” to adjudicate among truth-claims about God (Green, 129, italics mine).
of God because it sets up an *analogia entis*. Instead, he engages in theological world-building, showing God in action, as the subject of his own-revelation. If Barth has an *a priori*, it is that there is no *a priori* when it comes to God’s self-revelation.

### 2.2 Barth’s Rejection of the Analogia Entis

#### 2.2.1 Humanity Under God

For Barth, there is no human knowledge of God. There is only the free action of God in Jesus Christ. As Barth said, any knowledge or point-of-contact from the human side could just as easily end up being the product of the devil."147

John Webster says, Barth’s generative idea was that a “rejection of nineteenth-century liberalism involved discarding any idea that God is a given presence in human religious culture.”148 Barth rejected the idea that there is “one dominant account of God and humanity, according to which God’s relation to us can be discovered within us and our undertakings, when in fact that relation is constituted solely by the free, disorienting action of God.”149 Barth says,

God’s revelation in its objective reality is the Incarnation of His Word...In this bit of knowing we are not the masters but the mastered. It is when we are *in the act* of knowing God’s revelation, amid the objective reality of it, *in the act* of knowing the person of Jesus Christ, that this must be said. If we do not know this person, if we are unaware of the reality of ‘very God and very [hu]man,’ we will certainly not say this, but confidently ascribe to ourselves the possibility of knowing it.150

---


148 Webster, *Barth*, 22.

149 Ibid., 27. Webster argues that ultimately Barth was not rejecting God’s relation to humanity but rather clearing the ground so that God’s relation to humanity could remain God’s own work. Ibid., 27-45.

150 CD, 1/2, 172, italics mine.
Humans cannot be “aware” of the truth of God’s self-revelation or “declare that it is true...because of any capacity belonging to us.”\textsuperscript{151} We can only receive God’s revelation and “know” it is true if God makes us know its truth. That is, the truthfulness of God’s revelation is a closed-circuit which exists on God’s side. The point-of-contact where humanity exists with God (and has real freedom \textit{under} God’s freedom) is the Incarnation.

Rowan Williams in his essay, “Barth on the Triune God” stresses that it is impossible as autonomous humans to know that we know revelation and that this impossibility is the strangeness of the Word that is essential to understanding Barth’s discussions of revelation.\textsuperscript{152} Some have suggested that Barth changed his mind. Johnson contends that Barth did indeed understand the \textit{analogia entis} and that he maintained his rejection of it for good reasons.\textsuperscript{153}

\textbf{2.2.2 Did Barth Change his Mind?}

With such a decisive early break, most interpreters have asserted a development within Barth’s Christology in his later work.\textsuperscript{154} For example, in CD 4/1, Barth says, “The community [church] is the earthly-historical form of existence of Jesus Christ Himself.”\textsuperscript{155} Johnson’s work implies a sense of “development” (akin to McCormack) but he attempts to show first that Barth understood the \textit{analogia entis}, second that Barth maintained his rejection of it.\textsuperscript{156}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 172.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Johnson, \textit{Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis}, 8-11. An important essay on this point is Barth’s late essay, “The Humanity of God.” There Barth argues for a true freedom for humanity under God and God’s freedom (in the Incarnation).
\item \textsuperscript{154} McCormack, “The Doctrine of the Trinity after Barth.” Torrance, \textit{Persons in Communion}.
\item \textsuperscript{155} CD 4/1, 661.
\item \textsuperscript{156} Cf. Barth, “The Humanity of God.” The implication Johnson seems to make is that Barth’s later Christology (with its heightened emphasis on the church) is commensurate with Barth’s rejection of the \textit{analogia entis}.
\end{itemize}
In his late essay, “The Humanity of God,” Barth suggests a “change of direction.” But by this, he does not mean a change in his theology; instead, he means a change in the theological location from which he posits the same theological basis—God. That is, instead of beginning with the deity of God (God’s self-manifestation as very God, the 100% divine in the Incarnation), he is going to begin with the humanity of God (God’s manifestation to us, the 100% human in the Incarnation). Barth is here emphasizing the Spirit with the Word, whereas before (CD 1/2) he emphasized the Word with the Spirit. Notice, he did not say he is going to begin with humanity or human knowledge but with the humanity of God. Barth is still talking about the Incarnation (the very God and very human), but instead of beginning with the divine, he is beginning with the human-as-it-exists-in-God, assumed in the Incarnate Word.

The point is two-fold. First, Barth’s “change of direction” is not a change in the possibility of human knowledge. Barth still rejects the possibility of human knowledge because there is still no such thing as an autonomous human. Second, humanity exists under and in God’s electing decision in the event of the Incarnation. As such, God is free and the church’s decisions are relative—that is, the truthfulness of God-talk is relative to God who is the subject of his self-manifestation. In CD 4/1, Barth says, the church should have

Reservation in relation to itself, with a consciousness of the relativity of its decisions, their provisional nature, their need of constant reform, standing under and not over the Word it can go to work with quiet determination, accepting the risk, but with the courage and authority of faith and obedience, and therefore without the false affectation which in order not to do anything questionable will never do anything at all.

---

158 Given Barth’s rejection of the *analogia entis* and his union-and-distinction of Being and Act, “authority” would thereby be the authority not of a static, universal, objectively out-there being but instead the quite relative authority of the real-in-act whose authority is not only its ability to be heard and obeyed but also *its ability to reach its goal*. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1.3, 984a12-16, 21-23; 983b-984a; and *Poetics* 1459a3-8. Also, Ricoeur, “Between Rhetoric and Poetics,” 353-355, 334.
159 CD, 4/1, 660.
There is no objective referent or epistemic ground for God’s free action which thereby ties God’s hands to the teachings of the church. But the church can and should “go to work” within all the risk of its own relative dependence on God’s grace. Its courage and authority do not belong to it; instead, (and this is really important), its authority is “based” on its willingness (by faith) to limit itself to the world-built by its confession to Jesus Christ. That is, within this very closed-circuit the confession of Christ creates the world which it re-presents. If we are to receive the grace which Christ gives, we must “go to work” (theologically) imagining the world as we see it in the Incarnation. Its reality is its ability to create the world it re-presents (i.e., its ability to reach its goal); its truthfulness is measured by the goodness of the goal it attempts to construct.

One of Barth’s critiques of liberal theology was not that it was wrong (as an autonomous human or social scientific account) but that it was incapable of achieving its goals because it attempted to step outside of the closed-circuit of faith (and the imagination) by positing something more “real” out-there. Barth refuses to allow theology to become talking about the thing out-there rather than choosing to limit oneself to the (imaginative) world of faith. So if one is to receive the grace and love of Jesus Christ, then you have to talk about Jesus Christ—and by that I mean we must re-present the world in action so that people see Jesus Christ acting on their behalf.

---

160 Barth, “The Humanity of God,” 38-46, 56-57. Speaking from the autonomous human side (which Barth permits but discounts—at least from theological world-building which Jesus does), Jesus is the metaphor. There is nothing out beyond the closed-circuit of divinity (a divinity encircling humanity) for Barth.
2.3 Implications (Section 2)

The self-contradictory nature of Barth’s claim about the impossibility of human knowledge of God\textsuperscript{161} coupled with his dogmatic insistence on behalf of human speech/testimony to the Lordship of Jesus Christ generates incendiary responses from critics who are increasingly interested in inter-faith dialogue and emphasize religious and social pluralism. Noting the violence and power that often accompany the use of God-language, Barth’s theology garners accusations of sectarianism and worse.

While Barth is no pluralist, it may be beyond our adjudication to determine if he is a relativist. Though he shows no interest in relativism and would surely reject the label—as all first-order discourse must because first-order discourse (the discourse of worship and world-building) cannot step outside the story they are telling without compromising the world they seek to image—Barth has shown himself to be a theologian more interested in showing God’s Being-in-Act than in establishing a humanly accessible referent against which to adjudicate God-talk and to confirm or deny God’s existence.

Barth shows his readers God in action. He does not talk about talking about God; instead, he makes God the subject of sentences such that God is seen acting in a particular way. One does not have to agree with where Barth re-presents God acting (Barth’s theological content) in order to agree with Barth’s theological method rooted in God’s freedom as the subject of God’s revelation—a method in which Barth discards epistemic foundations and accepts the risk of naming God in action in the world. For this reason, Barth is a theologian of the imagination, which I suggest is a socially scientifically viable method because it does not depend on the accessibility and verifiability of a referent.

\textsuperscript{161} CD, 1/2, 173; Johnson, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis.
3. Barth and the Imagination

If for a moment, we suspend the question of access to a referent and the question of God’s existence/Being (which as I hope I have shown are superfluous to Barth’s method), then we can still see (from social science) that the language of God in action (where God is the subject) is the language necessary for people to see God (or anyone) acting and to spark the imagination. Furthermore, it is through re-presenting the world in action that the question of “reality” as an objective, out-there thing becomes completely extraneous. That is, by speaking of God’s action rather than God’s existence—by speaking of Being-in-Act—one bypasses the question of belief or unbelief and makes it superfluous. By speaking of God in act, the question of worship (“Do you worship? Do you embody the ethics of Jesus?” Rather than “Do you believe?”) becomes methodologically primary while remaining penultimate to God’s impenetrable (closed-circuit) and indomitable grace.

In the next chapter, I look at the nature and role of in Aristotle and Ricoeur and thus attempt to show how a doctrine and method of revelation (that is not grounded in a referent or an autonomous Being-ness) can be social-scientifically coherent. Barth employs a socially scientific method so as to speak of God in spite of (and maybe because of) the closed-circuit of reality. Based on the socially constructed nature of things, I conclude by affirming Barth’s assertion that preachers (and theologians) can embrace the positive (grace-filled) task of showing God in act in the person of Jesus Christ in order to shape the hearer’s imaginations toward worship expressed in justice and ethics, precisely because the possibility of epistemology in theology is discarded in favour of the task of world-building.
3.1 World-Building and the Imagination: Re-presenting the World in Order to Change It

Living in Canada, my wife and I wanted to give our children some basic awareness of the American culture and society from which they came. When my daughter was five years old, my wife reviewed the Presidents of the United States. After concluding the list (which at the time was the 44th President), my daughter asked, “Why are there no girls?” Currently at the age of three, my son goes into toy stores. If the picture on the box has a boy, he exclaims, “Look, Dad! This is for boys” (and vice versa).

While these are personal examples, other images within any person’s context (whether one’s local-physical context, TV-Internet-media context, or literary context—the sort of literature one is exposed to) are inscribed on the minds and bodies of those who inhabit their particular spaces. The power of these images is recognized and addressed by gender studies and post-colonial studies in their attempts to reform language and images; their power is attested by affirmative action policies which help redress mis-representations of the world by re-presenting minorities in positions in which they are rarely seen.

People need to see others (with whom they identify) doing a job in order to believe it is possible. Re-presenting the world—that is, showing a different way as happening in action—opens up the possibility for others to embody these new worlds.

In Rhetoric, Aristotle says, “Metaphor “sets the scene before our eyes.” That is, metaphor makes hearers see things. “By ‘making them see things’ he means using

---

162 Cf. Bourdieu on habitus, Practical Logic.
expressions that re-present things as in a state of activity.”\textsuperscript{164} Expressing things in a state of activity is the power to “make things visible, alive, \textit{actual}.”\textsuperscript{165}

In a rhetorical theory of language (and thus metaphor), we are talking about (as Aristotle envisioned it), “the power to set things before the eyes, the power to speak of the inanimate as if alive, ultimately the capacity to signify active reality.” Metaphor is used…to set things before the eyes of the hearers so that they might see new possibilities. First-order discourse—the language within the world of faith—has the capacity (as language which re-presents the world in action) to construct worlds of possibility, worlds into which people can enter, worlds which shape them and their ethics.\textsuperscript{166} So when Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood,” he was not talking about an abstract \textit{concept}; he was constructing an alternative world (painting a word picture) for us to live into.

Martin Luther King, Jr., tapped into the possibility of language to construct alternative ways of living in the world (regardless of what is “out-there”) by showing justice in action, by re-presenting the world as it could be. This is the power of words that speak to the imagination, and this is congruent with Barth’s own method (regardless of one’s evaluation of his dogmatic content).\textsuperscript{167}


\textsuperscript{165} Ricoeur, “Between \textit{Rhetoric} and \textit{Poetics},” 347, italics mine.


\textsuperscript{167} Though again, his brilliance is, in part, his rejection of the \textit{analogia entis}, which permitted for continuity and integration of his method and content in the very God (100% God) and very human (100% human), union-in-distinction of the Incarnation. That is, the Incarnation as revelation is where and how Barth’s content is his method and his method is his content.
3.2 Barth and the Imagination

Barth rejects the *analogia entis* because it “is built upon the notion of a static God who is ‘there’ rather than the...God who ‘comes.’” Barth speaks of a God who *acts* concretely in the world rather than a static God who *exists* in abstraction somewhere out-there. For Barth, the “real” is in act; the real is not an autonomous thing, not an unmoved mover who generates linear movement. Instead, God is the beginning and the end—whose action activates the end from the very beginning in the event of God’s self-revelation, namely, the Incarnation.

By making God the subject (not just theologically but in his sentence structure!), regardless of what Barth or anyone believes about the (objective) existence of God, Barth images an acting God, one who is doing something, acting in the world to revision it (i.e., the Kingdom of God). And by showing God in action to revision the world, people can see God acting and live into the theological world built thereby.

Barth is unique in that Barth begins with *who* God is (Jesus) rather than first positing *that* there is a God or even *that* this God is Jesus. Barth does not employ an *a priori* founding of human knowledge whereby he uses as a foundation to tell us who God is; instead, he submits to and thereby enters (by faith without epistemology) into the world of God. Instead of beginning with the existence of God, Barth *imagines* Jesus as God and begins to describe what the world looks like when (we imagine that) Jesus is God.

This is in sharp contrast to what often happens in Christian theology, which is that theologians imagine Jesus in the image of a God who exists out-there, objectively or

---

168 Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, 102. See also Torrance, *Persons in Communion*; and Webster, *Barth*.

independently. That is, Barth doesn’t begin with the *a priori* of the existence of a force or higher power (e.g., Mystery or Infinity) which he then seeks a name for. *Barth does not assume God exists and then after extensive searching settle on the name of Jesus for some independent, scientifically-verifiable or epistemological reasons. Instead, Barth tells us what revelation looks like when Jesus is God’s revelation.* And thereby, Barth tells us what creation, reconciliation and humanity are when one begins to imagine a world in which Jesus Christ is the very God, very human—God’s once-for-all creating, redeeming and reconciling event.170

Webster is very helpful. He says, the *Church Dogmatics* are not written like a scholarly treatise in that they are not a “disinterested inquiry….In its place, Barth slowly created a literary art whose persuasiveness is closely akin to the form of speech which he first used to articulate his discovery of the freedom of God: preaching.”171 Rather than apologetics or foundationalism, rather than inquiring “into the possibility of Christian belief. Barth’s concern, by contrast, is not with the possibility of ‘church’, but with describing how things look once one is inside the region or culture of the church.”172 In other words, Barth takes the “risk” of constructing theological worlds and governs his language according to the Incarnation. In literary terms, Barth engages in world-building. World-building is first-order discourse (the discourse of preaching and worship). Rather than proving or demonstrating anything about God, Barth prefers to talk of God “with fluency and delight.”173

---

170 Barth is quite certain that there is a God. But whether or not there is a God is not a necessary assumption on which his theology depends. Cf. Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 74.
171 Webster, *Barth*, 50.
172 Ibid., 51, italics mine.
173 Cf. Ibid., 52.
Indeed Barth says we cannot know or understand “how” God becomes Incarnate in the Son. “We can only know and worship its actuality.” And this “actuality” is the work of the Spirit. A theology professor was once asked if he believed in infant baptism; he scoffed at the question and replied ironically, “Believe in it?! I’ve seen it done!” I can imagine if someone asked Barth whether or not he believed in Jesus, he could have said, “Believe in Jesus?! I’ve seen him act in the Incarnation!” For Barth, knowledge of God is not knowledge as we think of it. Acknowledgement, confession and witness—this is all the access humans have as humans within the human realm; but if indeed, one takes on the interpretative lenses that God has assumed the human realm, then one can see and live as though it were already so. As such, Barth’s method is not objective in the scientific sense, but this particular theological world constructed in the imagination is capable of sparking the imagination in those who hear.

Barth took this approach because he did not believe in a point of contact between God and humanity in such a way that humans could “search for apologetic prolegomena” upon which to establish revelation or the content of it. Revelation is a given, something one receives from receiving the Incarnation. Barth did not think humans could speak “absolutely” about God. And he rejected autonomous means for adjudicating truth claims. Instead, for Barth, theological language is dependent on its theme and goal, and in Christian theology, Jesus is that theme and goal.

For Barth, according to their faithfulness to a goal, means can be adjudicated. And this is where Barth differs from many of his interpreters: Barth adjudicates claims from within the closed-circuit (within the circularity) rather than appealing to something ‘out-

---

175 Webster, Barth, 54.
176 CD, 1/2, 35.
Theology, for Barth, becomes untrue (a lie of the anti-christ) not when it violates humanly constructed theological doctrines (church, scripture, preaching) but when it violates its “theme” and its goal—Jesus Christ.\(^\text{177}\)

Barth is not a pluralist—there are not an infinite number of ways to achieve a goal. Once one does Christian theology, then its theme and goal are already given—Jesus Christ. And while Barth may not be (and probably was not) a relativist, no definitive case can be made that his method is not open to it. However, it is possible that the attempt to shore up this perceived deficiency of relativism would be to compromise not just the freedom of God but also the Incarnation as both content and method.\(^\text{178}\)

The divinity of God is a closed-circuit of reality, and humanity is a closed-circuit of reality. The question Barth might ask is, “But which ‘reality’ is really real? For Barth, God and humanity touch each other in the imagination—the question is whether we have an imagination shaped by the Incarnation and God’s grace? or an imagination shaped by our human doctrines and vain human attempts to secure ourselves or our faith? Barth does not evaluate the truthfulness of theology on anything except its theme and goal—Jesus Christ.

\(^{177}\) Garrett Green makes an important contribution to the discussion by calling for a retrieval of the imagination. The imagination, Green insightfully asserts, cannot be the basis for contrasting religion and science: instead, it names a feature that they have in common.” (Greene, Imagining God, 45) However, Green himself treats the imagination as an autonomous thing which can be used for religion (Greens), instead of acknowledging the closed-circuit of language (as metaphor) and the socially constructed nature of reality and thus the fact that there is no autonomous, out-there reality (or ideal) which imagination assists in bringing to actualization.

That is, Green’s understanding of the imagination is different from Ricoeur (via Aristotle). For Green, the imagination makes accessible the thing out-there that is real but inaccessible. For Ricoeur (via Aristotle), the imagination re-presents the world in act in a way that seems possible, given one’s experience of the world in their particular context. The imagination, says Ricoeur, simultaneously constructs and deconstructs our paradigms through re-presentations which confirm and interrupt our interpretations. See Paul Ricoeur, “Between Rhetoric and Poetics,” 334. The power of the imagination, for Ricoeur, is both the power to re-instantiate and disrupt our interpretative lenses by re-presenting possible worlds in action (world-building).

\(^{178}\) That is by claiming that the content is universal out-there (rather than a universal in-here), interpreters violate Barth’s method. And if one violates his method, the content too becomes violated because content and method flow back and forth in both directions (like a circle rather than in one, linear direction).
3.3 Doing the Impossible: How to Speak of Jesus without Proving God’s Existence

Barth says that there are no outsiders. All humanity is included in the humanity of Jesus. And even the “insiders” (churched, believers) “must and will recognize himself [sic] ever and again as an ‘outsider.’”¹⁷⁹ There is therefore no special Christian language, no separate language for those who do not believe, no way to rework preaching and worship so as to make them acceptable to people who have not acknowledged Jesus as Lord. Barth says, “There must...be no particular language for insiders and outsiders.”¹⁸⁰ What there must be, Barth says, is good news—“the message of the eternal love of God directed to us...[humans] as we at all times were, are, and shall be.”¹⁸¹ This is to say that the good news is constructive; it names grace.

Barth says, “The sense and sound of our word must be fundamentally positive.”¹⁸² That God is faithful and not unfaithful to hypocrites like us—”that is what we have to testify to men in view of the humanism of God, irrespective of the more or less dense godlessness of their humanism—everything else must be said only in the framework of this statement and promise.”¹⁸³

Preachers may speak of lots of things (philosophy, sociology, the times and culture) but the one thing they must tell is the great joy that is for all humanity because of the humanity of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Hence, moral earnestness is a praiseworthy thing and the gift of penetrating and perhaps witty analysis of the times, of the situation, and of the soul is certainly a fine gift. But the task of bringing the gospel to light is more urgent than manifesting that earnestness and bringing this gift into play. He [She] to whom this positive task is not absolutely the supreme task, who first

¹⁷⁹ Barth, “The Humanity of God,” 58.
¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 58.
¹⁸¹ Ibid., 58-59.
¹⁸² Ibid., 59. Cf. Paul Wilson’s emphasis on grace and showing God in action. The Four Pages.
¹⁸³ Barth, “The Humanity of God,” 60.
of all wants to shout at, bewilder, or laugh at...[humans] on account of their folly and malice, had better remain silent altogether. There is only one analogy [the Incarnation] to the humanity of God in this respect, namely, the message of the great joy—which comforts but in so doing really judges—which is prepared for [hu]man[s] by God and which...[they] in turn may have in God. 'All my springs are in you!' (Psalm 87:7.) 184

The message of the great joy is a message of God as the subject of God’s self-revelation whose content and method are found in the Incarnation.

Conclusion

The gospel shows God acting in the person of Jesus. One cannot come outside of the story to speak about possibilities for the out-there reality of revelation. In fact, Barth will not come out of the gospel story to establish its independent reality. The gospel is a reality when it is attested as a reality. To validate or debunk the gospel is to presume that language and reality is not a closed-circuit, that there is a way out of objectified subjectivity. 185

A story is not true or false because of some objective, transcendent essence. It is true or false in terms of the ethics of its goal and in the story’s ability to reach its goal. 186 That is not to say the gospel cannot be evaluated. 187 But to judge the gospel on any other referents than itself is to presume that humans have access to a reality outside of the closed-circuit. Barth—like social scientists—does not presume such things. Because Barth remains inside the story, inside the world of the gospel in which God is the acting subject, Barth is a theologian of the imagination who builds a world in which God acts. For Barth, the gospel is a reality when God’s action in Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

184 Ibid., 61.
186 Webster, Barth, 170.
187 One can question the goal of a closed-circuit, and one can question its ability to reach its goal.
One of the critiques of Barth centres on the sort of closed-circuit, self-referential “foundations” he gives as the basis for his dogmatic claims. While one might appreciate the way that naming grace (God’s action) in Jesus Christ creates the reality it attests in Barth’s theology, one might question (even if it is unable to be proved or disproved) the context in which Barth places his theology—namely, the context of the Incarnation as the place where the divine assumes the human for all time. That is, Barth begins at the end (or the goal) when doing theology but the end has already been assumed in the Incarnation. As such, the end (the goals or outcomes) toward which God acts is one which remains transcendent—above and beyond the power of human agency to change. Instead of human agency to act, Barth appeals to the freedom of God and the freedom of the human for God.

In this sense, Barth was probably not a relativist, but as I have suggested his rejection of the analogia entis and his focus on imaging a world in which God is the subject suggests that his method is open to it. This thesis will now turn to linguistics to show further how language serves as a means toward an end by creating worlds of possibility in the imagination. Unlike Barth, in metaphor and the imagination (as they are described by Aristotle and Paul Ricoeur), the end is open to an infinite number of possibilities; the goals and ends constructed by means of naming an acting subject in the world can be re-imagined and re-presented toward alternative (ethical) ends—as those ends are continually revised by their use and critique in various socio-linguistic contexts. Furthermore, the following chapter will attempt to show how naming an acting subject (e.g., God) in the world activates human agency, so that humans might act as subjects to enact the change they see re-presented. That is, having “seen” it happen in their imaginations, humans now “see” it as a possibility and therefore act to bring it about.
Chapter two will show both how homiletics (and language) can be conceived as a means toward an end accomplished by re-presentations and that the ends or goals can be constantly re-constructed as ongoing ethical critique re-imagines what counts as ethical. This next linguistic piece will show how theology can be both open (in its ends/goals) and yet remain conservative in its means (i.e., proclaiming the gospel, God’s action in Jesus Christ).
Chapter 2

Linguistic Perspective: Aristotle and Paul Ricoeur on Metaphor, the Imagination and Movement in Aristotle’s Poetics

This chapter will provide a historical and linguistic view of the nature and role of language in Aristotle’s *Poetics* in order to explore how truth (and revelation) is constructed through language and what kind of language is conducive toward “good” constructions. I will do this by dialoguing with Paul Ricoeur’s article, “Between Rhetoric and Poetics.” The school of thought that was Aristotle and Paul Ricoeur are helpful in this thesis because they explore and describe the relationship between language and the imagination in the construction of new possibilities—possibilities which may be critiqued and re-envisioned but which are constructed by linguistic re-presentations. That is, Aristotle and Ricoeur, like Barth, are primarily constructive (rather than deconstructive) in their proposals about language use. Unlike Barth, they show how to open up (and relativize) the end or the (ethical and political) goals of re-presentations without relativizing the means.

First, this chapter will define poetry, in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, in terms of its purpose, which for Aristotle is the good (and questions of what is “the good” are questions, for Aristotle, of *Ethics* and *Politics*). Second, this chapter will discuss how Aristotle envisions one might generate movement in the hearer toward the good. Ricoeur will join the discussion as he shows that Aristotle’s use of *poiesis* in both *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* suggests that the “Real” is in “act.” That is, the “Real” is constructed or produced by making (*poiesis*) a world
(in the imagination) by means of re-presentation (*mimesis*) in order to generate desire (*katharsis*) for a particular (constructed) ethic (again, “the good” as Aristotle called it).

This chapter will help show (from the social sciences) how truth (and thus revelation) is not dependent upon a verifiable referent but is constructed or produced by re-presentations. This chapter will contribute to the thesis by providing a social scientific description which can be interfaced with Barth’s theological *method* to yield an inter-disciplinary doctrine of revelation which is rooted in preaching.¹ Within the context of Christian preaching, proclamation is a re-presentation of the world in light of God’s action in Jesus Christ that generates desire for God’s Kingdom (a kingdom of love, non-violence, etc.). When God is shown as acting in a particular way, then God may indeed be experienced as acting in that way. And such imaginative language may be what is most effective in generating movement toward (or human agency to act for) a good (i.e., ethics) (e.g., movement toward an “other”).

The outline for this chapter is as follows: I will locate language and the imagination in Aristotle’s three methodologies to show how language (and poetry in Aristotle’s *Poetics*) can be defined in terms of its purpose, namely, the good. As such, language creates truth by creating desire (*katharsis*) for its (constructed) purpose. By looking at language and the imagination in Aristotle’s three methodologies, we will have a framework in which to locate Paul Ricoeur’s understanding of *mimesis* and *poiesis* within Aristotle’s productive sciences. This is important because it allows us to see how language is capable of producing or creating the world it re-presents. It is then suggested that re-presentations are the means to

---

¹ Barth seems to accept the non-referential nature of language. And thus a closed-circuit, non-referential view of language does not challenge his theological method. However, for Barth, the end (and thus the context) has been assumed by the Incarnation. And while, as I have attempted to show, one cannot prove or disprove this “foundation”, it is not a satisfactory answer for social science. As such, I will attempt to show how Barth’s theological method can interface with a social scientific description of language that relativizes the ends (e.g., the kind of ethical world re-presented) without relativizing the means (e.g., proclaiming the gospel—God’s action in Jesus Christ). In addition, this thesis will suggest that re-presenting divine agency does not necessarily produce human passivity but that it can activate human agency.
the imagination. The imagination is where a good becomes possible, and human agency is activated to work toward those (albeit constructed) ethical possibilities.

1. Poetry and the Imagination: Locating Language and the Imagination in Aristotle’s Three Methodologies

Aristotle “did not believe in a single unified” method of inquiry. Instead, he proposed three methods of inquiry; each dependent upon their respective “goals.” They are the following: theoretical sciences, productive sciences and practical sciences.

The goal of the theoretical sciences is the “discovery of truths.” They are employed in order to “know” something. However, practical sciences—namely, ethics and politics—do not seek to know something but to perform actions, that is, to do something. The aim of the practical sciences is not just to know what the good is “but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us.” The practical scientist’s goal is “action, not knowledge” but it is action which is based in a particular inquirer’s understanding of “the good.”

“The greatest good”, for Aristotle, is not a “state” which humans “possess” but an “activity” which they use. The greatest good is something which does not exist as a state of

4 Barnes, “Life and Work,” 24; Kennedy makes the same observation, Classical Rhetoric, 62. Such a division into three disciplines is noted by Aristotle himself in Metaphysics (6.1.1025b25).
7 NE 1103b27-31.
8 NE 1095a5-6; NE 1094a25. Aristotle seems to leave room for the context. But his notion seems to be more collective than individualistic. That is, what one group of inquirers consider good for themselves is not necessarily what another group will consider good for themselves.
being (i.e., a fixed ideology); instead, for Aristotle, “the greatest good” is an *activity* which actualizes a potentiality (i.e., a what-is-possible).⁹

The greatest good, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, is happiness. Now, happiness is “an activity of the soul expressing complete virtue.”¹⁰ And virtue is “a state that decides” for the “mean” (middle) between the extremes of “excess and deficiency”. Finally, the “standard” against which one judges the “mean” is in reference to what an “intelligent person would define it” as.¹¹ Happiness, then, is not a state of being but an *activity* which a person *decides* to do or use and which shapes (habituates) them into a person who embodies the greatest good. In *Ethics* the greatest good is happiness expressing virtue; in *Politics* it is love expressing itself in justice.¹² In the practical sciences, knowing something is doing it.

The practical sciences for Aristotle begin with the end, that is, with action. Definitions of the good may change. Regardless, the practical sciences are concerned with people doing the good, however they might envision (or re-envision) “the good”. Furthermore, action admits of decision among options. Aristotle’s definition of virtue as an activity “that decides” suggests that activity presupposes a decision. Activity deals not with necessary things but with things that could be otherwise, that is, with things that are “possible” when agents act.¹³ Aristotle says, “What is achievable in action admits of being otherwise,”¹⁴ and is thus a possibility to be actualized. That which is possible must be created by an agent; that which is necessary exists regardless of (human) agency. What-is-possible is not “an agreed-upon set

---

⁹ NE 1.8.1098b30-34.
¹⁰ NE 1.13.1102a5.
¹¹ NE 2.6.1107a1-3.
¹² In *NE*, Aristotle says that a person is habituated through practices into becoming a virtuous (and thus happy) person. Being formed through habits of practice, a person eventually comes to “find enjoyment [pleasure] or pain in the right things.” NE 1104b13-14.
¹³ Kennedy calls these sciences (things that are necessary) and arts (things that can be otherwise). Aristotle does so too, but he is somewhat inconsistent in his application of the terms.
¹⁴ *De Anima* 3.10.433a9ff.
of first principles...able to claim finality for its results" but that which can be made or
created and acted upon (or lived into). Because something is possible and not necessary, a
decision must be made. Decision is the fulcrum between possibility and actualization.

In summary, the practical sciences deal with what-is-possible (the object of inquiry—
i.e., “What is the good?”) and the actualization of potentiality (the action of doing the
possible—i.e., doing the good). Between possibility and actualization lies a decision, a
decision by a subject to move. And the arena of decision (and movement) is the realm of the
productive sciences. Here, the nature and role of language in generating movement and
constructing the good(s) will begin to take shape. The productive sciences (Rhetoric and
Poetics), and thus language, produce the doing of the what-is-possible envisioned in and
through ethical reflection.

In interpreting Aristotle, both Barnes and Kennedy concur that the productive sciences
deal with making or creating something. They make or create something in the
imagination. Aristotle’s means for producing action—that is, for moving people to act—are
rhetoric and poetics. Productive sciences produce action because they first touch the
imagination. Aristotle says, “Most of the things about which we make decisions, and into
which we inquire, present us with alternative possibilities. For it is about our actions that we
deliberate and inquire, and all our actions have a contingent character; hardly any of them are
determined by necessity.” “Rhetoric exists to affect the giving of decisions.”

---

15 David S. Cunningham, Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology, (Notre
       Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 15. Henceforth, FP.
17 Rh. 1357a24-27, italics mine.
18 Rh. 1377b21. In Rhetoric, Aristotle says, “Metaphor “sets the scene before our eyes.” Rhetoric
       1410b33. Cited by Ricoeur, BRP, 346. “By ‘making them see things’ I mean using expressions that represent
       things as in a state of activity.” Rhetoric 1411b24-25. Cited by Ricoeur, BRP, 347. “Expressing things in a state
       of activity is the power to “make things visible, alive, actual.” Ricoeur, BRP, 347.
exists to create desire for the good (however one envisions the good). Together, the productive sciences are the engine that moves people to the actualization of the possible (an activity for the greatest good—contextually constructed as it is). That is, the productive sciences are means toward an end, and those ends are discerned elsewhere—namely, in the practical sciences (ethics and politics).

2. Defining the Imagination in Terms of its Purpose: *Katharsis* and Desire for the Good

*Rhetoric* focuses on inventing an argument based on a logic of the probable. And rhetoric moves people by disrupting their *doxa* (common opinions) so that they can see new possibilities and be moved to decide and act toward those possibilities. But Aristotle’s *Poetics*, says Ricoeur, does not try to prove anything. Rather, it attempts to re-present (mimesis) human actions (muthos) as a way to elicit pleasure (katharsis) in the hearers. Ricoeur says,

Aristotle defines it [Rhetoric] as the art of inventing or finding proofs. Now poetry does not seek to prove anything at all: its project is mimetic; its aim...is to compose an essential representation of human actions; its appropriate method is to speak the truth by means of… muthos [plot-structure]. The triad of poiesis-mimesis-katharsis...characterizes the world of poetry.

The re-presentation through word images of a world with new possibilities reaches the imagination; and where the re-presentation of human actions is seen and felt in the

---

19 It does so by first affirming some of the hearers’ common wisdom.
20 Ricoeur says, that for Aristotle’s *Poetics*, we speak the truth “by means of fiction, fable, and tragic muthos.” Halliwell also lifts up the power of fiction, but he interprets muthos as “plot-structure.”

*Poiesis* is the making of a poem or story. Poetry is defined (and used in this essay) as the re-presentation of human actions in order to elicit desire for something (some good, some change). *Mimesis* is the re-presentation or imitation of nature or human action. *Katharsis* is a feeling of pleasure or pain; in *Poetics*, the goal is pleasure but pleasure is defined as the good (see Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, 6). *Muthos* is a plot-structure, fable or fiction (see Ricoeur, BRP; and Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics*). Plot-structure highlights both the necessity of showing human actions and also the need for the movement to be directed by the end or purpose of the narrative (see *Poetics* 1.6.1450a15-25). But I will at times employ the word “story” for *muthos* to assist the reader, who may be more familiar with this term and its usage in homiletical literature since 1956.
imagination, *katharsis* has been elicited. For example, it might show people what the possible looks like when it meets the dim realities of racism.\(^\text{21}\)

A pleasurable re-presentation is one that allows the hearers to feel something even if those sensations are not necessarily enjoyable. A pleasurable re-presentation imitates human actions so that hearers can *feel* things (i.e., *katharsis*—whether pity or fear as in tragedy, or humor as in comedy).\(^\text{22}\) Stories (or plot-structures) told in terms of actions being done create images in the mind of the hearers (their imaginations) and produce feelings. This is why Aristotle says that poets imitate the world by means of action.\(^\text{23}\) “All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality [i.e., not a state of being or a disposition]...it is in our actions that we are happy or the reverse.”\(^\text{24}\) Therefore, for plot-structures to elicit feelings, they must involve not the detailing of interior human thoughts or the development of the qualities of a character but instead must re-present people in motion, doing things. Presenting an acting subject, especially in ways that the hearers can identify with the action narrated, evokes “pleasure” and generates desire for some good within the hearers.\(^\text{25}\)

Furthermore, plots move toward a purpose or an end, for Aristotle.\(^\text{26}\) And the end or purpose of a “poem” (story) determines the actions and their arrangement in a plot-structure (*muthos*).\(^\text{27}\) The purpose of the story shapes the entire plot-structure; all parts of the story must be unified in contributing to its purpose. The “poet” should then ask herself, What do I

\(^\text{21}\) See for example, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, “I Have a Dream” speech.
\(^\text{22}\) Halliwell says, “Pleasure is connected with the emotions,” *Aristotle’s Poetics*, 26, 42.
\(^\text{23}\) *Poetics* 1.22.1459a15-16.
\(^\text{24}\) *Poetics* 1.6.1450a16-20.
\(^\text{25}\) For example, the movie *Schindler’s List*, is not pleasurable to watch. But the way it re-presents the story desire is generated, not desire to perpetuate such violence but to end it. Re-presentations of an activity can generate desire for the opposite of the activity re-presented.
\(^\text{26}\) “The end” of a story (*muthos*) is not the story’s literal (or chronological) end but its goal or purpose.
\(^\text{27}\) Note that plot and character are determined by the goal not vice versa (as some post-liberal theological interpretations seem to do).
want to create desire for? Aristotle’s answer was that poetry ought to create desire for the good.

2.1 Katharsis and the Good

But how is such an interpretation valid, if indeed as one interpreter says, “For Aristotle ‘the purpose of poetry...is to give pleasure’” (katharsis)?

Attention to the whole of the text, together with consideration of Aristotle’s general philosophy of pleasure, leads to the realisation [sic] that in both cases pleasure is not to be taken as an undefined and self-sufficient gratification, but rather as the result of an underlying activity or experience. To understand the conception of pleasure involved we need to understand the activity which it completes.

Notice pleasure is the result of activity; and poetics culminates in the release or pay-off (katharsis) of the activity. But what is this activity which yields pleasure? Pleasure, when it is pleasure for “right things”, is pleasure in an activity on behalf of the greatest good. Thus, in Poetics, characters should be “good”—at least “if the purpose so revealed [is to be] good.” Hutchinson notes, “On Aristotle’s analysis, whether a pleasure is good depends entirely on whether the associated activity is good.” And “the pleasures of the ideal life will come directly from its serious and worthy activities.” Halliwell says that poetics contributes to Aristotle’s “conception of the good life which is a common premise of all Plato’s and Aristotle’s thought.” Indeed, the goal of poetry is to produce pleasure. But pleasure is not

---

29 Halliwell, Aristotle’s Poetics, 6.
30 NE 2.3.1104b13-14.
31 Poetics 1.15.1454a17-19.
33 Ibid., 211.
34 Halliwell, Aristotle’s Poetics, 2.
defined as “frivolous amusements of the so-called life of pleasure”\textsuperscript{35}; rather, pleasure results from activity on behalf of the greatest good.

2.2 A Truthful Goal

Poetry, for Aristotle, seeks to tell stories of an acting subject that “resemble the truth” as a way of generating movement toward the good.\textsuperscript{36} A realistic\textsuperscript{37} story of an acting subject (\textit{muthos}) is a true story because it faithfully represents the world which we experience.\textsuperscript{38} Halliwell says that \textit{muthos} “is the kernel or essence of poetry”\textsuperscript{39} because the image of what-is-possible creates desire for the world re-presented in the imagination.\textsuperscript{40} For Aristotle, “the mimetic representation of an action” has its own “respectability” as an imitation of truth.\textsuperscript{41} Aristotle did not argue “for the complete independence of art, only for the respectability of a status which is not wholly subjected to external standards of truthfulness.”\textsuperscript{42} And the standard from which Aristotle wishes to free poetic truthfulness is the standard of a historical referent.

Aristotle says,

The poet’s function is not to describe the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. What is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse…; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{35} Hutchinson, “Ethics,” \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle}, 211. See Aristotle, NE 1152b25-33; NE 1175b24-76a29.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Mimesis} re-presents through “acts of human discovery…what was there to be found.” What is “there to be found” is the good which is the cause of movement of all things. Halliwell, \textit{Aristotle’s Poetics}, 14, 49.


\textsuperscript{38} Notice that the “referent” for the truthfulness of the story exists \textbf{within} the story itself. The internal unity, the desirability of the (constructed) purpose (a purpose discerned through ethical reflection but always changing), these are what make the story “true.” There is not a referent, out-there to which the story corresponds. The story creates its referent; the story creates the good—a good which has been discerned by the context as being good (and which is open to constant revision as the context re-imagines what it believes is good).

\textsuperscript{39} Halliwell, \textit{Aristotle’s Poetics}, 23.

\textsuperscript{40} See \textit{Poetics} 1.9

\textsuperscript{41} Halliwell, \textit{Aristotle’s Poetics}.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 24.
been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more
philosophic and of graver import than history.43

From the view of poetics, “I have a dream…” is more philosophic and more “true” than
the historian who excavates the “truth” behind the world of scripture. The poet’s re-
presentation of the world in the imagination can change the world. The poet has the audacity
to speak things that did not exist before they were uttered and so give others hope; and hope
of what-might-be (in the imagination) moves people to action.

However, the faithful re-presentation of human action is not wholly relative, free to
every whim of the poet. Truth is not whatever someone wants it to be; it is not any possibility
that one can conceive. Rather, truth in poetry, for Aristotle, must be true in its re-presentation
of “good and evil in the world.””44 This imitation of good and evil is the reason “for the
production of poetry and for the pleasure taken in it.”45 Thus for something to be true it must
correspond to the world as it seems to us (the what-is of the hearers), that is, a faithful re-
presentation takes the what-is of the hearers (their perceptions about the world and their
understandings of their experiences46) and presents them alternatively so that hearers can see
what-is-possible.

The power of re-presenting the world in action (an acting subject) over the power of
history is that it opens up new worlds. It discloses new opportunities. It shows people how
things can be in the future. In a world of full of acting subjects, where things can be
otherwise in the future, the poet creates worlds in the imagination that hearers can live into.

43 Poetics 1.9.1451a37-1451b6. Ricoeur notes the significance of this passage, BRP, 351.
44 Halliwell, Aristotle’s Poetics, 25. Thus, Aristotle can say, “Homer has above all taught the rest how
to speak falsehoods as a poet ought.” Poetics 1.24. 1460a19 (quoted in Halliwell, Aristotle’s Poetics, 12). By
falsehoods, Halliwell suggests, that Aristotle means fiction.
45 Halliwell, Aristotle’s Poetics, 48.
46 Much like Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus and field. See The Logic of Practice
The measure or standard by which Aristotle adjudicates a story’s truthfulness is its purpose. First, is the story unified in its purpose? That is, do all the parts contribute to creating desire for one thing? And second, how virtuous or “good” is the activity for which the story seeks to create desire? Halliwell says that for Aristotle, the art of re-presenting (mimesis) human actions in stories “cannot be wholly divorced from ethical values, which are themselves for Aristotle, as for Plato, an aspect of reality.”

The goal or purpose of poetry, which provides plot-movement, is to create a desire for the good through the re-presentation of human action in words. According to Poetics, desire for the good moves us.

2.3 The Good as Goal and Cause of Movement

While desire for the good may be the goal of Poetics, one still might ask how this contributes to moving the hearers to act differently in the world, to live into the what-is-possible envisioned through re-presenting the world. How does a vision of the good move hearers to act? If the good is the purpose or “end” of movement, then how can it be a cause of movement? That is, how can the movement be circular? These are the questions with which we are now concerned.

Aristotle says, “Causes are spoken of in four ways.” The first cause is the being and essence of a thing. But things do not just exist independently. There is a reason, Aristotle says, for the being or essence of anything. So Aristotle asks with earlier philosophers, Why do things come into being and “perish”? “What is the cause? For certainly the subject does not produce change in itself...and to search for this is to search for the second principle—the

47 See Poetics 1.6.1449b21 - 1.8.1451a36.
50 Though, for Aristotle, comedy makes hearers “worse [kheirous]” while tragedy (which takes up most of Poetics) makes hearers “better [beltiones].” Ricoeur, BRP, 351-352.
principle of motion.” Aristotle says that for change to happen, there must be a second subject interacting with the first to cause things to come into being and to perish.

He makes these observations in a survey of previous philosophers and concludes that other philosophers perceived the first two causes, but most of them missed the last two. What they missed, says Aristotle, was to ask about the source of the principle of motion (cause #3). And the source of the cause of movement is desire. Aristotle quotes Parmenides, who “in describing the coming to be of the whole universe, says: ‘Desire was the first of all the gods she devised’...there must be some cause among beings to initiate motion in things and to bring them together.” Desire (cause #3) initiates the interaction (cause #2) of two things which causes something to come into being or perish (cause #1).

Aristotle continues. “The fourth [cause of movement] is what something is for, i.e., the goal and specifically, the good.” The fourth cause is the goal of the source of the principle of motion. Aristotle seems to ask, “For what purpose (#4) do things desire (#3) to interact (#2) to cause things to be or perish (#1)?” His answer in Metaphysics is love. The greatest good is love and the desire for love causes movement. “Love is the cause of good things”, and the cause of “all goods is the good itself.” Here are the four causes again: (1) the being or essence of a thing; (2) the principle or cause of being (i.e., being comes from interactions); (3) the source of the principle of motion (desire); and (4) the goal of the source of the principle of motion (the good—love).

Two important points. First, the good is a cause of movement—in itself and for hearers. That is, in Metaphysics, desire for the good prompts interaction which produces what-is and what-is-possible (or can be otherwise). The good is the end of all goods and thus creates desire for itself. The good is desirable and produces movement towards itself. And,
the presentation of the good [by means of (1) a unified plot-structure which (2) faithfully imitates the what-is as the hearers perceive it] which generates pleasure is the goal of the Poetics.

The second important point is ancillary but offers a significant implication about method. For, while the goal of movement is the good (#4), when Aristotle begins to inquire about being and essence (#1) he must begin at the end, namely, the good. The good is the goal of Poetics, but because it is also the cause of movement, it is thus the beginning place for inquiry. Look at the question, “For what purpose (#4) do things desire (#3) to interact (#2) in order to cause things to be or perish (#1)?” The beginning of the question is the end and answer to the question. The beginning and end of movement for Aristotle is “the good.”

In other words, it’s circular. The beginning and the end are the same.

There are apparently two parts that move us—both intellect and desire...This [arena where things can be otherwise] is the intellect that reasons for some goal and is concerned with action; its <concern with an> end distinguishes it from [autonomous] theoretical intellect. All desire also aims at some goal; for the object of desire is the starting point of intellect concerned with action, and the last stage <of our reasoning> is the starting point of action…. Hence it is reasonable to regard these two things—desire, and thought concerned with action—as the movers. For the object of desire moves us, and thought moves us because its starting point is the object of desire.51

Desire for the good is the goal and cause of movement. And Poetics seeks to generate desire for the good through re-presentations of an acting subject who shows the (provisional, constructed) good (in the imagination) as being desirable (katharsis).52

Poetics seeks to move hearers through ethics that touches their desires by a truthful re-presentation of an acting subject; the re-presentation of an acting subject is the necessary

52 Or showing the not good as being undesirable or any number of re-presentations.
piece in order for the good (so re-presented) to be seen in the imagination of the hearer. For Aristotle, things that can be otherwise require action. Action should be directed toward the good. Poetics (and Rhetoric) seek to move people to decide and desire to act for the good. Exactly how Poetics generates movement is the subject of the next section.

3. Re-Presentation as the Means to the Imagination: Poiesis, Mimesis and Movement

It is important to hear the school of thought that was Aristotle because it provided a framework in which to understand Ricoeur’s own work. That is, it allows us to locate Ricoeur’s interpretation of Aristotle and Ricoeur’s own notion of the “Real” in his essay, “Between Rhetoric and Poetics,” within the productive sciences.

3.1 The Relation between Poiesis and Mimesis

Aristotle says of the art of making a poem, “Art imitates [mimesis] nature.” But what does “imitates” mean? Ricoeur laments, “Perhaps our translators were hasty in choosing as the equivalent of the Greek mimesis a term that we think we understand better than we really do. They chose ‘imitation,’ which turns out to be easily accused of a naturalistic tendency.” While Plato employs the term almost boundlessly, Aristotle defines the “normative use” of mimesis when he divided the sciences and consequently, gives mimesis “one and only one literal meaning” within the productive sciences. In this particular method of inquiry, “there is mimesis only where there is a ‘making [faire]’...Imitation is thus a ‘process,’ the process of ‘forming each of the six parts of the

---

53 Art does not denote only canvas paintings (though it could be these), and nature, here, does not denote trees, plants and animals. Rather, nature is the what-is of the hearers (their perceptions, experiences, expectations; namely, the ways in which they frame the world). Art is the re-presentation of the world (the what-is-possible).
54 Ricoeur, BRP, 349.
55 Ibid., 350.
tragedy,' from plot through to spectacle."\textsuperscript{56} Imitation is the process of making or creating a muthos [plot-structure]. Imitation is not replicating something that already exists out-there in the real world. That is, language (when it re-presents the world as it could be—what-is-possible—when a subject acts) creates or produces the world it builds through language. Language that imitates and re-presents the what-is (human beliefs and expectations) with a what-is-possible can re-create what humans believe and how they act in the world. The (subjective and relative) what-is can be re-presented as what-is-possible and create a new what-is.

Ricoeur exclaims, “Now this is quite a strange brand of imitation, which composes and constructs the very thing it imitates!”\textsuperscript{57} The re-presentation of an acting subject ordered into a unified story makes imitation more than just a duplication of an “out-there” reality but rather brings it into tension with “creative action which is poetry.”\textsuperscript{58} So then speaking in terms of our theme, the means for achieving the goal (creating desire for the good) is a dynamic tension between things as they now are and things as they can be when they are imaged and created through language, namely, imitation/mimesis. Imitation is the process of giving form and shape to what-is-possible (art) by re-presenting what-is (nature).

Revisiting Aristotle’s phrase (“Art imitates nature”) in light of Ricoeur’s interpretation, we see that the story (muthos) shows us (imitates) the world of the hearers (their what-is; i.e., Aristotle’s “nature”) and thereby produces a picture (Aristotle’s “art”) of what-is-possible.

It is only through a grave misinterpretation that the Aristotelian mimesis can be confused with imitation in the sense of copy. If mimesis involves an initial reference to reality, this reference signifies nothing other than the very rule of

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 350.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 351.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 351.
nature over all production. But the creative dimension [art] is inseparable from this referential movement [coming from nature]. *Mimesis is poeisis, and poeisis is mimesis.*\(^{59}\)

In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, stories (or re-presentations) do not copy reality; re-presentations make reality as long as they faithfully represent an acting subject as the hearers currently perceive it (i.e., their what-is).\(^{60}\) Narratives, which re-present the world with an acting subject, move hearers to act (productive science) because they show a picture of the good which is possible through action (practical sciences). For “what convinces is [not so much history but] the possible.”\(^{61}\) *Mimesis* (a re-presentation of the world as it is perceived and thus experienced) moves the hearers to do the good which is narrated. By re-presenting the world in such a realistic way through a story, people see that it is a real possibility. The poet’s *mimesis* “produces” a new world because it so “truthfully” imitates the world which we experience. And for the story to be effective, it must be constructed in dialectical tension (and thus ethically) between the world of that the hearers experience (their “what-is”) and the world of the possible (the good—love).

But as Ricoeur noted, this form of “imitation” which Aristotle employs “constructs” or makes the thing it imitates. The making of a plot-structure is the making of reality; words create worlds. The plot-structure itself (one particular narrative) is ultimately subordinated to the (metaphoric) movement created by the dynamic interaction of what-is (the beliefs, expectations of the hearers) and what-is-possible (the world being named into existence); the interaction of the context with an alternative narrative (or context).

---

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 351.

\(^{60}\) So one cannot “make” any story they want. For the story to “make” reality it must exist in dialectical tension with what-is (particularly the common opinion—*doxa*—of the hearers). A story only “makes” reality for the hearers when it corresponds to the world as the hearers perceive it. Compare with Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*.

\(^{61}\) *Poetics*, 1451b16.
3.2 Nature and Art: Movement as the Core of What-Is and What-Is-Possible

Next, Ricoeur is important because the non-foundation “foundation” begins to emerge in his description of art. Ricoeur continues about Aristotelian *mimesis*, “If it is true that imitation [*mimesis*] functions in the Aristotelian system as the differentiating characteristic that distinguishes the fine and the useful arts from nature, it follows that the function of the expression ‘imitation of nature’ is as much to distinguish human making from natural production as to align them.” In this section, we are asking explicitly about what we touched on tangentially in the previous section—the relation between nature and art. For Aristotle and from the view of the productive sciences, “imitation of nature” distinguishes and aligns an “out-there” reality (nature) and an “in-here” human construct (art). The real, as Ricoeur calls it, is neither solely out-there (objective) nor in-here (subjective); the real is in act, which is to say that what is real becomes so. It is produced.

I will suggest in this section that Being is created; it is becoming. And action (and ethics) is created. It is the creation of Being and Act through language (world-building or narrative and not necessarily a singular story or ideology) which is really “Real.”

Ricoeur notes, “It would appear that the expression ‘imitation of nature’ takes us out of the domain of the *Poetics* and into the *Metaphysics.*” Aristotle asks of the being and essence of a thing (cause #1), “Why does this happen and what is the cause? For certainly the subject does not produce change in itself?” Aristotle surveys perspectives on this first (material) cause and lists what were then considered by many to be the four “primary”

---

62 Ricoeur, BRP, 353. That is, “imitation of nature” is the creation of a new what-is through the representation of the old what-is in light of a what-is-possible (a what-is-possible which is re-presented through a *muthos* which involves an acting subject). And this feature of creating or producing what-is (human experience of their world, their perception) means an alignment of “human making” (and subjectivity and relativity) with a referent (albeit, a created or produced referent).

63 *Metaphysics* 1.3.984a21-23.
material causes: water, air, fire and earth.\textsuperscript{64} Despite other developing theories about material causes, Aristotle is not going to get bogged down here. He is interested in why things come to be and are “destroyed.” He does not want to define the essence or being of a thing. No, he wants to understand the cause of essence or being. For example, Aristotle notes Anaxagoras of Clazomenae’s theory “that the principles are unlimited” and then moves right on to his point—which is, regardless of what the principles are, we still can and need to ask why things are.\textsuperscript{65} At least from the view of the productive sciences (where the goal is to “cause” movement), Aristotle does not try to know what the thing is (i.e., an out-there referent); instead, he wants to understand why the thing has come into being.

And his answer to why some things come into being and why other things perish is that something acts on them. That is, being and essence are the result of interaction, which is the second (formal) cause. This principle of motion suggests that the why behind all essence (Being) is interaction. In other words, what-is is itself in movement. It is acting and being acted upon; and this interaction which makes or produces being/essence is more fundamental than the Being itself.\textsuperscript{66} In matters where things can be otherwise (and thus the realm of the productive and practical sciences), what popularly passes as “reality” is a reductionist and distorted view of reality itself. For, in Metaphysics, the real itself is interacting and thus in movement.

Ricoeur calls this movement—between nature and art, between what-is and what-is-possible—“metaphorizing.” “Reality [the current what-is as it is understood to exist within a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[64] Metaphysics 1.3.983b-984a.
\item[65] Metaphysics 984a12-16.
\item[66] Regarding metaphor (and epiphora in Aristotle), Ricoeur notes, “This brings us very close to our most extreme hypothesis, that the ‘metaphoric’ that transgresses the categorical order [by allowing two things to interact, thus showing resemblances and differences] also begets it.” So the essence of a thing is its interaction with another thing. And this interaction simultaneously creates our knowing of the thing in relation to another and deconstructs our knowing of the thing. Ricoeur, BRP, 334.
\end{footnotes}
particular context] remains a reference, without ever becoming a restriction.” So a story does not have to fit the criteria of history or be scientifically verifiable and thus correspond to an out-there, pre-existing referent. The truthfulness of a story that re-presents the world with an acting subject and shows new possibilities touches the imagination is not restricted by what-is currently. In fact, Ricoeur says that this free space given to poetics is a space left for it by reality itself. Inherent in nature is room for “the ‘making’ of imitation.” The real contains within it the potentiality for what-is-possible and can be “produced.”

Certainly Greek man was far less quick than we are to identify phusis [nature] with some inert ‘given.’ Perhaps it is because, for him, nature is itself living that mimesis can be not enslaving and that compositional and creative imitation of nature can be possible. Is this not what the most enigmatic passage of the Rhetoric suggests? Metaphor, it relates, makes one see things because it ‘represents things as in a state of activity’ (1411b24-25). The Poetics echoes that one may ‘speak in narrative’ or present ‘personages as acting [hos prattontas] and doing [energountas]’ (1448a22, 28). Might there not be an underlying relationship between ‘signifying active reality’ and speaking out phusis [nature]?

For Ricoeur, words create worlds; re-presenting the world by means of a muthos (plot-structure) in which a subject acts to do what-is-possible can recreate a new world in the imagination and thus generate movement by means of desire for the new, imagined world.

“The Real,” as Ricouer calls it, is the re-presentation of people “‘as acting’ and all things ‘as in act’...in which every dormant potentiality of existence appears as blossoming forth, every latent capacity for action as actualized.” True speech must show people new possibilities; and when this is done rhetorically and poetically, it will move people to decide and desire to act on behalf of this (provisionally good) potentiality. The reason I make this

---

67 Ricoeur, BRP, 354.  
68 Ibid., 354.  
69 Again, this power can be abused and turn into manipulation as ethicists warn, but remember Aristotle construes “pleasure” as “the good.” And Ricoeur notes, “philosophy cannot break the ties between discourse and power.” Instead, we must ask about a philosophical rhetoric; and what I am proposing is to judge philosophy in terms of the practical and productive sciences. After all, if there is “no such thing as a metaphor
claim about true speech is because, for Ricoeur, the essence of nature (what-is) is interaction (or metaphor).

Existence is not static; it is alive. It is interacting—subject interacting with another subject. The re-presentation of an acting subject through a plot-structure interacts with the hearers as subjects. Language, from Ricoeur’s iteration of Aristotle’s productive sciences, must give lively expression to a living, moving subject. Language usage that expresses a world as being static, “out-there”, that depends on a pre-existing referent is not true to being-ness. Being is in Act; a method which I suggested is operative in Barth. It is circular, and its truthfulness arises from the construction of being by means of act (not its content as referring to an out-there Being). Besides being untrue, language which does not re-present an acting subject misses the power of world-building to show hearers in their imaginations the new possibilities; images which shape desire and decisions of subjects to enact the new possibilities so envisioned.

3.3 Metaphor and Truth: Metaphorizing

Metaphor is the imitation (mimesis) and therefore the creation (poiesis) of an alternative world. It is not the juxtaposition of autonomous words which exist independently of one another. Metaphor does not exist on the level of words but on the level of narrative.70 As such, metaphors are not ornamental addendums to an autonomous principle. For Ricoeur (by way of Aristotle), metaphor is the re-presentation of human action that imitates the world as experienced so as to open up new possibilities for action.71

70 Ibid., 330-335.
The focus is on the *predication* not on the subject or the object in the metaphor. The emphasis is on the movement between two interacting things. This movement, Ricoeur says, is more fundamental than the thing itself. The real is in act; the real is metaphorizing. The real is the imprecise interaction between the subjective and the objective, between the interior world and the exterior world, between agent and recipient. That is, the focus of metaphors are not, contrary to popular usage, nouns but verbs. The real is in act; the real is in the verb; the real is in the interaction between the what-is expectations of the hearers and the what-is-possible named into existence by re-presentations. Those re-presentations are narratival in that they narrate an acting subject (*mimesis*), but they are not an *a priori* narrative (*muthos*). That is, re-presentations are not adjudicated based on their conformity to a singular narrative (*muthos*) but are adjudicated on the basis of their ability to re-present a what-is-possible well enough so as to create desire for the (constructed) goal.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a historical and linguistic view of the nature and role of language in Aristotle’s *Poetics* in order to explore how truth (and revelation) is constructed through language and what kind of language is conducive toward “good” constructions. It was suggested that poetry, in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, is defined in terms of its purpose, which for Aristotle is the good (constantly revisioned by the subjects who name a good). Second, this chapter discussed how Aristotle envisions one might generate movement toward the good, namely through re-presentations of the what-is to show what-is-possible. Ricouer joined the discussion to show that Aristotle’s use of *poiesis* in both *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* suggests that the “Real” is in “act.” That is, the “Real” is constructed or produced by making (*poiesis*) a

---

72 Ibid., 355.
world (in the imagination) by means of re-presentation (*mimesis*) in order to generate desire (*katharsis*) for a particular (constructed) ethic.

This chapter showed that, even in the social sciences, truth is not dependent upon a verifiable referent but is constructed or produced by re-presentations. These insights along with Barth’s own method suggest a homiletical method which does not attempt to discover or “know” truth. Such foundations are both unverifiable and ineffective. In other words, truth (and revelation), from Aristotle by way of Ricoeur, is not fixed and cannot be known as an object existing out-there. And homiletical theories and methods which employ this paradigm (whether right-leaning or left-leaning ideals) set up untenable foundations. In addition to being false foundations, methods which pre-suppose the existence of revelation are not as effective at accomplishing their own goals, namely, ethical movement (e.g., movement toward an other).

Within the context of Christian preaching, proclamation is a re-presentation of the world in light of God’s action in Jesus Christ that generates desire for God’s Kingdom (a kingdom of love, non-violence, etc.). When God is shown as acting, then God may indeed be experienced as acting. And such imaginative language may be what is most effective in generating movement toward a good (e.g., toward an “other”, or however the good is envisioned within a context).

Through proclamation, preachers create new possibilities for living by showing hearers what-is-possible (constructed as it might be) which are capable of moving them to *act* on behalf of a (provisional) good. Where preachers make their goal to discover a truth that is out there and get people to “know” it, they pretend that the world is fixed and turn the dynamic movement of the Real into an object.
The homiletical focus, based on this theory, would be on naming what God is doing in the world, outside of (objectively) “knowing” what God is “actually” doing in the world. That is, preachers might draw on the tradition, on the text, on theology, without requiring scientific verification that the tradition or the text or theology actually refers to anything out-there. 73

The promise of such an approach for those with Christian beliefs is that, while it is circular, it does not depend on any truth being out-there and as such does not require verifiability before one can re-present the world—which in Barth’s words means that one need not first establish an analo gia entis before one risks proclamation of a divine acting subject. Finally, because like Barth this method is circular, it cannot ultimately be disproved either.

However, one can disagree with a particular good envisioned through the re-presentation, and one can ask to revision that good. But such openness should always be sought and indeed it will be sought so long as the “truth” named is circular and does not go outside the closed circuit of language and claim to refer to something out-there. 74

Furthermore, this approach has promise because it fits within the description of the social space as being the objectification-of-subjectivity noted by Pierre Bourdieu in his practice theory. Re-presentations, as I have defined them above, are indeed objectifications-of-subjectivity, which often lead left-leaning critics to dismiss them (and thus dismiss inductive approaches in homiletics, particularly those found in the New Homiletic). However, this chapter has attempted to show two things which relate to Bourdieu’s practice

---

73 For a discussion on a reason for using the tradition, the text and theology, see chapter 4 and my discussion of Paul Scott Wilson’s treatment of scripture and theology.

74 That is, so long as it “shows” rather than “tells.” In other words, it sets the scene before the eyes rather than asks the mind to believe what it cannot see (even if what it “sees” is in its imagination).
theory. First, everything is an objectification-of-subjectivity. The Real is in Act; which is to say that the real is in the productive sciences—in the making or creating of a world by means of language and practices. The Real itself is in the *movement*, a movement which is produced and re-produced through interactions. The truthfulness of a narrative is in the desirability of the particular good so re-presented (both the desirability of the re-presentation by the poet, and the desirability of the good constructed by the practical sciences—ethics and politics).

Second, the opening up of language and practices (this ethical goal of other-ing) happens by means of re-presentations. That is, in order to see things differently and act differently in the world (e.g., to be open and inclusive of difference, etc.), the means to do so is re-presentations. Re-presentations are the means to achieve Bourdieu’s ends.

To Bourdieu, power and contestations over truth claims in 1 Corinthians 12-14, I now turn. This particular passage is chosen because it acutely displays how the Apostle Paul engages in a re-framing exercise whose foundations are relative and provisional. He re-presents the situation by constructing a world in the imagination that is oriented toward the other and not the self.

In postponing the discussion on scripture until chapter three, I attempt to show how it can be subjectively authoritative.\(^75\) In doing so, I have not granted scripture an autonomous authority but have attempted to say how it can be *heard* as being authoritative. Two themes carry forward, namely, the relative nature of truth claims themselves and the importance of the *means*, namely, re-presentations which create desire in the imagination.

---

\(^75\) In that subjects re-present the world to activate human agency and their own power to act as subjects in the world toward new alternatives, i.e., what-is-possible
Chapter 3

A Biblical Perspective: Power, Revelation and Contestations over Truth Claims in 1 Corinthians 12-14

This chapter looks at a specific contestation between power and truth in 1 Corinthians 12-14 to understand where and how the Apostle Paul locates revelation in one occasion within his first letter to Corinth. First, I provide a preface on my treatment of scripture, attempting to answer questions about its location in my thesis and theological concerns which have (or will) likely arisen. Second, I discuss Pierre Bourdieu’s practice theory which will be used to identify power relations within Corinth itself, within the Christian community at Corinth and within the language and practices of Paul as he responds to the conflict.

Bourdieu’s practice theory provides an important critique of religion—one which poses a troubling case for theologians and adherents of religion. Indeed, Bourdieu and Catherine Bell’s analysis could lead some social scientists to ask, when adherents speak of God, whether they are talking about anything other than themselves?¹ This is a serious critique that needs be heard and addressed. As such, while practice theory is a useful resource for this particular passage given the explicit contestations over truth claims in Corinth, it also has far wider implications for theology and the study of religion—particularly the relation of theology and the social sciences. I hope to show that theology does not have to be at odds with social science or vice versa—that from a social scientific point-of-view, theology and

¹ See Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 76-81. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*. Richard Nice, trans. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990. They seem to suggest that people objectify their subjectivity in the language and practices of “God.” This “capital” that they objectify is merely their own agency and power. And because it is objectified (so that God-language masks their own power and agency), it can be wielded by others and used against them to oppress them.
scripture can make sense in so far as they serve a purpose (i.e., are a means—found in the productive sciences—to an end—found in the practical sciences of ethics and politics). That is, scripture (and language) can be inculcated in issues of power and still have a subjective authority which is productive and ethical.\(^2\) In order to do this, I need to acquaint the reader with Bourdieu and Bell’s theory and then to show how their practice theory is manifested in the situations in Corinth. However, first, I will speak briefly to my theologically-oriented audience about reading scripture as a re-presentation, carrying forward the insights from the chapter two.

After providing a general understanding of Bourdieu and Bell’s practice theory in my second section, I will apply it to my interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12-14 and some larger problems surrounding truth claims and notions of revelation (as identified by Bourdieu and Bell). In my third section, I will examine historical, social and political forces operative in Corinth in the early 1st century. I will suggest that tensions between Roman and Greek culture were being played out within the Jewish-Christian communities in Corinth at that time.

Fourth, the chapter will seek to understand how tongues were an instrument of power against power. Paul does not discard tongues. Instead, he retains the subversive nature of

---

\(^2\) I do not attempt to make a special case for scripture. Scripture is true where people believe it is true. That is, its truth is not objective and autonomous. Notice that my focus here (as it has been throughout this thesis and will continue to be) is on the subject not the object. To make a special case for a unique authority inherently belonging to scripture would be to turn it into an object. But where scripture is evaluated based on the world it re-presents and produces is to evaluate it on relative and provisional bases that treats scripture as a subject. My presupposition is that the world is a multiplicity of subjects (and not objects); and indeed, this seems to fit with Bourdieu’s own theory. Scripture is entangled in the power dynamics of language (and socio-linguistics). All language and practices are ensconced in power. But what my thesis attempts to do is to show how to use language and practices for ethical ends—by treating them as means intended to produce an ethical end, as those ends are constantly critiqued and revisioned.
tongues against the dominant social and political order as instruments for asserting the self against hegemonic forces of self-negation.

Fifth, I will offer a theological reading of 1 Corinthians 12-14. Paul reframes power by constructing a world that is oriented toward the other and not the self. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, revelation is not a content; instead it is a posture toward power and one an-other (love) which is made possible by hope in God’s future Kingdom. Finally, a definition of revelation in 1 Corinthians 12-14, should emerge. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, faith is not so much a “thing” or a knowledge (not an ideology) that can be used as an instrument of power against an other. Instead, faith is a vehicle for hope, a hope for what-is-possible in God’s future. Hope therefore expresses and evokes the imagination on behalf of a greater good in the midst of relations of power. This hope permits believers to endure the present with actions of love and an orientation to the ‘other.’

For Paul in this particular situation, revelation comes from the end (love or ethics) not the beginning (faith as content or ideology). This section will help to demonstrate the relative nature of Paul’s standards for adjudicating truth claims and contribute to a view of revelation that is rooted in proclamation.  

1. Reading Scripture as a Re-presentation

This first section is a preface to the chapter, as it is intended to clear up some theological questions and concerns likely to be raised by the audience to which this thesis is directed. After treating these questions, I will return to the focus of the chapter. Indeed, some of the necessary elements for making these statements depend on the material that follows.

---

3 Proclamation is defined as preachers building worlds through language until they have built a world in which the hearers can see God acting and hear God speaking. The entire sermon must re-present the world in such a way that the hearers can “hear” that statement as being from God and as being possible.
In this thesis, I have not made a special case for scripture. Instead, I have chosen to look at it as language and thus to first use social scientific (and not theological) lenses to read it. My basic premise is that scripture is true where people believe it is true.

First, it could (and is intended to) be inferred from my reading of Karl Barth that a special case cannot be made for scripture. For Barth, to attribute a special, a priori, autonomous and objective authority to scripture would be to put the human in the position of the subject, who turns scripture into an object (analogia entis). Granted, Barth does find scripture authoritative but not because it possesses any inherent authority or objective truth. It is authoritative because of the Incarnation, because scripture witnesses to Christ and that witness is already assumed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (the in-here/subjective side of revelation). Even for Barth, to ascribe an independent authority to scripture would be to violate the freedom of God because all human witness (past, present and future) has been assumed in the Incarnation. The Incarnation is the point-of-contact; scripture’s authority comes from its inclusion and assumption within the freedom of God in the Incarnation.

Returning to my premise on scripture—scripture is true where people believe it is true.

---

4 Here is where I depart from Barth. While Barth would not grant scripture (as human words) any autonomous authority (as I discuss below), he would also not grant language any autonomy from the Incarnation. For him, humanity (language and time) have been assumed in the Incarnation. Language does not exist apart from God’s freedom.

As I said in chapter one, the brilliance of this move is that it can neither be proven nor disproven. The truthfulness of that claim exists in God’s freedom and thus in grace. There is no human access to that claim. As such, it can be true even while not being true for a social scientist.

Since it doesn’t have to be true to me in order to be true to God (it does not have to be true for me in order for it to be effective for me), I will exercise my own freedom and depart from Barth on this point. However, because it does not have to be true to me in order to be true for God (because it exists in God’s freedom and God remains the subject—i.e, it is not an object to which I have access), I also believe I can retain Barth’s method even as I diverge from him on this point.

With this proposal, the question might be asked, can fiction (e.g., fairy tales or comic books) be true simply because a person believes it to be true? There are at least two important issues in this question.

First, there is the issue of context for evaluating whether or not a claim is true. I will suggest (in the discussion of Bourdieu in the next section) that one appropriate context in which to ask this question is the context of the self or the subject. For a person, if it is *believed* to be true, for them it *is* true. However, in terms of a comic book or fairy tale, those stories are unlikely to be true for a person because they will encounter the construct/re-presentation in their imaginations as well as a multitude of other subjects who will contradict their self-understanding. For example, if everyone in my child’s life told them that they were a professional baseball player, if they got to go in the dugout and wear a jersey, if they conducted themselves in every way that they saw a baseball player conducting themselves, then my child may believe they are a baseball player. It could be true for them. Now, in “reality”, was my child ever really a baseball player? Who knows. Maybe or maybe not; it would depend on other subjects’ perception/beliefs about my child (and again, it would be *that particular* subject’s perception by which we adjudicate the “truthfulness” of it for them) —i.e., the security guard who greets them and grants them entrance into the locker room before the game; the manager who gives them a jersey and hat, the front office who gives them a pay cheque. However, my children are currently far from the “normal” age of professional baseball players, and they already notice how their experiences do not cohere with what they see as the life of a baseball player. No one has given them a jersey; they do not sit on the bench with the other players; and the Toronto Blue Jays organization is not sending a pay cheque in their name.
The same would be true for a comic book fan. If everyone in their lives treated them as a superhero, if they jumped off buildings and were able to fly (in the same manner as they saw the people in the comic books), if people marvelled at their abilities, then they may believe they were a superhero, regardless of what they “actually” were. However, if people made fun of them, if they jumped off buildings and fell to the ground, they would (excluding cases of mental illness) not believe themselves to be a superhero because their experience of themselves would not cohere with their constructed image of what it means to be a superhero. In other words, they would be faced with the dissonance between what they are able to do and the re-presentation of a superhero that exists (for them) in their imaginations as well as the dissonance between their own self-perception and others’ perception of them. If they were unable to mimic the mimesis that has been constructed (poiesis) and if no other subject perceived them as they perceived themselves, then they would not believe it true that they were a superhero (again, barring mental illness).

The issue of context then (and the difference in interpretation that I propose) means that it is not some out-there reality that we bump up against that makes one re-presentation (whether scripture or fairy tale) true or not. Instead, it is the interaction of my self/subjectivity with the construct in my imagination and with other subjects (and their perceptions of me). Where my belief matches a construct in my imagination and where that belief is true for others, it is possible for it to be true for me. Indeed, it is amazing the things a person can come to believe are true that are (so obviously) not true to people in other contexts. For example, where people inhabit contexts where a large portion of their interactions cohere and reify their beliefs/narratives, it is possible for people to believe just about anything (e.g., living in the Southeast United States, participating in some Evangelical
church services four times a week, attending a Christian school, watching only Fox News, travelling rarely or only for leisure, reading narrowly, etc.).

This leads me to my second issue. Underlying the question of whether believing it to be true makes it true, there may be a false assumption about reality. That assumption appears to be that there is a real reality to which our world refers, and as such fairy tales are merely narrative constructs that are obviously not real. As I attempted to show in chapter two, when it comes to language, this is simply not the case. Language is a re-presentation that constructs the reality it names; it does not objectively refer to any autonomous reality. As my discussion of Bourdieu attempts to show, when it comes to society and beliefs, those things which we call reality and believe exist objectively are more likely objectifications of subjectivity. That is, they are the objectification of all those perceptions into social and political structures. The practices and structures of society and politics do not refer to anything; they do not cohere to an objective standard; they are those things that are believed to be “real” because they have become “normal.”

If that is the case, the “truth” may be the construct (fairy tale) we tell ourselves that sets us most politically and ethically free. Indeed, retrieving the first issue of context, if truth/truth claims are contextual, then the question is not whether or not our re-presentations (scripture re-presentations or fairy tale re-presentations) adhere to reality? but what kind of response do they generate and what kind of world do they produce? In which case, a “true” word is one that generates (Aristotle’s productive sciences) the kind of polis we believe to be ethical (Aristotle’s practical sciences).

---

6 People like that may at times encounter “others” who contradict their perceptions of “reality”. But if they do not regularly interact with people and ideas that are different, if they do not develop affections for people with different beliefs, then those differences can be dismissed and disregarded.

Therefore, in one sense, scripture (like a fairy tale) is true to the person who believes it is true. And for that person, because it is true it moves them to act in the world in certain ways. The question, however, I propose that we ask about truthfulness, is not whether it refers to anything real but whether, in its re-presentation of the world, it is yet capable of moving people to act in the world in ways that we believe are ethical. And where it is capable of doing the latter, scripture may indeed be “really” truthful.

This first section is meant to be a preface to those in the church who might already have pressing questions regarding my assumptions about scripture. It was necessary to address some of these questions given the theological concerns that are likely to arise. However, some of the “foundations” for the above presumptions are to be found in the theory of Pierre Bourdieu that follows.

2. Methodology: Pierre Bourdieu and Practice Theory

This section draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s practice theory to read the relationship between Greece and Rome in Corinth from 197 B.C. to 114 A.D. and thereafter to read the practice of speaking in tongues within the Corinthian context in the middle of the first century A.D. Based on this Bourdieuan reading, it is suggested that ecstatic speech in general and tongues in particular was a practice which subverted the dominant discourse and attempted to reconfigure the power structures within the social sphere. I will attempt to show that in 1 Corinthians 12-14, spiritual gifts were claims to symbolic capital, which (where recognized) produced the exercise of power in the satisfaction of personal interests. Paul seeks to reframe spiritual gifts within the greater good as defined by love, so that spiritual gifts continue to testify quantitatively and qualitatively to the greater Kingdom of God which
is breaking-into and subverting the present socio-political structures, without subverting the Christian community itself.

2.1 Pierre Bourdieu and the Logic of Practice

Pierre Bourdieu posits that social scientists must “objectify the objectifying distance” in order to penetrate the “structuring structure” (habitus) so as to gain (practical) knowledge of the conditions of knowledge. The generative principle (which is durable and repeatable within certain social situations and thus measurable) is socially constructed and generates practices; knowledge of generative principles is knowledge of the conditions of knowledge. These generative principles do not conform to logical logic but are instead temporal, practical schemes that are capable of orienting practice in the face of urgent, life-and-death issues. And while they are not fixed or static principles (e.g., the “logician’s logic”), this practical, dynamic logic can be studied because it is objectified, as the objectification of the group’s subjectivity.

The object of inquiry then is the subjectivity of the group (constructed by the group) which has been objectified in practices. Practices are embodied myths, generated by a principle that seemed reasonable in the face of urgent, life-and-death issues (though not necessarily rationale nor having any grand, objective intention) which express and evoke deep-seated and durable dispositions. These durable dispositions make up the habitus. However, the generative principles to which rituals and habits were a response is forgotten,

---

9 Pierre Bourdieu tries to forge a path between objectivism (e.g., structuralist approaches) and subjectivism (e.g., some phenomenological approaches and the nihilism of Sartre). One contention is that both of these are still theoretical modes of knowledge and miss the practical mode of knowledge. As such the generative principles are reasonable responses not rationale and logically coherent schemas. *The Logic of Practice*, 26.
10 Ibid., 135-141.
11 Ibid., 69, 51-54.
while the durable disposition (the feelings that arise in a particular situation and the socially constructed and expected response) remain. The power of habits to hide their beginnings make them so effective at activating the collective subjectivity of the group (and their dispositions and thus practices), but this same “amnesia” of the generative principle of practice hides its violence against people. As such, ritual practices are not coherent nor do they have objective meaning; they do not resolve incongruities but play with them in such a way as to generate practice and inscribe the *habitus* on the body.

The objectification of a group or field’s collective subjectivity is then used to exert power over the group in order to reproduce the established order. Exposing the power which stands behind ritual practices exposes symbolic power thereby bringing its arbitrariness to conscious so as to modify the “categories of thought” (which drive individual and collective practices) so as to generate new language and practices which are capable of subverting the official language of those in power and the whole established order. Knowledge then of the conditions of social knowledge is the generative principle or the “logic of practice”, which when exposed for what it is (the objectification of one’s own subjectivity), is capable of dismantling the power arrangements of arbitrary social relations.

### 2.2 Practice Theory: Capital and Power

Practice theory (of which Bourdieu is one of the key figures), in general is “interested in how cultural activity in general works” and “the political dimensions of social relationships.” So for example, in ritual studies, performance theorists like Victor Turner

---

12 Ibid., 50.
15 Ibid., 135-141.
16 Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 76.
focus on an act (ritual) rather than the field (a particular social network of relations with reasonable but not necessarily rationale expectations) in which rituals are performed; while practice theorists focus on the field rather than the act. Therefore, someone like Turner seems to emphasize a change or transformation of the field by the ritual act (of the person); whereas Catherine Bell and Bourdieu tend to emphasize the transformation and subjugation of the person to the field in which the ritual is performed. The question may seem like one of focus (ritual act or field), but they lead to radically different conceptions of how cultural activity works.

For instance, Bourdieu suggests that there is no disinterested act. Even Christian practices of self-denial are acts of spiritual interest. Whether eschatologically oriented or otherwise, the participant sees herself benefiting in some way from her “disinterest.” And while asserting that all actions are motivated by interests does imply that all actions relate to ethics, the frame of ethics for actions simultaneously deconstructs the possibility of eradicating power. If there is no such thing as a disinterested act, then there is no social relationship which can be free of political dimensions and thus power. The question would then become how to arrange the political dimensions in a more ethical way.

Because actions are motivated by interests cultural activity is an economic exchange aimed at the accumulation of capital and the power to produce “the collectively recognized...representation of existence” (symbolic power). Symbolic power is the ability

---

18 Bell, *Ritual*, 74, 76.
20 Bourdieu speaks of an “economy of symbolic exchanges” and “the markets on which” people “offer their [linguistic] products.” *Language and Symbolic Power*, 37, 38.
21 Ibid., 42.
to be heard and obeyed and thus to be able to activate the collective subjectivity in order to satisfy one’s interests. A person or group with symbolic power is able to express and evoke the durable dispositions of the group and thus elicit practices which promote their own interests. A person or group with symbolic power “controls” the objectification of the group’s subjectivity. So for example, in religion, “god” is the objectification of a group’s subjectivity and the people with symbolic power (often the church hierarchy) express and evoke the dispositions inherent in the collective subjectivity, which in turn reproduces the regnant political dimensions of the field. So from a purely social scientific perspective, Bell might say that the language of “god” is a form of power exercised by those who are able to be heard and obeyed (or express and evoke the collective subjectivity).\textsuperscript{22}

The real area of contestation within the field of competing interests, Bourdieu suggests, is over what counts as capital. There are several forms of capital (economic capital, cultural capital, material capital) but the one which is imbued with symbolic capital—the one that represents the values, beliefs, expectations of the field (which is collectively recognized—the what-is in Aristotle and Ricoeur’s work), in particular, and the habitus, in general—is the one which procures symbolic power to construct social arrangements in such a way as to serve or satisfy one’s own interests.\textsuperscript{23} Symbolic power then secures one’s own interests and therefore other forms of capital (e.g., money).

Language is one of the most important arenas in which this battle for symbolic power is waged.\textsuperscript{24} For those who control the language, control the habitus.\textsuperscript{25} Remember that habitus

\textsuperscript{22} See Bell, \textit{Ritual}, 76-89.
\textsuperscript{23} Bourdieu, \textit{Language and Symbolic Power}, 72, 106, 111, 128, 156.
\textsuperscript{24} This is Bourdieu’s contention with linguistics, which he asserts “treats language as an object of contemplation rather than as an instrument of action and power.” Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{25} Here, as Bourdieu says, he is paying attention to the socio-historical character of language which he believes linguists (of the structuralist stream like Austin and others fails to account for). Bourdieu, \textit{Language and Symbolic Power}, 37-42; Bourdieu, \textit{The Logic of Practice}, 2, 15, 25ff.
is, for Bourdieu, the structuring structure of durable dispositions and probable eventualities that set the agenda (provide the “logic of practice” in which responses are reasonable though not necessarily rationale) for what we expect within particular fields of social relations. Language is the loci for this battle because those who can express the values and beliefs of the field can evoke the concomitant dispositions and thereby move people to action in a way that satisfies the interests of the speaker. Those who speak the dominant discourse can express and evoke the logic of practice and thereby exercise symbolic power over the collective subjectivity of the group.

The objectification of our subjectivity then is an object that acts on us but is also constructed by us yet is used against/for us by those with symbolic capital and thus symbolic power. Those who possess the capital that the market or field values (ethos), expects (pathos), believes (logos) are those who have power in the habitus and are capable of exercising control (albeit not “change”, for Bourdieu, tends toward determinism) over others by expressing and evoking their own (objectified) subjectivity. Cultural activity then operates, according to Bourdieu, in a marketplace or field in which all persons within the social relationships seek to procure power and thus the ability to secure more capital.

2.3 Language and Symbolic Power

Language is the place where this contestation regarding what is collectively recognized (what counts as capital) plays out and where we find the generative principles of action or practice. According to Bourdieu, the contestation over language (and over who has the power) is read in practice. The logic of practice is the dominant discourse inscribed on

---

Jay Heinrichs helpfully notes, ethos, logos and pathos do not have autonomous existence apart from the field in which we find them. They precede us and yet as objects of our subjectivity they have an “objective” nature (in Bourdieu’s sense of the term) in that they are durable and likely potentialities. So that while they are relative to the hearer, they are not not free and without objective elements which is both expressed and evoked in the habitus. Jay Heinrichs, Thank You for Arguing: What Aristotle, Lincoln, and Homer Simpson Can Teach Us About the Art of Persuasion, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), 173.
the body over time and gets (mis)recognized as social competence. This attunement to the *habitus* and thus collectively recognized social competence results in political dominance by those who possess the official language.\(^{27}\)

Practice is a cycle of reciprocal exchanges, a “continuous creation”, divided by intervals of time.\(^{28}\) The interval of time inserted between ritual exchanges is a strategy for hiding the norms which produce rituals. “Ritualized exchanges are ways of establishing political dominance by means of what appear to be overtly fair exchange. Ritual [as happening in time] is a tool for social and cultural jockeying.”\(^{29}\) Time is a strategy for officialization; “officialization is the process whereby the group...teaches itself and masks from itself its own truth.”\(^{30}\) Thus, those competing for power also compete for the official language because to establish and possess the official language of the group is to “appropriate the power to act on the group by appropriating the power the group exerts over itself through its official language.”\(^{31}\) In other words, practices (and their logic) happen in time; time serves to mask the genesis of practices; the genesis of practices is tied to the interests of those with symbolic power who exert power over the group by appropriating the group’s own power over itself through controlling the dominant discourse and categories of thought.

Those with “the power to secure recognition of power” (symbolic power) are those poised to reap economic (money) and social capital.\(^{32}\) Once economic capital is procured, relations of dependence are produced “but are disguised under a veil of moral relations.”\(^{33}\)

\(^{28}\) Bell, *Ritual*, 76-83.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., 79.
\(^{31}\) Ibid., 110.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 131.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 123.
Practices then are generated by the dominant discourse in order to exert power over the group and legitimate and institutionalize the arbitrary, asymmetrical relations. The dominant class inscribes their power on the group in practices by appropriating the group’s own power over itself, generating a *habitus* that reinforces the power of the established order.

Language is so important because the person/people who control the language (e.g., English, French, Chinese, etc.), the terms within the language (“man” or “human”; “disabled” or “other-abled”), and the definitions of the words/terms within the language (e.g., what does “human” mean in the context of gender studies? Or is a fetus a “human”?) are the ones who control the dominant discourse. A modern political example will help: Republican politicians and their constituents in the United States wanted to repeal or at least reform the “estate tax.” This is a tax imposed on the transfer of one party’s estate or wealth to another party upon death and at the dictates of a legally binding will. Yet despite their best efforts, Republicans could not gain any movement toward their goals. One of the reasons was because of the nomenclature. “Estate tax” suggested wealthy upper-class aristocrats who had accumulated a nest-egg large enough to be deemed an estate. The language inspired images of large southern plantations with scores of slaves or a feudal arrangement with its vast holdings and many subservient vassals. So Republicans commissioned Frank Luntz, who conducted field research and case studies and found that by changing the name to “death tax” they removed much of the negative, anti-wealthy sentiment and gained the support they needed to bring some reform to the law. By adjusting their language to the field and

---

34 Ibid., 131.  
attuning to the expectations and desires of the *habitus*, they were able to exercise symbolic power so that they could effect some reform.

Those who control the language, control the objectification-of-our-subjectivity, can express and evoke the "logic of practice", and thus have symbolic power. As such, they have the power to decide and act within the *habitus* and exert power because they have the “capacity to make oneself heard, believed, obeyed, and so on.”

2.4 Language, Symbolic Power and 1 Corinthians

I will use Bourdieu’s practice theory to analyze the *habitus* of Corinth as an essential and inseparable component of the message of 1 Corinthians, recognizing that Paul too was responding to urgent, life-and-death questions in a community in conflict. Furthermore, Bourdieu’s insights on the relation of language and power are most fitting for an analysis of 1 Corinthians 12-14, its concern for speaking in tongues, and the political dimensions involved in this practice.

Thus a Bourdieuan reading would suggest that in order to understand the situation Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians, one must pay attention to the larger social, political and cultural tensions in Corinth during this time (socio-linguistics). As such, the next section will pay attention to the pre-eminent cultural tensions in Roman Corinth in the middle of the first century A.D. which existed between Romans and Greeks. To understand this tension, one must first explore the history between Romans and Greeks, keenly attentive to where their beliefs and expectations differ.

---


3. Corinth in Context

The thesis of this section is that the distinctions (and tensions) between elements of Roman and Greek culture are being “played out” within the Jewish-Christian communities in Corinth, a city in the heart of Greece, in the middle of the first century A.D. The following will be examined: (1) the issue of geography and Greek socio-cultural self-understanding; (2) the establishment and change of the official language (Latin and Greek) in Corinth and the role of tongues in this cultural contestation between Greeks and Romans; and (3) the ongoing process (and tension) of Hellenization. It will be suggested that Romanitas and Hellenization is a process still underway in dynamic (and subversive) ways in Corinth from 44 B.C. until the early 2nd century A.D. with the reign of Hadrian. I will suggest that during this time Rome and Greece were in an ongoing struggle to define what counted as symbolic capital (the economy and politics of the Roman empire and the culture and literature of the Greeks) and thus who was capable of exercising symbolic power in Greece during this time.

As post-colonial theorists remind us, history is rarely so monolithic as we might suppose. What we think of as right or normal, is more likely the silencing of an “other” through violence. So one is encouraged to think not in terms of history but histories, not theology but theologies, because there are multiple narratives existing in relation (at times tension, conflict or even violence) to one another. And while the term “Greco-Roman world” is meaningful, it too has histories and narratives that exist together in tension, a tension arising in part from Rome’s political and economic domination of Greece but Rome’s interest in Greek literature and culture. As the Roman poet Horace wrote, “Greece, the captive, made her savage victor captive.” Taking cues from Bourdieu and finding confirmation for this path in post-colonial research, it would be important to ask about the
relation of Rome and Greece in Corinth from the 2nd century B.C. to the early part of the 2nd century AD.

3.1 Old Corinth (Leading up to 146 B.C.)

Corinth is a city with two histories. The old Corinth or the Corinth of “the great classical period” (prior to 146 B.C.) was such that “Cicero (106-43 B.C.E) in the first century could reminisce about Corinth as…‘the light of all Greece.’” Corinth was the “star” in a culture which already considered itself the cradle of civilization, the pinnacle of culture and enlightenment due to its great literature and culture. From Homer (c. 800 B.C.) to Plato through Aristotle and Aristotle’s pupil, the “disseminator of Greek culture”, Alexander the Great, Greek culture greatly influenced imperial Rome and the trajectory of the Western world. But in order to understand the social relations between them, it is necessary to examine the history and context which sets the tone for their interaction in Corinth in the first century A.D.—a time in which Rome dominated the political and military landscape in Greece and beyond. Therefore, it is essential to recount Rome’s presence in Greece, and especially in Corinth, during the first centuries B.C. and A.D.

Albert Trever suggests that Rome’s expansion into the Hellenistic east was not motivated by “national ambition and conceit,” but “became more imperative, as Rome became ever more involved in world politics and responsibilities”, particularly protecting weak states from the strong in order to “prevent any power from becoming strong enough to

---

threaten Roman interests” at the beginning of the 2nd century B.C.\textsuperscript{41} This foreign policy therefore drew it into conflict with the East.

One of the major Roman military forays into Corinth happened in 197 B.C. At that time, Rome won a decisive victory which resulted in “the autonomy of all the Greek states, the surrender to Rome of Macedonian strongholds...especially Corinth, Chalcis, and Demetrias,” and payments among other things.\textsuperscript{42} Rome sought to bring stability to the region but following its military victory, it assumed a more hands-off approach in dealing with the recently conquered Greek states (notably Corinth).

This proclamation was initially celebrated by many Greeks because they loved autonomy.\textsuperscript{43} But discontent arose “among the liberty-loving Greeks when they discovered that…[the] proclamation of independence was interpreted by Rome to mean only a limited freedom, subject to Roman interests and supervision.”\textsuperscript{44} Factions emerged; revolt among the Greeks ensued; and Rome was at war again in Greece from 171-167 B.C.\textsuperscript{45} Though Corinth was not directly involved as a battle ground site, the Greek revolts and subsequent war affected Roman foreign policy in Greece. After this war, Rome tightened its political grip in the region. “‘Freedom’ now implied no right to carry out any independent policy, though not yet annexed, Greek and Asiatic allies were henceforth actually subjects who were expected to accept Rome’s advice as a command.”\textsuperscript{46}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Trever, \textit{History of Ancient Civilization}, 105.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 105.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 108.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Levi suggests that there was a great amount of fighting between Greek communities who were fighting for control and power in the Greek region. \textit{Political Power in the Ancient World}, 81-92.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Trever, \textit{History of Ancient Civilization}, 109.
\end{itemize}
Later, while Rome was engrossed in significant military campaigns in Spain and Africa, “revolt again raised its head in Macedonia and Greece. The chronic rivalries between the Greek states, the bitter partisan strife between the pro-Roman and anti-Roman factions, and the growing resentment of the dictatorial policy of Rome furnished good soil for rebellion.” Rome, weary of the Greek’s complaining and pre-occupied with more politically critical campaigns, had neither the sentiments nor the time to tolerate such ongoing petulance. Rome’s patience had been exhausted.

So in 146 B.C., Corinth was ruthlessly “sacked and torched” by the Romans. They killed most of the men, exported women and children as slaves along with the finest of Greek art back to Rome, establishing imperial rule throughout the region. The destruction of Corinth (it’s graves, art, men) showed the Greeks that Rome did not care about all that pompous talk about Greece being the cradle of civilization, not when it came to teaching the Greeks a lesson about who was in charge. Having been drawn into political and military action in Greece, Rome became progressively more heavy-handed in its governance of Greece until it eventually demolished Corinth, among other cities in the region.

Jerome Murphy-O’Connor opens his commentary on 1 Corinthians by describing the Corinthian Christians as, “Conceited, stubborn, over-sensitive, argumentative, infantile, pushy. All these adjectives have their place in a description of the Corinthian Christians for whom Paul was responsible. They were the most exasperating community that he had to deal

---

47 Ibid., 118.
49 Richard notes that Augustus may have saved Greco-Roman culture in that the formation of the empire prevented the Greek city-states from obliterating one another, Twelve Greeks and Romans Who Changed the World, 197, 213. See also Robert Garland, Greece and Rome: An Integrated History of the ancient Mediterranean, (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2008), Lecture 9, 21:45.
with.” This description of Corinthian Christians in the middle of the first century A.D. rings familiar with the one given above in Rome’s relations with Corinth and Greece in the 2nd century B.C.51

Scholars disagree on just how many, if any, people dwelled in Corinth for the next one hundred years (146 - 44 B.C.), but most assume that it lay rather desolate.52 With the influx of exiled Greeks into Rome, the process of Hellenization of the Romans, which had already begun centuries before through trade and Greek religious cults and literature, was greatly accelerated.53

3.2 Movement toward a Greco-Roman Culture: Contrasting Greek and Roman Culture in the Process of Hellenization (146 - 44 B.C.)

Rome’s increased exposure to Greeks and eventual captivation with their literature and culture propelled the process of forming a unique cultural entity known as the Greco-Roman world. However, there are important differences between the two cultures, which when contrasted with one another help contextualize the cultural and religious situation in Corinth during the middle of the first century A.D.54 First, the very notion of Hellenization, suggests that we are dealing with two similar but distinct cultural entities such that formal terms are used to signal cultural movements generated by distinct cultures. For example, Romanitas and Hellenization are common terms employed which denote unique

---

54 And while, there were not clear national identities in the ancient world; Robert Garland suggests that we must study the two cultures in connection in order to understand the Greco-Roman world as a cultural entity. Robert Garland, Greece and Rome.
characteristics and influences of each society—politically and culturally. Robertson and Robertson, in commenting on Greece’s effect on Rome, implicitly refer to the philosophical differences between the two cultures: “with increasing acquaintance, even the hard, practical Roman began to feel the beauty and charm of Greek art and literature.”

In philosophical and epistemological categories, Greeks were far more open to uncertainty, discerning and deciding matters based on probability. For the Greeks, “The basis for human action is...not...certainty but what is probable...whereas the Stoic theory of providence, while not certain, is less improbable and, at any rate, more welcome to a Roman official.”

Philosophically and epistemologically, Rome pursued more certainty and expressed it in political and administrative efficiency; Greeks were more open to ambiguity and tension, expressed both in their literature and art and by the fact that they approached or organized life through literature and art (rather than through political arrangements as the Romans emphasized).

### 3.2.1 Roman Cultural Capital; Greek Symbolic Capital

Rome was captivated by the unique beauty of Greek culture and literature, as the Roman poet Horace eloquently attested. Attempting to become “not merely a capable man of affairs [as the Romans were] but also an enlightened and cultured man,” Romans often employed the new influx of exiled Greeks as teachers.

One of these sources of culture was the Greek language with its epic poetry. Robertson and Robertson suggest that until the time of Cicero, most people, even Romans themselves, did not believe that “the Latin language [Rome’s language] could be the vehicle of noble thought,” worthy of “being ranked with

---

Greek.”\textsuperscript{59} While Roman imperial politics and their efficient economic infrastructure dominated the world, Greek language and culture enchanted the Romans.\textsuperscript{60} So much so that Virgil (29-19 B.C.) in his poem, the \textit{Aeneid}, goes so far as to attribute the establishment of Rome to the Greeks.

From a Bourdieuian perspective of the political dimension “inscribed” in Virgil’s poem, enlightened Roman elites procured capital for their culture by tracing their origins to the highly esteemed Greek culture; and pompous Greeks could rest knowing that they were the progenitors of Rome and its empire.\textsuperscript{61} While subjugated politically, Greeks could feel that they retained what counted as cultural capital. Therefore, Romans could obtain cultural capital through their association with Greece; and Greeks could obtain symbolic capital because their culture gets valued as a source of cultural capital. That is, the Greek narrative of what counts as real culture gets “collectively recognized, and thus realized” as the proper currency for “symbolic exchanges.” Greek culture gets collectively recognized by Romans and thus the empire as a source of real capital. As such, Greek culture and literature must be accumulated in order to express and evoke the \textit{habitus} so as to procure symbolic power in the pursuit of satisfying one’s interests.\textsuperscript{62}

\textbf{3.2.2 Hellenization and Religion}

Furthermore, the process of Hellenization also included religious syncretism. The Romans found parallels between their gods and goddesses and the Greek gods and

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 275.
\textsuperscript{60} Richard notes the efficient administration of the Roman empire, \textit{Twelve Greeks and Romans Who Changed the World}, 196.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 197-202.
\textsuperscript{62} This agency is not necessarily a conscious agency, but it is, at least for Bourdieu, an attempt to satisfy one’s own interests. So that regardless of what is \textit{intended} as an acting agent, people seek to satisfy their interests, whatever those interests are.
goddesses. For example, the Greek Zeus gets paired with the Roman Jupiter; the Greek Aphrodite gets paired with the Roman Venus.

However, the one god who was too Greek to be paired with a Roman god was Apollo. Apollo was the god of prophecy and his temple at Delphi housed the most important pythia in the ancient world. Rulers and military leaders from around the world travelled to Delphi to consult the Pythia. The Pythia was known to utter oracles that were at times ecstatic in nature. In Delphi, the Pythia became filled with the spirit of Apollo. One writer calls the oracles “unintelligible”, but scholars disagree on whether “unintelligible” means syntactically and grammatically incoherent (thus the ecstatic designation and its possible similarity to glossolalia) or whether they were coherent but required discernment—as in, if the Pythia said, “Go to Crete” did it mean, “Go to war with Crete, or go with diplomatic intentions.”

After Rome resettled Corinth in 46 B.C. (which I will refer to as Roman Corinth), another temple to Apollo was constructed. Archeological evidence suggests that the temple to Apollo was adjacent to the entrance to the temple of the imperial cult (the structurally prominent temple in Roman Corinth).

The following observations then can be made about the Greek god Apollo as it relates to the interplay between the Greeks and the Romans: first, Apollo had an extremely important influence throughout Greece and in Corinth. Second, cultic practices associated

64 Scholars differ on whether the “unintelligible” utterances refer to incoherent speech (e.g., a form of tongues) or syntactically and grammatically coherent speech that required discernment in order to properly interpret it. Plutarch seems to suggest that “the divine message was often too cryptic for human comprehension without other assistance,” thus testifying to coherent speech in need of proper interpretation. Allen R. Hunt, _The Inspired Body: Paul, the Corinthians, and divine inspiration_, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 27. Katherine Selby Knoke, “Fourth Ezra 14 and the Oracle at Delphi,” Unpublished paper presented to Judith Newman, May 2011.
with Apollo provide precedents for ecstatic speech. Whether or not it was typical for the Pythia to utter ecstatic speech that might be incoherent (similar to *glossalia*), it seems that incoherent ecstatic speech by the Pythia was at least a phenomenon that was recorded and known throughout the ancient world. Third, while there were early Apollonian influences in Rome, Apollo was “too Greek” and his influence began to wane in the 1st century B.C. as Romans consulted him less and developed other philosophies, such as Stoicism.

From a Bourdieuan sociological perspective, the status and worship of Apollo (or at least cultic practices associated with him) would be a loci in which political tension or conflict between Romans and Greeks would occur because of the conflicting durable dispositions arising from the overly Greek Apollo.\(^{66}\) The competing “myths” inscribed on the different practices of worship would suggest, sociologically speaking, that this cultural contestation—of what counts as capital (e.g., ecstatic speech) and therefore who has power within this field—would play itself out in the city of Corinth.\(^ {67}\)

### 3.3 A Brief History of Roman Corinth from 44 B.C. until the Second Century A.D.

In 44 B.C., Julius Caesar established a Roman colony at Corinth and made it the capital of the region of Achaia.\(^ {68}\) Anthony Thiselton suggests that the colonists sent for resettlement were Roman in origin, and he names three sources: (1) freedmen, (2) Julius

---


\(^ {67}\) Helmut Koester notes, “Oracles had always been a significant factor in Greek religion.” Most of them were associated with Apollo. Koester further notes that the political significance of oracles of Apollo diminished in the Hellenistic period and that during this time there was the rise of the Sybil. Sybils were “prophetic women…who resided in different places and uttered ecstatic predictions…whether or not any prophecy had been requested”, whereas oracles responded to requests. Finally, Koester suggests that Jews and Christians appropriated these prophetic utterances (recorded in the Sybylline books) and “used them in order to propagate their own apocalyptic predictions of doom, as well as their image of a better world to come, all in the dress of an established Greek genre of religious literature.” Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age*, 162-164.

\(^ {68}\) Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 23, 25.
Caesar’s own veterans, and (3) urban trades persons and laborers. Horsley, however, contends, “The majority of the colonists sent to Corinth in 44 BCE...were only superficially ‘Roman.’ Many of those taken from the urban poor in Rome had likely been displaced from their farms in the Italian countryside.” "Reflecting aristocratic Greek attitudes [after Roman colonization], the poet Crinagoras lamented that Corinth had been ‘wholly abandoned to such a crowd of scoundrelly [Roman] slaves.’” Crinagoras description displays contempt and feelings of cultural superiority among the Greeks who came to Corinth against the lower class and less cultured Roman settlers.

Horsley says, “Politically and, to a degree, culturally the new Corinth would have been patterned after Rome.” Thiselton notes that Roman Corinth was a community and culture "formed after a Roman model, not a Greek one.” Romans had shifted from allowing for more autonomy among conquered city-states to a policy of instituting imperial rule in conquered territories. One of the ways of doing this was through the imperial cult; the use of standards of currency; the layout and construction of city centers to reflect imperial rule. In addition, the centralized government of Rome placed its stamp on Corinth linguistically, making Latin the official language of this Roman colony. Given the Greeks long-standing sense of cultural superiority as inscribed (Bourdieuian sense) on their language and literature, the issue of official language would be a field/market of great concern or interest among Greeks where one would expect the political dimension (between Romans and Greeks) to play itself out. Corinth was thus Roman in layout, in the syncretism and adoption of Greek

---

70 Horsley, 1 Corinthians, 24.
71 Crinagoras, Greek Anthology 9.284, in Horsley, 1 Corinthians, 24.
72 Horsley, 1 Corinthians, 24.
73 Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 3-4.
religion in service of the emperor, in its politics and economics, but there was still a strong
Greek presence there, as Murphy-O’Connor attests. He says that archeological evidence calls
into question the notion that Corinth was “totally destroyed” or “completely depopulated”
after 146 B.C. Instead, he suggests that those who escaped the exile by the Romans would
probably have returned to the city. Upon his visit between 79 and 77 B.C., Cicero records
that people were dwelling in Corinth.\(^{74}\) So while Corinth was formed after a Roman model in
44 B.C. and became a cosmopolitan city of many different cultures thereafter, Greek culture
would have had a presence in Corinth that was distinct from the Roman one being imposed.
Furthermore, differences between Greek and Roman culture would have resulted in tensions.
And since Greek culture was so prized, one could expect that any political, social or cultural
tensions might be exhibited in a cultural contestation where Greece still had some value and
therefore influence.

Fitzmyer notes, “Latin was the official language” in Corinth from 44 B.C. until the
2nd century A.D.\(^{75}\) From the 104 texts found prior to the reign of Hadrian (117-138 A.D.),
101 are in Latin, while only 3 are in Greek.\(^{76}\) Fitzmyer suggests, “This was to be expected
because the colonial administration had seen to the introduction of Roman people, laws,
culture, customs, taxation, and religion.”\(^{77}\) Contestation would be expected from the
pompous Greeks who saw themselves as the cradle of civilization. Greeks were the
champions of philosophy, literature and art,\(^{78}\) and as Gordon notes, the literature of Corinth
remained Greek throughout.\(^{79}\) It seems while Rome imposed Latin, the Greeks (and most

\(^{74}\) Murphy-O’Connor, “Corinth,” in The Anchor Bible Dictionary, 1134-1139.
\(^{75}\) Fitzmyer, First Corinthians, 30.
\(^{76}\) Gordon, Sister or Wife? Also, Koester says, “Hadrian was an enthusiastic friend of Greek culture.”
\(^{77}\) Koester, History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age, 306.
\(^{78}\) Fitzmyer, First Corinthians, 30.
\(^{79}\) Cf., Robertson and Robertson, The Story of Greece and Rome, 275.
\(^{79}\) Gordon, Sister or Wife?, 67, footnote 29.
everyone else) took for granted that Greek was the true choice for the cultured and
enlightened. And pressure from Rome to conform to the culture of Rome by use of Latin
(for as Bourdieu notes, language is the means by which symbolic power gets exercised and
cultural capital accrues) would have been repugnant to the Greeks in Corinth and most
Hellenized persons.

Bourdieu cites the imposition of French as the official language by an administrative
organization linked to royal power in sixteenth century France as an example of the relation
of language and symbolic power in cultures. Such a scenario adds credence to the tensions in
Corinth. In sixteenth century France, the construction of the monarchical state coincided with
the officialization of language as the popular and purely oral uses of all the regional dialects”
were denigrated and devalued. In the formation of an official Parisian dialect, peasants
were limited to their local dialect while the aristocracy, the commercial and business
bourgeoisie and “literate petite bourgeoisie..had access much more frequently to the use of the
official language...while at the same time possessing the dialect.” However,

the conflict between the French of the revolutionary intelligentsia and the
dialects or patois was a struggle for symbolic power in which what was at stake was the formation and re-formation of mental structures [ways of organizing thought and re-instantiating power]. In short, it was not only a
question of communicating but of gaining recognition for a new language of
authority.

In Corinth, the powerful Romans imposed their official language but it was a language
collectively recognized as inferior and thus symbolically was not really official. Greek
language was valued as conferring symbolic capital and therefore capable of procuring some

80 Koester, History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age, 321-322.
81 Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 46-47.
82 Ibid., 47.
83 Ibid., 48.
degree of symbolic power even while another culture maintained the political power. This situation would have generated tension by the scorned culture who considered itself superior.

While Bourdieu’s analysis permits examination of language and symbolic power by looking for the political dimensions of cultural activity, historical evidence attests to the inner conflict over language. For while Latin was the “official” language, Greek was used in the colony. “In the mid-50s A.D., Paul wrote at least two letters in Greek to Corinthian Christians, and many educated Romans spoke Greek. Moreover, Plutarch (A.D. 46/47-120), who would have been a young boy when Paul visited Corinth knows of it as a city where Greek was spoken.”

84 Corinth became (after Paul's writing) “the principal ‘Mother-city’ among Greeks.”

85 Greek people came to Corinth, used their language and exercised influence. The differing languages being employed would have been, according to Bourdieu, an issue of power and the exercise of symbolic power within Corinth.

In the 2nd century A.D. after Hadrian restored Greek as the official language in Corinth, Rome no longer maintained a standing army there. 86 Furthermore, not until the 2nd century A.D. was it “said that Corinth, though Roman, had become thoroughly hellenized.”

87 Until this time, the political dimension of socio-cultural relations in Corinth seems to be existing in a dynamic tension among many influences—obviously the Jewish influence is of great significance among Christians and from Paul himself being a Roman Jew—but in Corinth at least, the tension between Greek and Roman cultures is noteworthy.

---

84 Fitzmyer, First Corinthians, 30.
85 Horsley, 1 Corinthians, 25.
86 Ibid., 25-26; Horsley suggests that this is because of a patron-client relationship and a concern over status. Regardless of why, it is interesting to note the chronology in that Greek acceptance of Roman imperial rule is easily maintained following the establishment of Greek as the official language. Furthermore, the process of Hellenization had reached a higher level of stasis by the 2nd century A.D. For whatever reason, tensions between Romans and Greeks had greatly subsided at this point in their history.
87 Ibid., 25.
It seems highly likely then that the context into which Paul wrote was not one in which the process of forging a Greco-Roman culture had concluded. Instead, Paul writes to a new (Christian) community living within a society which was still in the process of forming a unique cultural entity. Roman politics and economics undoubtedly prevailed in Corinth, but the battle for what constituted cultural and symbolic capital in Corinth seems to have been an ongoing exchange between Greeks and Romans (among others, e.g. Jews, Christians, etc.) from at least 44 B.C. until the second century A.D.

### 4. Practice Theory and Speaking in Tongues

#### 4.1 Habitus and the Logic of Practice among Corinthian Christians at the Time of Paul’s Writing of 1 Corinthians

It has been suggested that the *habitus* of ancient Corinth was one in which what counted as capital and therefore conferred power was in flux between cultures which were still in the process of syncretism. It has also been shown that one of the primary areas up for grabs and one of the few remaining legitimate fields/markets on which Greeks could contest the Romans was that of literature and language—in part because most Romans recognized the superiority of Greece in these areas. It seems plausible that language and religion converged for the Greeks in the field-market of ecstatic speech and that this area constituted a field in which they were capable of competing and one that was in some way already part of the *habitus*.  

Regarding the collective recognition of ecstatic speech and its resultant place in the *habitus*, one person says,

---

88 Mario Attilio Levi says, “Oracles were a constant feature of Greek life and religion.” *Political Power in the Ancient World*, 41.
Oracles, dreams, and astrology were...common currency in the first century, and the surviving evidence indicates that nearly everyone made at least some use of this preternatural tender. Consulting an oracle, like that of Apollo at Delphi [Greece], or the Sybil at Cumae [Rome]89, or Asclepius at Epidaurus, was a time-honored tradition in antiquity and considered to be a valid means of finding a divine answer to a perplexing dilemma.90

And while questions remain about the relation of ecstatic speech and glossalia, “for the Corinthians, who regularly saw Mount Parnassos, where the Delphic oracle was located, to the north across the Corinthian Gulf, it would have been quite natural to associate unintelligible speech with a divine revelation.”91

But regardless of what glossalia “was”, Paul expresses concern that tongues was being used by the Corinthian Christians as a means of securing symbolic power within the community. In other words, regardless of what glossalia or ecstatic speech were (metaphysically or theologically—divine or not divine, eschatologically-oriented or not, etc.), both were at least similar in what they did politically (i.e., pieces in the contestation for symbolic capital and symbolic power among various cultures). Therefore, the application of Bourdieu’s practice theory to interpret the practice of ecstatic speech in Corinth by Christians will be pursued. Given the context examined above (Section II), Corinthian Christians were probably bringing to expression the cultural contestation already in process between the Greeks and Romans as Christians were in the nascent stages of their own process of community formation.

89 The Sybil at Cumae was an oracle of Apollos established by a Greek colony in Naples, Italy; but eventually through the poet Virgil’s Aeneid, 29-19 B.C., she became a prophetess of Rome; cf. Richard, Twelve Greeks and Romans Who Changed the World, 200-202.
90 Though the Romans were growing increasingly skeptical of such non-rationale ways of knowing (e.g., the promulgation of Stoic philosophy). From the first century A.D. onward, Roman consultation of these sort of oracles began to decline. This further attests to the different expectations and possible tensions which could have been a backdrop for the cultural contestation between Greeks and Romans in Corinth in the middle of the first century A.D. Moyer V. Hubbard, Christianity in the Greco-Roman World: A Narrative Introduction, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 34; see also, chapter 1 of Allen R. Hunt, The Inspired Body.
91 Nash, 1 Corinthians, 361. See also, Levi, Political Power in the Ancient World, 53.
In this section, I will suggest that Paul accepts the practice of spiritual gifts and tongues. And Paul re-presents tongues theologically so that they can do something productive politically in a contentious situation. First, tongues subverts the socio-political structures of the present age which is passing away and testifies to the age to come, the Kingdom of God. The contrast (or maybe sharp break) between the present and future age is an important theme for Paul in 1 Corinthians. Second, Paul too appeals to the Spirit as the legitimate power authorizing his own ministry and instructions. In section Four, I will suggest that in 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul attempts to reframe tongues within the life of love so that tongues and all the spiritual gifts, which subvert the present age, will serve rather than subvert the Christian community itself.

4.2 Tongues as Subversive Speech

Bourdieu demonstrates how language; terminology within language; and the definition of terms within a language have political dimensions and thus are arenas of power. Symbolic power belongs to the person/group who possesses the dominant language (e.g., those who speak the “official” language or the language of upper-class people within a society), to the person/group who has the power to name things (e.g., the person/people whose use of “man” or “human” is accepted and used by others within his/her field of influence); and finally to the person/group who has the power to define what those names or

---

92 Bourdieu contends that there is no space outside of the habitus for those who live in it. Individuals who share social space cannot be free from the cultural activity that exists between them and the political dimensions running beneath the surface. However, there is significant disagreement over the relation of Paul’s understanding of tongues and oracular ecstatic speech (like at Delphi). Hunt notes a few varying opinions, The Inspired Body, 27, footnote 34.

However, regardless of how Paul conceived of tongues in relation to the ecstatic speech of the cultic oracles and regardless of their influence or lack thereof upon Paul, I proceed with my project on the basis that my question is not about their real or actual relation in the mind of Paul or the Corinthian Christians (for that matter). Instead, I am interested in the way ecstatic speech or tongues (regardless of what it is or how it is consciously conceived) function politically within the habitus. I am asking, what tongues or ecstatic speech actually did in and for the people who practiced tongues or ecstatic speech.
terms mean (e.g., the person/people who are effective at expressing and evoking the beliefs, expectations and needs of those who listen such that their definition of “human” becomes collectively recognized). Bourdieu further contends that one can examine this power by looking at practices because what counts as capital and demonstrations of power are inscribed on the body in practices which are reasonable responses (not necessarily rationale) to urgent, contextual issues. The “logic” which generates a practice is the key, for Bourdieu, to unlock what a culture values (capital), and this logic is discovered by examining the language of those who have the symbolic power to express the dispositions of the habitus so as to evoke practices from others that satisfy one’s own interests.

Taking cues from Bourdieu, I will read looking for the political dimensions of the language and practice of “speaking in tongues” by Christians within the larger context of the cultural contestation by the Greeks against the imperial policy in Roman Corinth during the first century A.D.

4.2.1 Contestation over the Official Language

Tongues challenges the regnant political arrangement by contesting the dominant discourse. As an entirely different language which the empire does not speak, it contests the dominant discourse in the most subversive of ways. As an altogether different and even a rationally impenetrable language, it is the most subversive of the three heuristic categories of linguistic contestation described above. Tongues by the Christians is a language which the empire does not speak and cannot interpret; they have no access to it. As such, those who speak in tongues and interpret have symbolic capital and symbolic power among those who collectively recognize ecstatic speech as legitimate. During the first century A.D. among a cosmopolitan group of people living in the shadow of pythias and oracles in the heart of
Greece, there were many who would recognize tongues as legitimate and therefore conferring authority or symbolic power.

Furthermore, tongues claims an authority which transcends any human political authority by ascribing the speech to divine revelation. The connection between ecstatic speech and divine revelation was collectively recognized by the Greeks (though not necessarily some of the Romans), as Nash notes. By taking it out of the sphere of human discourse and ascribing the phenomenon to God, those who spoke in tongues would make the most culturally permitted form of subversion and protest. As such, tongue-speakers could claim the ultimate symbolic capital because divine discourse would be understood as constituting not only a legitimate language but also the official language. Those who recognized divine discourse occurring through tongues-speech would believe that truth is not what the emperor says but what God says. The claim of divine discourse was a challenge to the official language and subverted the human political powers by claiming that the true official language (and thus authority and power) was not in the hands or on the tongues of those who ruled over this present age. From the view of practice theory, speaking in tongues was the utmost, culturally-permitted, form of subversion in order to reconstruct the official language and thereby claim the power to be heard and believed and thus evoke practice from others within the community.

Contemporary examples of this phenomenon in cultural and religious experience are available. First, Cheryl Bridges Johns has cogently argued that among early modern Pentecostals, tongues was a means of “conscientization” to counter real and perceived

---

93 Pentecostalism arose out of the holiness movement of the 19th century. Pentecostals were persecuted by other churches and the general society. Charles W. Conn recounts testimonies of Pentecostal churches being vandalized and burned and members being persecuted, Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God, (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1994).
oppression and marginalization. In this capacity, tongues among early marginalized Pentecostals took on a very political form in that it became a means of protest, identity formation and even contestation. It was a way to challenge the dominant discourse—not by challenging the definition of terms nor even the terms themselves—but by challenging the legitimacy of the very language by appealing to divine language breaking-in from beyond. Similar characteristics have been noted about Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 13:10-12, which will be discussed later.

Second, the political dimension involved in the use and government-recognition of African American English in the United States attests to the contestation between African-American society and White Anglo-Saxons. Furthermore, there is a political dimension in the promulgation of English around the world. Jacques Derrida lamented in his conversation at Villanova University saying, we are all being forced to speak English. Finally, beyond language itself, the contestation over terms and their definitions within a common language are forms of power which have been studied. The point of these last three examples is that there are underlying political dimensions behind what counts as legitimate discourse and what constitutes the official language.

---

97 Driven again by economic interests, which would be one facet of Bourdieu’s broad sense of the term, “economic”. Thompson gives a helpful clarification on Bourdieu’s use of market and economics. *Language and Symbolic Power*, 8-32.
99 See for example the Frontline documentary, *The Persuaders*. See the earlier example of differing emotional and intellectual responses generated by using “death tax” rather than “estate tax”.
4.2.2 Tongues as a Technology of the Self\textsuperscript{100}

Horsley acknowledges the benefit of tongues for the oppressed and marginalized. For as he says, while Paul calls the behavior “childish” and modern psychologists might call it regressive,

such ‘regression’ can be creative. In mystical or spiritual form it can lead to an alternative self or life rooted in the childlike creative energies that have been overlaid or repressed by the social forms and contingencies of oppressive reality. The periodic seeming loss of self can be the means of establishing a new self above the social realities that emasculate, diminish, or deny it. Spiritual experiences like this could transform lives.\textsuperscript{101}

A study of a poor charismatic group in Mexico City suggested that “the experience of glossolalia transformed their individual lives in a way that was not simply internal or subjective.”\textsuperscript{102} They are quoted as saying, “Afterwards [speaking in tongues] I felt strong, and all my problems were forgotten.” And “In the world one suffers much. But I am happy.” Particularly important was the feeling of assurance and security in receiving manifestations of the Spirit….”\textsuperscript{103} Tongues was for these poor, marginalized Hispanics, like it was for the Greeks in Roman Corinth and the Christians living in Corinth, a means of self-assertion, a means of trying to become an active subject in a society which diminished or denied one’s values, beliefs and needs. Spiritual gifts was a means of tearing down “the

\textsuperscript{100} Cf. Nathan D. Mitchell, \textit{Liturgy and the Social Sciences}, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999); in which he argues contrary to Michael Foucault that the Rule of St. Benedict is indeed a technology of the self (a means of making, forming, creating a self). One must still ask though about what the practice/ritual (whether tongues or monastic orders) actually does in the person who does the practice/ritual. See my, “Generating Movement in the Social Sphere.”

\textsuperscript{101} Horsley, \textit{1 Corinthians}, 191.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 191.

\textsuperscript{103} Quoted in Horsley, \textit{1 Corinthians}, 191; also see Philip D. Wingeier-Rayo, \textit{Where Are the Poor? A Comparison of Pentecostalism and Base Christian Communities in Mexico}, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 1-34.
social barriers that deprived them of power over their own lives.” Tongues gave people a sense of power over their own lives in the face of marginalization and oppression.

As a means of both subversion of the language and symbolic power of the dominant social order and of the assertion of a self or group’s own language and symbolic power, tongues has prominent political features. That is, it is not necessarily an other-worldly flight from the vagaries of existence; rather it can be a challenge to the official language (particularly among the marginalized who either do not speak the official language or who do not have the symbolic capital or power to be heard, believed and obeyed) by contesting what counts as symbolic capital and thus who is capable of exercising symbolic power. The political dimensions of tongues are clear in Paul’s concern over the use of spiritual gifts, especially tongues, among Corinthians Christians who were exercising power over one another through the use of tongues. It seems tongues in Corinth was not so much apolitical as much as it was other-political in that tongues-speakers appealed to a higher power as the basis for accumulating symbolic capital and exercising symbolic power within the community and in the culture. It seems however, that among the Christians in Corinth that it had turned into a form of power against one another within that same community.

The claim of glossolalia and divine revelation by Corinthian Christians makes sense within a larger society already living in tension over legitimate language and symbolic capital. Conscious or unconscious of such connections, Corinthians (Christian or not) would have been steeped in these cultural tensions. Contemporary claims to official speech through appeal to divine discourse can be subversive of current socio-political arrangements and likely would have been so in Roman Corinth in the first century A.D., especially given the habitus at the time. Finally, Paul’s concerns over the use of tongues and spiritual gifts in 1

---

104 Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 192.
Corinthians 12-14 further attests to the power dynamics which were produced by the practice of tongues. Subversion of the present age had become subversion of one another within the Christian community.

However, despite the conflict which spiritual gifts were causing within the community, Paul does not call for an end to spiritual gifts or speaking in tongues; he claims to speak in tongues more than all of them (14:19)! In 1 Corinthians 12:4-5, Paul says that he came to the Corinthians with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. From a Bourdieuan perspective, Paul appeals to divine power at work in him as a means to secure symbolic capital and exercise symbolic power in order to mediate the conflict and instruct the Christian community in various matters (Paul also appeals to divine power authorizing his instructions in 4:1,19-21; 5:3; 7:10; 9:1-2; 14:19). In 3:3, Paul de-legitimizes the Corinthian Christians’ appeal to the Spirit and spiritual gifts based on their jealousy and strife. Paul, in essence, calls their authority invalid and seems to imply that they are misguided in what they value and count as symbolic capital. Luke Powery says that the divisive attitudes among Corinthian Christians negates their appeal to the Spirit.\footnote{Luke A. Powery, \textit{Spirit Speech: Lament and Celebration in Preaching}, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009).} Sociologically, Paul tells the Corinthian Christians that they do not really possess symbolic capital. As such, they do not have the symbolic power to act, to be heard and thus obeyed within the community.\footnote{Thompson, “Introduction”, \textit{Language and Symbolic Power}, 8.} And I will suggest that in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul attempts to reframe what counts as symbolic capital, namely, love of an other (see also 8:13, 9:12b, 19; 10:33). It seems that the subversive nature of tongues was being too effective in its political function in that it was subverting the community itself. But Paul does not believe that the choice is an either/or between the power
inherent in spiritual gifts and the ethics of Christian hospitality; the two could exist together (14:19).

Instead, he reframes spiritual gifts within the common good (12:7) and therefore the greater good of love (13:1-13). Indeed, Paul claims divine authorization based on the same work and gifts of the Spirit that the Corinthian Christians appeal to (14:19). But while Paul has the same symbolic capital of spiritual gifts, they do not have the love of one another which is essential for such appeals to divine discourse. It will be suggested in the next section (Part 4) that Paul seeks to reframe the social and political strategy of spiritual gifts and therefore tongues by situating them within the context of the Christian life of love in 1 Corinthians 13.107

5. Theological Reading of 1 Corinthians 12-14: Alternative Constructions of Power by Means of Re-presentations

The focus on chapter 13 within the larger pericope of 1 Corinthians 12-14 is pursued for two reasons. The first reason is Ricoeur’s notion of metaphor. The second reason is Aristotle’s notion of productive science as one of three methods of inquiry.

Ricoeur and Metaphor. Ricoeur contends that metaphors are not “illustrations” of an autonomous principle.108 In ancient rhetoric metaphors were considered ornamental; that is, metaphors were interchangeable. Different metaphors could be employed to communicate the same point. Ricoeur (using Aristotle) challenges the notion that metaphors are interchangeable addendums to pre-existing truths. Instead, as discussed in chapter 2, the

---

107 Also, though there are no explicit indications that Paul saw tongues as a playing-out of the social and political contestation for symbolic power between Rome and Greece, given the socio-historical linguistic reading I am using, regardless of what Paul intends or what is going on in Paul's impenetrable mind; this would likely have been occurring, according to Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice; Language and Symbolic Power; Practical Reason.*

“Real is in Act” between the two poles of subject and object; the truth or principle of the metaphor cannot be abstracted from the particular metaphor employed. So then, truth is in the “metaphorizing” movement between subject and object.

While a metaphor might contain a subject, object and predicate, Ricoeur contends that metaphors are narratives. The smallest, most indivisible unit of interpretation is not the word or even the sentence but the narrative. Yet for Ricoeur, narrative is not what contemporary readers might call a “story”. Instead, a narrative is the re-presentation of the world in action in such a way that corresponds to (but is not limited by) our experience so that readers/listeners see new possibilities for action in the world. It attempts to open up a world of what-is-possible through portraying people in action, using active verbs so that readers can see others actually living in the world envisioned. Metaphor does not talk about a world; it shows a world already in action. In this sense, metaphor shows rather than tells.

When Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “I have a dream…” and then talked about white boys and girls holding hands with black boys and girls; he was not giving an illustration nor was he necessarily telling a story; instead, he was giving hearers a picture of the kind of world they could live into, even the kind of world that was capable of coming into being. Therefore, what some, at times count as “illustrations” are not substitutable additions; instead they are the heart and soul of what the text generates or makes possible—that is, the narrative world it constructs/creates. So while some commentators call chapter 13 an illustration to

109 Dale Martin makes a similar argument when he discloses the union of body and soul in Greek philosophy as a way of reading the body in Corinthians. His reading challenges the notion of a dichotomy between form and content as Ricouer’s notion of metaphor does. There is no disembodied principle which exists independently of the form in which it comes. See Dale B. Martin, The Corinthian Body, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 3-21.
111 Ibid., 324-384.
112 So the whole text is the narrative; and the narrative is the metaphor; and the metaphor is the smallest unit of interpretation. Ricoeur, “Between Rhetoric and Poetics,” 324-384.
help make Paul’s argument (the heart of which is found elsewhere, e.g. ch. 12 or 14), reading this passage through the lens of Ricoeur means one will need to look at chapter 13 because it is in the “illustration” that one might expect to find the metaphorizing movement which generates a world of possibility. The world that is being envisioned by the text is the focus of this interpretation. Therefore, based on Ricoeur’s interpretative focus on the world being generated by the metaphoric movement of a text, I will focus on chapter 13 as essential to what Paul actually does in the narrative unit of 1 Corinthians 12-14.

Aristotle and Productive Hermeneutics. By choosing this path as my entry into this section (chs. 12-14), I am committing myself to a productive hermeneutic in which I look for what is produced or created by this “illustration” in chapter 13 of the narrative of 1 Corinthians 12-14. Fruit from the previous chapter comes to bear again from the earlier discussion on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, where he contends that there are three scientific approaches. To summarize them again quickly, the first are the theoretical sciences; they seek to know something (e.g., Prior and Posterior Analytics, Metaphysics, Biology). The second are the productive sciences; they seek to create or make something (e.g., Rhetoric and Poetics); and the third are the practical sciences; they seek to do something (e.g., Ethics and Politics).

Chapter 13 paints a portrait of the kind of world that is possible and therefore

---

113 For example, Horsley divides the unit (12:1-14:25) into 3 sections: general discussion [12:1-30]; Paul’s “own actual or hypothetical action as an example” [12:31-13:13]; and “more precise (corrective) advice” [14:1-25]. Horsley, First Corinthians, 166, italics mine. While Collins calls chapter 13 a digression from Paul’s argument, Fitzmyer sees it as the climax to Paul’s teaching in chapter 12; Raymond F. Collins, First Corinthians, Sacra Pagina Series, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 605; Fitzmyer, First Corinthians, 488. In addition, Nash calls chapter 13 “not...a temporary aside to discuss the merits of love but rather represents the model that should guide the exercise of ‘spiritual things’ in the church”; Nash, First Corinthians, 355.

114 And by “actually does”, I mean, we will bear in mind Bourdieu’s practice theory and thus the political dimensions of Paul’s argument as I employ Ricoeur.

115 This approach is congruent with the previous Bourdieuan analysis because it asks what this section on the praise of love actually does. It thus is attentive to the political dimensions of the text.

seeks to generate a course of action (love) which is empowered by this vision of the future. In the midst of Paul’s deliberative argument (future-oriented and seeking to shape a course-of-action), we come to chapter 13 where Paul envisions the eternal and desirable attributes of love as they are lived out with others; that is, chapter 13 produces desire for love by painting a beautiful picture of what it is and what it makes possible now and in the eschatological age to come. In Aristotle’s threefold method, production of desire is the work of *Poetics* (and thus the productive sciences); consequently, one would attend respectfully to the pericope (1 Corinthians 12-14) by paying attention to its productive dimensions which seem to serve a very political agenda.

As such, I am doing two things in this interpretation. First, I am employing a “productive” hermeneutic. I do not seek to know Paul’s intention (which is beyond a hermeneut’s access) nor to reconstruct a coherent theological thread which unifies Paul’s letter, nor to know the historical context, *per se*.\(^{117}\) Second, in this way, I retrieve the earlier discussion of Bourdieu in that I ask about the political dimensions of Paul’s vision in chapter 13. How does chapter 13 confront power with an alternative vision of a possible world, and what does it do with power in the community?

I will suggest that chapter 13 reframes power and the political dimensions of social relationships by asserting that faith produces hope which expresses itself in love. Tongues were a form of power (without necessarily agency or intentionality by its practitioners) and yet all social relationships (as Bourdieu discloses) have political dimensions and are fraught with power relations (again, even if without the intention to procure power). As such, Paul does not try to get rid of power or the subversive aspects of tongues but to reframe power.

\(^{117}\) There is undoubtedly an element of history in this analysis, but I have read the history sociologically rather than attempting to reconstruct the “is-ness” of the ancient world.
(and its means—tongues, faith as knowledge, etc.) in the context of love. So faith is not a form of codified/official capital (e.g., tongues or special knowledge) which can accrue to a person in order to exercise symbolic power. Instead of being something that is known, Paul seems to re-frame faith as that which creates worlds of hope (hope in the promises of God; hope in the age to come, the Kingdom of God). Hope, then, is that which identifies eternal purpose; it points beyond the present to a better future of what-is-possible. Hope therefore expresses and evokes the imagination for a greater good in the midst of relations of power. This hope permits believers to endure the present with actions of love, kindness, generosity, hospitality and an orientation to the ‘other.’

5.1 1 Corinthians 12-14, Things Can Be Different Than They Are Now: From What-Is to What-Is-Possible

Paul uses deliberative rhetoric [future oriented], “urging the Corinthians to take a particular course of action in their future community gatherings (summarised in 12:31; 14:1, 39-40). He makes the same appeal to pursue their common advantage or common good in 12:7.”118 This appeal for a course of action that changes the trajectory of the future is expressed by Paul in the “actual or hypothetical action” (12:31-13:31) about love. In other words, Paul appeals to kinds of action (love) in the present that will reshape the future and resolve the present conflict within the community. The future hope (13:13) for the “common good” (12:7) would be expressed in the present by love.

Paul’s overarching goal seems to be unity within the Christian community,119 but Paul tries to achieve this goal by appealing to the future through deliberative rhetoric. That is,

118 Horsley, 166, italics mine.
119 As most commentators note; Horsley, 1 Corinthians, 166; Fitzmyer, First Corinthians; Gordon, Sister or Wife?; Richard B. Hays, First Corinthians, Interpretation Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 5-6.
things can be different than they are now, one in which the common good is sought by all and offered to all. Paul presents a course of action defined by love and imaged through the rhetoric of the body. By using future-oriented rhetoric, Paul points the Corinthian Christians beyond their present circumstances, beyond the current power dimensions of social relationships to a future (the Kingdom of God) where love reigns in a mutual concern for the other.

In chapter 14, Paul’s praise of prophecy as superior to tongues then grows out of his attempt to redirect the political dimension of tongues within the community from a form of capital capable of securing power and authority for one person/group over another toward a use of ecstatic speech (intelligible speech—prophecy or interpretation of tongues) which serves the ‘other’ within the community. Nash says, Paul seeks “to redirect the thoughts of those who exercised any gift to do so for the good of everyone else.” Paul does not pretend that the political dimension of social relationships can be eradicated by expatiating spiritual gifts, nor is he eager to expunge those practices from the church. The question is not whether or not there will be power (and thus subversive elements, even if unintentional

---

120 Much important literature has been written on the nature and use of “body” in 1 Corinthians, particularly noting the political dimensions of this image. Dale Martin notes the use of the “body” in political discourse (notably Greek literature on the polis or city-state) and how the body was a rhetorical image to promote interdependence and concord. And since the individual body is conceived as a microcosm of the universe, the individual body thus bore and reflected hierarchical status differences within the social body. Martin argues that Paul seeks to turn the body image “against its usual role as a prop for upper-class ideology”, The Corinthian Body, 47, 38-67. See also, Yung Suk Kim, Christ’s Body in Corinth: The Politics of a Metaphor, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 30.

121 This is in accord with the general account given in this chapter about the subversive nature of tongues within the politics of the Roman empire. For Paul expresses acceptance of tongues as a valid gift of the Spirit, but he seeks to reframe its use within the community so that the contestation is not within the Body of Christ but rather fits within his notion of a contestation between the already/not yet eschatological Kingdom of God and its subversion of the present, temporal age.

122 Nash, 1 Corinthians, 385. Furthermore, the idea of power and authority is taken from the hands of individuals in the church and is said to belong first to Christ whose body is the church (1 Cor 12:27) and second on Paul as Christ’s apostle (1 Cor 1:1; 2:1-5; 4:15; 9:1-2).

123 Ibid., 370-380. Recall the earlier discussion of Bourdieu, that all actions are motivated by interests. One cannot eradicate interests; as such, one cannot eradicate power. One can only discover power and then ask about the ethics of particular power arrangements.
subversion) within the community. Instead, the question is over how power will be used—whether for or against one another. And so, Paul’s reframing of the work of the Spirit in the context of love leads to chapter 14 where Paul argues for the superiority of prophecy over tongues because prophecy instructs, nurtures and generally builds up the community.  

While it is important to note that Paul is giving instructions on worship, read through the lens of Bourdieu’s practice theory, it appears that this conflict is a microcosm of the contestation over what counts as capital and the exercise of symbolic power between Rome and Greece. The social contestation of the Greeks in Roman Corinth is manifesting itself among the Corinthian Christians. As Bourdieu contends, it would be impossible for the Corinthian Christians not to be affected by this cultural contestation within Roman Corinth. If indeed this is an expression or playing-out of the Corinthian situation in the middle of the first century A.D. among its Christian community, then Paul’s directives about love in chapter 13 are paramount to Paul’s attempt to reshape the habitus.  

Love (agape) is a central theme in chapter 13. Thiselton helpfully notes that at least two themes emerge in 13:1-13 from Paul’s use of the word.  

First, love represents ‘the power of the new age’ breaking into the present, ‘the only vital force which has a future.’ Love is that quality which distinctively stamps the life of heaven, where regard and respect for the other dominates the character of life with God as the communion of saints and heavenly hosts. The theologian may receive his or her redundancy notice; the prophet may have nothing to say which everyone else does not already know; but love abides as the character of heavenly, eschatological existence.

---

124 Oikonomia, see Allen R. Hunt, The Inspired Body. Nash says that prophecy is inspired preaching and that Paul wishes that all would do so, but as Thiselton notes, monographs devoted to this topic assert that one cannot be certain about what prophecy actually entails. Nash, 1 Corinthians, 361; Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 901.

125 Many commentators categorize this section, ch. 12-14, as instructions on worship. See Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians; Collins, First Corinthians; Horsley, 1 Corinthians.

126 And Paul’s expressions of ongoing frustration with this community in 2 Corinthians testifies to Bourdieu’s contention that the habitus is nearly impossible to change through conscious human effort. Could it be that the contestation over language through literature and tongues was effective at subverting the dominant discourse where conscious human effort is not? It is, at least, a question deserving further research.
Second...love...denotes above all a stance or attitude which shows itself in acts of will as regard, respect, and concern for the welfare of the other.\textsuperscript{127}

Whereas tongues is a form of symbolic capital that procures symbolic power so as to be heard and believed, tongues does not serve the ‘other’. Tongues challenge, contest and subvert. Such activity might have its place for believers in constructing and supporting their alternative identity in the world (and thus a “sign” for unbelievers, 1 Corinthians 14:22), but such activity does not promote belief among non-believers (who will say that “you are out of your mind,” 1 Corinthians 14:23). And it especially does not advance unity when used within the Christian community to procure power and authority over the community. As a result, the use of tongues within the community against one another is producing division as members compete for the power to be heard, believed and obeyed.

In ch. 13, Paul reframes tongues and the gifts of the Spirit (and their value as symbolic capital) so that they are subsumed under the higher call of love. Regardless of Paul’s intention, in terms of practice theory, greater symbolic capital is ascribed to love than to spiritual gifts. It is at least plausible that this reframing of spiritual gifts allows Paul to retain tongues as subversive speech that dismantles the present world order which is passing away and testifies to the in-breaking power of the coming Kingdom of God while concomitantly subsuming tongues under love, defined as respect and concern for the “other” (even the non-believing “other” who might become part of the community, see 1 Corinthians 14:24-25). This two-fold approach of retaining and reframing is one way to prevent tongues from subverting the interdependence and concord of the Body of Christ.

\textsuperscript{127} Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 1035, italics his.
5.2 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, A Love to Worship Capable of Producing a Worship that Loves: Re-presenting the World as a Sphere of God’s Loving Action

“In his argument about spiritual gifts more than in his other arguments in 1 Corinthians we see the extent to which he [Paul] emphasized the horizontal human social-political relations rather than the vertical relation of people with God.”¹²⁸ 1 Corinthians 12-14 attempts to reframe the workings of the Spirit not as a-political, interior feelings of periodic inspiration but as political acts based on other-narratives about the nature and source of power. This other narrative is subversive of the present political arrangement. That is, the world envisioned (the Kingdom of God which is breaking-in to the present as evidenced by spiritual gifts) is an alternative (other) world characterised by love. This new world of perfect love (13:10) that is possible by the Spirit is a power operative in the social sphere which is qualitatively greater and quantitatively more enduring than the present social order and its power.¹²⁹ From the perspective of Ricoeur and Bourdieu, regardless of whether or not one believes in an objective, transcendent divine power, the world which the narrative of 1 Corinthians 12-14 constructs presents the possibility of a new world. And this very possibility which is envisioned in 1 Corinthians 13 generates a new political arrangement. It challenges the present power relations of the social sphere with an alternative vision. Chapter 13 produces a vision of what-is-possible that contests the present political dimensions operative in the Christian community. 1 Corinthians 12-14 is not apolitical; instead, by activating the imagination for what is possible, it testifies to an entirely different (other)

¹²⁸ Horsley, 1 Corinthians, 193.
¹²⁹ Fitzmyer, First Corinthians, 500.
political arrangement based on other-political acts. In this sense, one can maintain as Horsley
does, “The very purpose of the Spirit’s workings were political.”

Paul in chapter 13 articulates a vision of what this alternative, political society looks
like. “For Paul it was precisely the ‘manifestations of the Spirit’ that were making the
communities of the new age a social-political reality.” The Corinthian Christians were
engaged in subversion of the dominant order by contesting the dominant discourse within
Corinth. But without an alternative vision of how the political dimensions could be arranged,
the Corinthian Christian’s practices of spiritual gifts were unproductive and divisive within
the community. But the praise of love given in chapter 13 sets up a socio-political vision
based on love “over against the imperial order that he believed was ‘passing away’” so that
the gifts of the Spirit might not divide the community but actually produce the alternative
society envisioned. The in-breaking of the Kingdom of God to which the gifts testified
should be reflected in a life of love which is the character of the Kingdom of God which has
already come but has not yet been fully consummated.

This alternative society which Paul envisions for the Corinthian Christians is
categorized by love. “The love Paul portrays is not some abstract concept but rather the
concrete point where the love of God expressed in the death of Jesus becomes embodied in
the lives of believers.” It is a concrete picture of love because it shows love in action. Nash

---

130 Horsley, 1 Corinthians, 193.
131 Fitzmyer notes that love is presented as the “highest an unsurpassed gift of God” (and agape does
not mean the historical person of Jesus). The pericope “contains no mention of Christ…, and even lacks all
explicit reference to God”; Fitzmyer, First Corinthians, 487. Cf. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, in which
Aristotle is speaking of what we might now call political science and there he says that love is the greatest good.
A further study might employ a social scientific reading of 1 Cor 13—which upon describing the text with
social sciences does not then try to explain it using theology but instead remains a social scientific explanation
which does not impinge on theology. For further thoughts on method, see my “Liturgy, Social Science and the
132 Horsley, 1 Corinthians, 194.
133 Ibid., 194.
134 Nash, 1 Corinthians, 367.
notes in 13:4-7, “Paul does not describe what love is but rather what love does or does not do.” As a concrete picture of what love looks like in the world, chapter 13 is what Barth calls, “The life of the children of God,” or the worship life of the church expressed in love and ethics. Paul calls on the Corinthian Christians who evidently love ecstatic worship to embody worship through an ethical life of love toward one another. The reason to embody worship in a life of ethical love is that love remains forever into the eschatological Kingdom of God, and it expresses and evokes the (eschatological) hope of a new age generated by the workings of the Spirit who is the agent to empower the construction of a society characterized by love. The spiritual gifts of the Spirit of God should serve to generate the love of the Kingdom—God’s Kingdom which is breaking-in and to which the gifts themselves testify.

5.2.1 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Paul depicts ideal situations in 13:1-3 in order to say that even if such ideal situations were achieved, they would be inadequate and inferior to love. Tongues (13:1), knowledge and power (13:2), and benevolence (13:3) in their best forms—all fall short of love. Nash notes that in 13:2, prophecies, mysteries and knowledge “involve things one might know.” The gospel is more than knowledge, more than cognitive assent to well-defined dogmas. Even if one could penetrate the cosmos with spiritual acumen and theological erudition, such knowledge is neither a legitimate authorisation for power in the community nor endures indefinitely (13:12-13). The goal of faith is not the apex of knowledge; it is love.

---

135 Ibid., 369.
136 See Karl Barth, CD, 362-454. See Fitzmyer, who says that the triad (faith, hope and love) is about “Christian life”; First Corinthians, 503.
137 Nash, 1 Corinthians, 368.
5.2.2 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Paul uses verbs to personify love.\[^{138}\] In so doing, Paul points out that love is a lifestyle and involves action. Love acts for the other. Love is not something Christians know; love is something Christians do. It is the character of their lives.

Thiselton’s exegesis of 13:6 emphasizes the political dimensions of love contrasted with the symbolic capital and power accruing by the practice of the spiritual gifts as they were being used against one another within the Corinthian Christian community. That is, love is not without political dimensions, for there is no such thing as a disinterested act (i.e., there is no such thing as an act without power). But love deals with power in a productive way. Thiselton says, when Paul says that love “rejoices with the truth” (13:6), this “probably denotes the truth in this or that situation rather than gospel truth as such.”\[^{139}\] Paul is not trying to codify the truth in a fixed body of knowledge; indeed, knowledge is something that one can accumulate for oneself. And the accumulation of symbolic capital to be used as symbolic power against the community is why Paul appeals to love as the context for the operation of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14. And so while one might agree with Bourdieu that there is no disinterested act, love provides a constructive means for dealing with the various political dimensions inherent in social relationships.\[^{140}\]

\[^{138}\] Though as Thiselton notes, they are often translated as adjectives. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1046; Nash, *1 Corinthians*, 386.

\[^{139}\] Thiselton suggests the import is that love does not hide from “reality”; it does not try “to protect itself” from the truth about oneself or the world; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1056.

\[^{140}\] Cf. Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, in which he asserts that there is no such thing as a disinterested act. However, Fitzmyer says that 1 Cor 13:5, “asserts fully the essence of Christian love: disinterestedness”; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 496. Thiselton too is adamant that love, for Paul, is not “concerned for its own interests” and that to read it otherwise “would be a logical contradiction [within Paul’s argument] of huge proportions”; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1059. Yet, Bourdieu notes that even ostensibly “disinterested” acts, like the love for which Paul advocates in 1 Cor 13:5, serve to advance some personal interest (albeit eschatological or spiritual). But even if there are interests and political dimensions behind language and practices, Bourdieu’s theory reminds us that all language and practices (even practices of “othering”) cannot be free from interests and political dimensions. Instead of trying to find a way to get rid of...
Knowledge is power within the social order. Paul’s vision is that before the face of God (13:12) and in the eschatological revelation of divine knowledge (in which each person is “fully known”, 13:12) such human knowledge and human power “disappear” (13:10) when the perfect *(to teleion)* of God’s order come (13:10). Human knowledge, along with the present social order will “pass away” (13:8, 12), but an eternal and qualitatively superior age characterized by love will remain forever (13:12-13).\textsuperscript{141}

**5.2.3 1 Corinthians 13:8-13**

In 13:7, 8a, 13, “The four verbs form a chiasmus, the middle two (‘believes’ and ‘hopes’) focus on the future in an intense trust and hope that enables endurance and perseverance (‘bears’ and ‘endures’) in the present.”\textsuperscript{142} The call to persevere and endure in the present (first and the last verbs, ‘bears’ and ‘endures’) is empowered by faith and hope. Faith in Christ and the hope-full vision of the future permits and sustains acts of love in the present.\textsuperscript{143}

In 13:8-13, Paul contrasts the present and the eschatological future. Paul’s previous teaching about ‘the present form of this world’ that ‘is passing away’ (7:31) and ‘the kingdom of God’ (6:10) that will finally be realized at the *parousia* of Christ (15:20-28, 50-57) will have been sufficiently familiar to the Corinthians that he can simply allude to them here.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{141} Thiselton notes the temporality and contingency of spiritual gifts and theology in the face of love, Thiselton, 1061, 1064. Thiselton quotes Barth saying, the gifts and theology “will not overtake love”, Barth, *CD*, 4/2, 837-838, in Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1064.

\textsuperscript{142} Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 177.

\textsuperscript{143} Though as Nash notes, chapter 13 is primarily epideictic rhetoric. “In epideictic rhetoric, one celebrated certain commonly held values by praising those who exhibited them and blaming those who did not…In chapter 13, Paul praises not a person but a virtue, love” Nash, *1 Corinthians*, 366. However, Thiselton along with M. M. Mitchell’s conclude that chapter 13 is deliberative rhetoric “designed to persuade,” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1030.

\textsuperscript{144} Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 178.
Thiselton situates the entire section of 13:8-13 within an eschatological framework. The end of prophecy, tongues is an end that occurs at the eschaton. Furthermore, the bold statement, “Love never falls apart” (13:8) signals a robust, eschatological permanence. While not explicit, the hope of the eschatological future is the implicit foundation upon which Paul’s praise of love is constructed.

This eschatological framework shows up again in 13:10-12. Paul says, “when what is perfect comes, the partial will be brought to naught” (13:10) and “for at present we see by reflection, as in a mirror” (13:12). Fitzmyer suggests that v. 10 “seems...to express some sort of goal; it has undoubtedly something to do with the eschaton...(1:8; 3:13; 5:5) or with the telos, ‘end’ (of the present era), as in 15:24.” In 13:12a, Paul “contrasts the present (arti) with what is to come (tote).... His contrast is between the way we now see reality, and the way we shall see it, when to teleion comes.” In 13:12b (“at present I know only in part, but then I shall know fully”), Paul notes that “the contrast [between the two ages] is not merely temporal, but also qualitative.” Here in Paul, as Steven Land suggested, there is a qualitatively superior future which not only challenges but overthrows the current social order which is “passing away.”

Horsley “is not quite clear how verse 13” fits with the preceding paragraph (13:8-12). But he suggests that one could think of the following: faith is faith in Christ who has “inaugurated the eschatological events leading to the new age” which make the present and

---

145 Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 1060-1074.
146 Ibid., 1063-1064; though as Thiselton notes, there is little here to construct or deconstruct the cessationist views. My point is not to speak of the validity of spiritual gifts but to show the eschatological framework in which this section takes place so as to draw out the precursors to Paul’s invocation of “hope” in 13:13.
147 Ibid., 1061
148 Fitzmyer, First Corinthians, 498.
149 Ibid., 499.
150 Ibid., 500.
future promise of God possible; hope is that which enables believers (those with faith) to endure and to love; and love is that “which holds the community together [unity] in anticipation of the completion” of God’s promised future.\textsuperscript{151} In this way, love is the present-tense expression of a future-oriented hope. Faith produces hope; hope expresses itself in love. The eschatological hope which has stood behind the praise of love in chapter 13 comes to expression in a somewhat orderly arrangement in 13:13.

Just as the goal of faith is not knowledge (13:2), so also the goal of faith is neither faith itself nor hope.\textsuperscript{152} The goal of faith is love. Faith, for Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14, is not a thing which one has and uses (whether to move mountains, 13:2, or understand the cosmos, 13:8-12); as such, faith is more than codified knowledge about God. For Bourdieu, collectively recognised knowledge is a form of symbolic capital which can accrue on behalf of a person and then be used to express and evoke the \textit{habitus} so that a person/group can exercise symbolic power over the group and satisfy one’s own interests. Faith is not symbolic capital—whether knowledge or spiritual gifts—which accrues to individuals and procures for them symbolic power. It seems, for Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14, faith in Christ is \textit{productive}. Rather than being theoretical and thus something one knows; faith produces action. That is, faith generates something, and what it generates is love.

How faith generates love is by means of hope—an eschatological, future-oriented vision of a better age to come, namely, the already/not yet eschatological Kingdom of God which is breaking-into the present by the Spirit’s agency in a proleptic testimony to its guaranteed arrival. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 13:13, Paul joins faith, hope and love in a beautific

\textsuperscript{151} Horsley, \textit{1 Corinthians}, 179.
\textsuperscript{152} Fitzmyer says that faith and hope do not exist in the \textit{eschaton}; only love “remains forever”; \textit{1 Corinthians}, 501, 502.
vision of what Christian life in the present looks like. The present call to love is motivated by the future hope of faith: faith generates love by means of hope.

6. Revelation in 1 Corinthians 12-14: The Gospel as a Means for Other-ing Movement

In the very practical and concrete situation of tongues and the concomitant social relations of power within the Corinthian Christian community, Paul seems to suggest that the faith which remains in the life of the children of God (13:13) is not a systematic content, weaved into a coherent narrative thread which can be wielded by one against the other. Understanding and knowledge are not the goal because they are always incomplete and temporary (13:1-3, 8-12). As such, in 1 Corinthians 13:13, faith does not create the experience of knowledge. Overweening claims to knowledge and therefore power is one of the immediate concerns Paul is attempting to correct. Instead of a fixed content controlled by spiritually gifted people or groups within the community, faith generates actions of love. Faith, in this case, is not something one knows nor is it necessarily something one does; instead, faith creates new possibilities for new courses-of-action—in this case, a life in community characterized by love. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, faith is productive more than it is theoretical or practical; faith creates a new situation, a what-is-possible situation.

What then does faith create, which is capable of generating actions of love? Faith can create the anticipation of hope, an anticipation which expresses itself in actions of love for the ‘other’.\(^{153}\) Without hope, without a promise to hold onto, life can denigrate into a ruthless competition in which each person seeks to secure his/her own future. Without the hope that the future can be different or that new things are possible, the political dimension of social

---

relations can easily become a survival-of-the-fittest competition. Hope for alternative possibilities creates a world that believers can live into which overcomes the fear and insecurity that arise from feeling as though one must secure one’s own future against challengers on the same quest. Faith generates hope by means of a beautiful and eschatological promise to inspire and move the Corinthian Christians to a way of love with one another within their community.\textsuperscript{154} Barth said, “Faith is not something that a man carries about in his pocket as a rightful possession.”\textsuperscript{155} Instead faith is a step toward God, a step toward God which humans make in prayer. For prayer is a request for God to do something, for God to work in and through life; and this belief in God’s action permits hope so as to move Christians to fulfill the task of love, which is the essence of the life of the children of God.

Employing Aristotle’s methodological typology\textsuperscript{156} to read Paul’s triad in 1 Corinthians 13:13: faith is not a theoretical science within the field of systematic theology in which one might try to construct an overarching system or narrative into which all the parts fit and which can be known; nor is faith a practical science within the field of ethics in which justice is done. For although faith moves humans to action; faith itself is not the appropriate action because it is not an end in itself. Instead, faith is a productive science somewhere between preaching and worship—or more generally between what-is (what-is are simply, as

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{154}] Contemporary ethicists might want a less dualistic approach between church and world that explores the capacity of faith to generate hope expressed in love for the 'other' outside Christian communities in a way which seems to go beyond the concerns expressed in the text of 1 Corinthians. But the seeds for such a question seem to germinate in Paul’s own work here in 1 Cor 12-14.
\item[\textsuperscript{156}] See \textit{Metaphysics}, 6.1.1025b25. Barnes, \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle}, 24-25.
\end{footnotes}
Bourdieu has shown, objectifications of subjectivity and thus not out-there in an autonomous, abstract way) and what-is-possible.\textsuperscript{157}

Aristotle says, “Art imitates nature.” An implication from Paul Ricoeur’s argument on Aristotle’s dictum is that when art imitates nature, nature imitates art. In theological terms, when preaching and worship present visions of hope-filled futures based on the eschatological Kingdom of God that is breaking-into the present by the work of the Spirit, then new worlds of possibility and hope are seen and desired. And on the basis of this hope-filled vision of the future, people are moved by desire to act in ways congruent with the future, to act in ways that testify to the Kingdom of God—a Kingdom in which God’s love and the God of love will reign forever.

In the case of 1 Corinthians 13:13, faith generates love by means of hope. And in 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul dislocates revelation from knowledge or from special access to the divine through ecstatic speech so as to reframe the political dimensions of the social relationships within the Christian community at Corinth. Paul re-presents the future in light of what is possible (the hope for the Kingdom) so as to generate desire among the hearers—not desire for a social Darwinian struggle to accrue symbolic capital so as to exercise symbolic power in the satisfaction of one’s own interests but desire for a future shaped by a love for an other. Paul produces other-ing movement by constructing a vision of the political dimensions of social relationships in the imaginations of his hearers based on love and motivated by a hope-filled faith. For Paul, writing to a culture in conflict, faith is not a knowledge (or ideology) exclusively accessible, and as such it is not a thing which one can procure unto oneself and use as power against fellow members of the community. Instead,

\textsuperscript{157} See Aristotle’s dictum, “Art imitates nature”, \textit{Poetics}. And Paul Ricoeur’s essay, “Between \textit{Rhetoric} and \textit{Poetics}”. 
faith generates hope; hope expresses itself in love. Faith is not a cognitive category which we can accrue as symbolic capital. Instead, faith must produce love, and Paul’s means for moving between faith and love is the hope of the age to come. In this way, spiritual gifts (and the power relations inherent in them) are *retained* as subversive of the present age—testimonies to the coming Kingdom of God. But they (and the power relations inherent in them) are *reframed* so that they no longer subvert the Christian community and which points to a divine already/not yet (eschatological) political vision. Paul does this in 1 Corinthians 13 by defining the Christian life in terms of love—love which is sustained by hope and generated by faith in Christ Jesus.

**Conclusion**

Ernst Bloch said, “‘Where there is hope, there is religion.’ But “Where there is religion, there is not always hope.”158 Luke Powery says the gospel is hope. Cornel West calls himself a prisoner of hope.

Hope is the engine that moves individuals to love. From Aristotle’s notion of *mimesis* in *Poetics*, we see that a beautiful and hope-filled vision of the future creates *desire* for this vision.159 So that in the case of revelation for preaching, using a hopeful imagination to paint a picture of the Kingdom of God sparks desire for it. Desire moves humans to action. And the construction of this alternative world and this beautific vision takes place in preaching and in worship.160 In the stories and testimonies of preaching, a world of hope-filled

---

158 Quoted in Moltmann, *The Experiment Hope*, 15.
possibilities are given voice by the preacher, a world which the community can live into.¹⁶¹ And in the prayers of the people the whole community can respond with desire for the vision constructed in the liturgy, or they can give their own voice to an alternative world made possible by faith.

To summarize, faith is more than content (knowledge or symbolic capital of any kind, as Bourdieu might call it); instead, faith is productive. Faith produces worlds of hope that people can live into. Preaching that is capable of generating movement in the public sphere is built on homiletical theory and method which is based in the productive sciences—the sphere where what-is (and all its arbitrary objectifications of subjectivity¹⁶²) is re-presented by what-is-possible (albeit new and provisional objectifications of subjectivity) so as generate desire for and movement toward a particular (constructed) good (e.g., openness to others and otherness). Revelation, as I have thus described, is the construction of a world of possibilities that people can live into. Revelation, as Paul employs it in 1 Corinthians 12-14, seems to be a new objectification of subjectivity that re-presents the dominant discourse and the regnant objectification of subjectivity (as Bourdieu’s practice theory exposes). However, rather than dismissing the new objectification of subjectivity because of what it is (an objectification of power), Paul employs it but re-frames how power is used.¹⁶³ This thesis presupposes that there is no ideal social or political system that can be free of power. Instead, the task is to re-frame it, which is exactly what Paul does (and what I suggest preachers do today). In the next

¹⁶¹ And, it will be suggested (employing a law-gospel structure) that naming grace (re-presenting God as acting in the world to do something) is what generates this hope. Or as Barth said, a “positive” construction, namely, the gospel (good news in Jesus Christ).

¹⁶² Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*; and *Language and Symbolic Power*.

¹⁶³ This thesis does not grant any special authority to Paul, but it tries to show the following: first, that writers of scripture in fact employ relative means of interpretation that are dependent upon their ends (i.e., a means toward an end); second, this method is outcome-based (depends on the end/goal) and thus Aristotelian, not ideal based like Platonism; and third, such a method can be used for good (and is not intrinsically good or evil, but depends on how it is used)
chapter, I survey and critique homiletical theory and method since 1956 based on the theological (Barth), linguistic (Aristotle/Ricoeur), socio-linguistic (Bourdieu) and biblical (1 Corinthians 12-14) work done thus far.\(^{164}\)

\(^{164}\) With particular attention to whether homiletical theories and methods are grounded in the circularity of re-presentations and are outcome-based (i.e., homiletics as a means toward an end; that is, homiletics as a *productive science*—one that generates desire for an outcome/end), or whether homiletical theories and methods are grounded in some verifiable referent and therefore ideal-based. In the former, truth is constructed (believing that all truth is constructed because truth is power, and ethics involves re-framing how power is shared within a system inherently fraught with power relations); in the latter, one might attempt to establish what is true and then speak about that truth.
Chapter 4

Homiletical Perspectives: Preaching and Revelation in Homiletics since 1956

This chapter attempts to understand perspectives on revelation in the field of homiletics since 1956. The term “revelation” is a complex concept. As a religious term, it involves:

(1) the origin or author of revelation, who brings us into contact with the Wholly Other…, (2) the means or instruments that give the insights…[e.g., visions, sacred books, etc.], (3) the content [e.g., the gospel], (4) the...recipients or addressees of revelation [e.g., priests, prophets, etc.]…, (and finally) (5) the effect on the recipients.”

As a Christian theological term, it affirms “that God is an agent” in the human world. Wesley Allen, Jr., defines revelation as a theological category that connotes “the ways [means] that God makes God’s self, character, actions, or will (i.e., God’s Being) known to humankind. From the under side, the theological category of revelation relates to questions of epistemology within the Christian faith.”

While recognizing that the means (and the content, recipients, and effects of revelation) is an essential theological consideration, this thesis assumes that revelation depends on the first, namely, the origin or author of revelation, that is, that God is an acting

---

1 Peter Antes, “Revelation: Religious Aspects,” in The Encyclopedia of Christianity, vol. 4, (Grand Rapids/Boston: Eerdmans/Brill, 2005), 672. Though the a priori foundation of “Wholly Other” foreshadows a critique which I raise later, particularly of homiletical theories and methods which emphasize revelation and power relations.


4 For example, one might say that the means of revelation are special revelation only (and not general) or one might say in addition to special revelation (like scripture, Christian tradition) that revelation also includes experience and reason (Wesley’s quadrilateral). Regarding the content of revelation, one might say it is the gospel. Regarding the recipients of revelation, one might say they are the prophets and apostles only. Regarding the effects of revelation, one might say that it gives a sense of divine mission (and that divine mission could be defined as social justice causes or the conversion of souls). As important as these are, they are superfluous without an acting divine agent. Indeed, one might say the task of justice itself depends on imaging God-in-act.
agent in the world. Without God’s agency, “the concept of revelation becomes redundant.”\(^5\) As such, preaching becomes essential in this definition of revelation because it is in and through preaching that God is shown (imaged) as being an agent in the world.

In the first section, I describe the rise of the New Homiletic (NH). In the second section, I look at three loci for revelation in preaching: scripture, metaphor, and power relations (social justice). It will be suggested that revelation for the NH was rooted in scripture and the transformational nature of the sermon, and revelation was generally assumed to be the content of preaching (namely, the gospel), while the subject of revelation was not a core consideration. With little explicit attention dedicated to the subject of revelation but with a high regard for the use of language in NH literature, critiques of the NH questioned the capacity of language (scripture and preaching) to disclose God or God’s will (and therefore be revelatory). Many of those critiques tended to locate revelation in social justice as an alternative to what they saw as a rooting of revelation in language.\(^6\) By revisiting metaphor and the imagination (as the bases for thought, language and action) as well as by examining some of the foundational assumptions of alternative perspectives (particularly social justice and power relation alternatives to the NH), this author suggests that God is known where God is described (theologically constructed) in action. That is, God is known where God is seen as being an agent in the world.\(^7\) In other words, God is known in


\(^6\) My focus is on mainline responses and particularly left-leaning responses which address philosophical problems with the religious concept of revelation. There have been many right-leaning responses to the NH (e.g., Evangelical and fundamentalist responses). It is my belief that much of this literature idealizes scripture and other sources of religious authority, granting them an autonomous, out-there authority free of their contexts. As such, my critique of some social justice responses to the NH—the ones which I see as idealizing and objectifying justice—will for the most part include Evangelical critiques of the NH (where some social justice responses and Evangelical responses both purport “objective” foundations for homiletical theory and method). For that reason, I did not feel the need to bracket out right-leaning responses for special consideration, since my critique of those responses can easily be inferred from my critique of the particular left-leaning critiques which I see employing the same ideals.

\(^7\) This definition as such leaves open the question of sin and evil because the positing of sin or evil becomes a criterion (a truth claim) against which to adjudicate competing claims to revelation. And the positing of such criterion becomes an \textit{a priori} foundation, an anthropological assumption, upon which one’s definition
preaching. As a result of this study, the author hopes to engage and stimulate ongoing conversations with the NH.

1. The Rise of the New Homiletic

1.1 Preaching in Crisis and a Recovery of Words

The NH arose during a time when the authority of preaching was being questioned. Craddock says of the social setting into which he first attempted to teach preaching, “Students were anticipating, ministries, but ministries that had no pulpits. Protests, social action, civil change—those were the orders of the day and that’s the world into which I moved with my copy of Broadus and Witherspoon.”8 Some students and faculty wanted to “drop homiletics as a requirement...remove the pulpit and pews from the chapel and sit around on the floor in small groups and reflect on something.”9 Not only in the seminary but in the parish, ministers “came out, leaned on the corner of the communion table and said, ‘What do you all want to talk about today?’”10 What good were words in disclosing “God’s self, character, actions, or will”?11

Paul Scott Wilson says prior to the mid-1950s, homiletics was characterised by “mechanical notions of structure, vertical notions of authority, use of the Bible in propositional ways, deductive sermons, stories used as illustrations of points already made, of revelation must then depend. For then how do we know that what one calls evil is really evil or what one calls a sin is really sin? Must we not then ask, who has the power to define what is sin or evil?


9 Craddock, in The Renewed Homiletic, 42.
10 Ibid., 42.

The point is that one of the main concerns which gave rise to the NH was a concern over revelation, even though revelation was not significantly developed by Craddock or others working during this time.
objective ideas of truth, [and] religious experience as universal."\textsuperscript{12} Stories (and metaphor) were formerly considered ornaments that illuminated objective truth that existed out-there, independent of human contexts and which was accessible to all.

The deductive point form may have presupposed a happening of the Word through “clear”, rational sermon construction; in time, however, it was felt by many preachers that it reduced faith to a matter of information and propositions. The NH sought to broaden the ways of address beyond communicating information, to include emotional and spiritual responses as well. For those in the NH, an effective sermon is one in which the hearers hear the Word of God in a word-event and therefore respond.\textsuperscript{13} As such, the sermon could become a transformative event.

1.2 Revelation and Transformation

1.2.1 Paying Attention to the Form of Revelation: Design for Preaching

In his Design for Preaching, H. Grady Davis, only uses the word “revelation” once. He says,

\begin{quote}
The content of theology appears as a given thing…. The preacher does not have to produce a revelation of truth and a saving wisdom out of his poor resources. His is a humbler task: to explicate the church’s faith in which both he and his listeners have been nurtured, to deliver a message he did not concoct, to point out a way of life he did not devise. All this he is relieved to recognize as true.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Revelation was not a core consideration in his writing because, as someone steeped in Luther’s thought, revelation in preaching is a “given” that only need be “recognize[d] as true.” The preacher’s task is to “explicate the church’s faith” by attention to the design and structure of the sermon.

\textsuperscript{12} Paul Scott Wilson, “New Homiletic,” in New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching, 398.
\textsuperscript{13} “Experience” is also a key term within the NH.
\textsuperscript{14} H. Grady Davis, Design for Preaching, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 237, italics mine.
While the content of theology is given, the response by the hearers is not. Attention to sermon design, for Davis, helps generate a response from the hearers.\textsuperscript{15} Davis says, “The aim of preaching is to win from men [sic] a \textit{response} to the gospel.”\textsuperscript{16} He argues that form “has an immediate and almost automatic power to repel or attract” hearers and that “the very nature of the gospel” is interested in a response.\textsuperscript{17} Therefore, preachers should concern themselves with an organic sermon form that grows out of the gospel. Davis says, designing a sermon with attention to winning a response from hearers is a matter “of \textit{form}, not of the substance of the gospel.”\textsuperscript{18} Davis seems to assume that revelation is the gospel content that comes through more “persuasive” forms.\textsuperscript{19} For him, revelation was assumed.

\subsection*{1.2.2 Renewal by Means of Preaching: The Eventfulness of Revelation}

In \textit{Renewal of Preaching}, David James Randolph uses the word “revelation” nine times in the text (two times in footnotes). Most of the occurrences connect revelation to scripture.\textsuperscript{20} He calls scripture “the source of revelation” and “the record of revelation.”\textsuperscript{21} He continues, the “subject matter of homiletics is nothing other than reality as exposed by the biblical text.”\textsuperscript{22} Still the subject of revelation is assumed for Randolph.

“The function of homiletics [is not] to \textit{guarantee} authentic preaching but only to assist in its delivery…. Only God himself can certify the arrival of his word.”\textsuperscript{23} However, while revelation is in the bible and an experience of revelation among the hearers belongs to the “freedom” of God, Randolph (citing Gerhard Ebeling) “regards proclamation as the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{15} The preacher is a “good craftsman” who works with the materials given, not an inventor. Ibid., 9.
\bibitem{16} Ibid., 5, italics mine.
\bibitem{17} Ibid., 8.
\bibitem{18} Ibid., 8. Though he only mentions it once, revelation, for Davis, is an out-there, given to preachers, which preaching needs only to communicate better, He sees that content is also a matter of form; see Ibid., 5. But he still dichotomizes between them in his theology of revelation. For him, revelation (the gospel content or “thought”) exists out-there, independently of the form.
\bibitem{19} Ibid., 7.
\bibitem{21} Ibid., 35, 36, 55, 56
\bibitem{22} Ibid., 20.
\bibitem{23} Ibid., 23.
\end{thebibliography}
responsibility of theology because reality and language are so integrally related.” That is, the reality of God (i.e., God as author and origin of revelation) is intrinsically related to “the capacity [of language] to impress [on the hearers] as real.”

“...for the new hermeneutic,...proclaiming the reality of God never means that God is present in the word of faith. The word of faith is not a sack into which ‘God’ is poured. Rather, it is an event, and it is real because it is ‘something which is effective (wirksam), active, mighty, which has the capacity to impress as real, to assert itself and gain recognition as real, to concern man [sic] as real, and which, in that it contains possibilities and hence has capabilities, has a reference to the future.’ God is not in the word of faith but rather comes to expression through the word of faith.

Randolph says, God “comes to expression” through “the word of faith.” Theology (the study of the Christian God through scripture and tradition), then, should concern itself with preaching, with the spoken “word of faith.” Quoting Ebeling, “‘theology is necessary only to the extent that it makes itself superfluous and makes proclamation necessary.’”

Theology serves the proclamation of God. When theology does not fulfill this task, then we are left with theology that does nothing for the world; and preaching becomes “the packaging of a product.”

Randolph asserts that preaching does something because it engages a “concern” within the hearers’ present situation and frames it theologically. Words may do things, but initially for Randolph, the NH is an attempt to recover theology for preaching so that theology can serve the present-tense happening of the gospel to effect change. Randolph says, preaching as an act of faith helps “establish and enrich” acts of justice.

---

24 Ibid., 14.
25 Ibid., 15, italics mine.
28 It is interesting to see how much the history of Christianity is also a history of preachers until the 18th century. See O.C. Edwards, Jr., A History of Preaching, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).
29 Randolph, The Renewal of Preaching, 19.
30 Ibid., 21. That is, preaching addresses a “concern”, those thing that matter to the hearers. Ibid., 27-28ff.
Randolph says preaching should be the goal and task of all theological faculty (there should be a “bench” of homiletics upon which all faculty members of a theological school sit) because transformation should be the goal of all theology. In this model, theology and preaching are “for God’s sake and for the world’s sake.”

“Preaching is the pivot on which the Christian revolution turns.”

The NH asked about effective sermons because it believed that the gospel, when proclaimed, would “do what it says,” which is, for the Word to “move” the hearers to become participants in transformation. The NH sought to recover words in order to generate a response from the hearers for the purpose of social and political transformation, because, for Randolph, that is what the gospel intends to do.

Randolph could be interpreted as suggesting a notion of preaching much different from approaches to theology which attempt to know something (e.g., systematic or historical theology). For Randolph, homiletics is not the mortar which patches together the disparate parts given to it by other disciplines. Instead, preaching is a different way of doing theology.

---

31 Ibid., 3.
32 Ibid., 3, italics his.
34 Henry H. Mitchell, Celebration and Experience in Preaching, rev. ed., (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 147; see also, O. Wesley Allen, Jr. The Renewed Homiletic, 10; and Eslinger, in The Renewed Homiletic, 129.
35 This is the presupposition for the NH’s ‘Word as Event’: “In the proclamation of the gospel, Christ is encountered in the power of the Spirit, and life is changed. Preaching is transformative.” Wilson, New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching, 400.
36 Aristotle identified three kinds of inquiry based on three goals. He called them sciences because he was interested in the means or methods of investigation. For him, theoretical sciences attempt to know something (analytics, metaphysics, etc.). Practical sciences attempt to do something (Ethics and Politics). Productive sciences attempt to make or create something (Rhetoric and Poetics). What Randolph does, even if he does not use Aristotle’s typology, is to say that preaching (and revelation) is not a theoretical science and thus an (objective) “thing”, the goal of which is to know more information. Instead, preaching (and revelation) seeks to make something happen (i.e., transformation).
One might say that the theoretical sciences seek information; the practical sciences seek transformation; and the productive sciences seek the means for transformation (in whatever way that transformation is envisioned within a particular context, that is, without recourse to referents).
37 Paul Scherer and Eugene Lowry take a similar perspective. See Lowry, The Homiletical Plot, 17; Paul Scherer, The Word of God Sent, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), 4. For an alternate view, see Eunjoo Mary Kim’s Preaching in an age of Globalization, in which theology and philosophy are the foundation
altogether because it has unique goals; its goals are the goals of the gospel, namely, a transformatively “event” which “impresses” itself on the hearers as real and thus “establish[es] and enrich[es]” acts of justice.\textsuperscript{38} Randolph wants to avoid being too precise about the manner in which revelation comes to us and is more interested in affirming God’s action in and through the event of preaching.

\textbf{1.2.3 Inductive Movement in Language Generates Transformation}

Fred Craddock seems to share an orientation toward social transformation and public engagement in \textit{As One Without Authority}. He speaks of the goal of preaching as transformation through a word-event that happens inductively. Preaching should effect “transformation in the lives of people and in the structures of society.”\textsuperscript{39}

Craddock uses the word “revelation” six times in \textit{As One Without Authority}. One of the more revealing passages comes in his response to theological objections to his proposed inductive movement in language. There he refers to a discussion between Barth and Rudolph Bultmann, and says,

\begin{quotation}
It would be meaningless to ask if the Word is located at the mouth or at the ear; Word belongs to communication, and communication is listening-speaking-listening. It is in the sharing that the Word has its existence, and to catch it in flight in order to ascertain which part is of the speaker and which of the hearer is impossible nonsense. Let the words be spoken and let them go, trusting God who gave not only the Word but the gift of hearing and speaking. \\
\textit{For revelation is antiphonal} \\
\textit{Nor comes without response.}
\end{quotation}

And if it be objected that this understanding of preaching not only shifts to the listener a portion of responsibility for the effectiveness of preaching but

\textsuperscript{38} Randolph, \textit{The Renewal of Preaching}, 3, 15, 24, which is to say that preaching \textit{makes} something (happen). And in so far as preaching \textit{makes} something (rather than seeks to “know” something), Randolph could be said to treat homiletics as a “productive science” (as Aristotle calls it).

\textsuperscript{39} Fred B. Craddock, \textit{As One Without Authority}, (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 19-20. The goal was transformation, not just information.
robs it of its thunder and authority, it should be asked again what constitutes an authoritative word. 40

For Craddock, revelation, like communication, does not come without response. 41

Inductive movement in language is effective communication in that it leaves room for “discovery” and therefore participation and response. 42 Revelation necessarily involves response. Room for discovery encourages a response, but it does not determine revelation. Pinning down where revelation exists (whether at the mouth or at the ear) is “impossible nonsense.”

A response in the hearers generated by their participation (communication) with the sermon was not just for the purpose of generating a private, internal feeling. 43 For Craddock, the goal of preaching is for people and social structures to be transformed. 44 A response generated in the hearers by the sermon that leads to transformation of people and structures witnesses to an event of the Word. In order for hearers to work toward the transformation of the public sphere by means of the sermon, the hearers must be involved in making meaning themselves. 45

1.3 Implications

In at least some quarters, preaching in the 1960s was in transition. As part of this, two factors stand out: first, the loss in some places of an intrinsic authority ascribed to scripture and, second, the realisation that words have power and that power and its use have

40 Ibid., 59. See also, 76, 55, 100, 101, 32.
41 “Communication, like revelation, must leave room for discovery.” Ibid., 76.
42 Ibid., 76. See also, Fred B. Craddock, Preaching. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 69-83.
44 Craddock, As One Without Authority, 19-20.
implications for scripture, preaching, theology and the church.\textsuperscript{46} Those working in the NH sensed this loss of authority and the need for social and political transformation, and they sought ways to recover scripture and preaching for “God’s sake and the sake of the world.” But many did so without explicitly developing in detail the subject of revelation. In the following section, I will attempt to make more explicit the subject of revelation by looking at three loci for revelation in preaching: scripture, language as metaphor and power relations (social justice).

The reason for these three loci is that, based on the readings of Davis, Randolph and Craddock above, one of the assumptions of the NH was that revelation was rooted in scripture (loci 1) and transformation; that transformation was generated by a response; and attention to language (loci 2) could contribute to a response in the hearers. Still, for these three homileticians, revelation was generally assumed to be the content of preaching (namely, the gospel), while the subject of revelation was not a core consideration. Based on later critiques about the capacity of language (scripture and preaching) to disclose God or God’s will, critiques of the NH tend to locate revelation in social justice (loci 3) because of power relations inherent in language. By re-visiting metaphor (and the imagination) (loci 2) as well as by examining some of the foundational assumptions of some of these alternative perspectives, this author hopes to compare and contrast their assumptions and foundations with the NH.

\textsuperscript{46} Wilson says that the NH arose during a challenge to the authority of scripture, and “knowledge and objective truth are not neutral but are determined by forces of power within social systems.” Wilson, “New Homiletic”, in \textit{New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching}, 400-401.
2. Loci for Revelation

2.1 Scripture and Revelation: Uses of Scripture Prior to the NH

Prior to the mid-1950s, scripture was treated as though it contained an objective content (a message) that was simply in need of an adept messenger who could provide a more fitting form for scripture’s truth.47 These assumptions eroded as did the false dichotomy between form and content, and the NH was concerned with recovering the words of scripture for preaching.48

I suggest three categories as a way to understand how homileticians, since the 1950s, interpret scripture: constructive, experiential and contextual interpretations of scripture. Constructive theological interpretations refer to homileticians who positively regard the manner in which they received the faith and seek to employ many of those categories in handing it on. Often their goal is to read scripture in such a way as to make interpretations within the framework of the constructions given to them already (by tradition, the church, doctrine, or otherwise). Experiential interpretations refer to the goal of producing an experience in the hearers (and not to the experiences of the preacher as those shape the preacher’s interpretative processes).49 These homileticians use other means to read scripture (and indeed appeal to experience as a way of generating a response, like Craddock and others did), but the point-of-view from which they read scripture is the production of an experience in the hearers. Contextual interpretations are those which analyze the larger power structures

47 Paul Scott Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 38.
48 Richard Eslinger notes how the NH sought to retrieve Scripture. In The Renewed Homiletic, 126-127, 131. Also, Eslinger notes in order to keep NH preaching “Christian” (and thus have ongoing significance), it must renew its desire to retrieve scripture.
49 Notice here the demarcation of the various approaches to scripture (suggested here) by way of their goals. Part of the intention is to retrieve the discussion of Aristotle’s three types of inquiry—each determined by their goals. Robert Reid notes the importance of paying attention to one’s goals when he ask preachers to pay attention to “the response” the preacher’s voice “calls forth” from the hearers. Reid notes four voices—explain, encounter, explore and engage. Robert Stephen Reid, The Four Voices of Preaching: Connecting Purpose and Identity behind the Pulpit, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 23-26.
in which texts, interpretations and doctrines are implicated. These can take a more
deconstructive approach to the church’s constructions (e.g., tradition, doctrine) or they can be
constructive. However, their perspective is often the present context that surrounds and
shapes our interpretations of texts.

2.1.1 Constructive Theological Interpretations of Scripture

Thomas Long says, the form and function of the scriptural text should shape the form
and function of the sermon. The reason preaching should derive its form and function from
scripture is because scripture is where Christ addresses hearers today and is thus present to
them.\footnote{Thomas G. Long, The Witness of Preaching, 2nd ed., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 55, 52-56; Barbara Brown Taylor, The Preaching Life, (Boston: Cowley, 1993), 53-54.} This is possible by reading scripture through the lens of theology, so then topical
sermons can be biblical if they are theologically informed.\footnote{Long, The Witness of Preaching, 59-63, 67.} The goal of preaching is to hear
“the claim of God in and through a biblical text”; to hear this claim requires “an act of
faithful imagination.”\footnote{Ibid., 58. Long seems to come to this more slowly. In the first edition of The Witness of Preaching, he does not speak here of “faithful imagination.” Instead, the text (more than theology) “serves as the leading force in shaping the content and purpose of the sermon.” Long, The Witness of Preaching, 1st ed., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 58. Cf. Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, 15, 11-12.} To have a faithful imagination is to listen for the claim of God in a
text by reading within a theological tradition—a tradition expressed and evoked within the
church.\footnote{Ibid., 3-15.}

Using a narrative, post-liberal reading of scripture, Charles Campbell asserts that
scripture is crucial because revelation is bound up in the language and practices of its context
(i.e., the church).\footnote{Campbell, Preaching Jesus, 45, 49, 55.} As a product of and for the church, scripture is “faithfully” interpreted in
the community of the church and for the sake of building it up.\footnote{Ibid., 83-85, 91, 222.} Scripture renders Jesus as the “unsubstitutable” person and subject of revelation, and then, Jesus, preached, builds up
What makes Campbell’s approach distinct from Long’s is that the theological theme by which he reads scripture is the person of Jesus (rendered by means of the text) and not the form and function of the text itself.

Richard Lischer says preaching must be faithful to texts but texts should be read in light of the gospel. Preaching seeks to proclaim the gospel “in texts, by means of texts, and in faithfulness to texts.” He emphasises the othering mechanism of the gospel, as it deconstructs modern individualistic notions of self and forms a community. It is the unity of scripture and the gospel which leads Lischer to call the Bible “the test of preaching.” Here, Lischer seems to suggest a higher priority to gospel in reading scripture than either Long (1989) or Campbell.

Paul Scott Wilson, like Lischer, calls for scripture to be read according to the gospel—which means looking for God’s action in the text in its relation to God’s once-for-all action in Jesus Christ. By looking for God’s action in a text, one discovers what the text says about

---

56 Ibid., 25, 28, 39, 192. This may sound like Wilson, but they are different. For Campbell, preachers preach Jesus as Lord; for Wilson, preachers image God acting in Jesus. That is, Campbell’s homiletical theory asks us to preach who Jesus is; whereas, Wilson’s homiletic emphasises what Jesus does.

Campbell worries over an “understanding of salvation” which is “anthropologically determined”. Ibid., 44, 56. Hans Frei says the gospel is real-like as a narrative is real-like. Frei is sympathetic to Barth, and Barth, in distinction from Campbell, rejects a priori prolegomena as a foundation for doing theology and preaching (e.g., apologetics); Barth does not however worry what theology is when it is being done (that is, whether or not it is humanly constructed and therefore humanly determined).

Barth says, we stay within the closed-circuit of the gospel (which is, epistemologically impenetrable) because we have no access to anything outside of the gospel, NOT because to do otherwise would mean the gospel is humanly determined but because we have no access to anything beyond the (imaginative) world which is imagined/constructed and inhabited. Relativism is not a concern for Barth even though his entire theological project works within it. Barth seeks to overcome relativism (this author would say such a thing is impossible though necessary in order to do theology at all) by accepting it before he rejects it by the context created by the Incarnation.

57 Ibid., 18, 22-23, 30.
58 Ibid., 18, 30-45, 46-65.
59 Long takes a similar position. See, The Witness of Preaching, 66-68. In the context of the church, hermeneutics is theology for Lischer and Long.
God, and for Wilson this is a key purpose of reading scripture in the church. Wilson’s theory is primarily theological, but rather than doing exegesis in order to “render” the person of Jesus (as Campbell does), Wilson seeks to facilitate an experience of Jesus by means of a theological reading of the text which looks for the gospel.

Wilson argues for “biblical” preaching, but Wilson is not naive to the problems of “text”. He notes that, while each of the following are distinct tasks, the lines between exegesis, hermeneutics and homiletics are blurry. Preaching is not separate from exegesis or hermeneutics. The way preachers do exegesis is, in part, determined by their goal, namely, to proclaim the gospel. In forms of exegesis prior to the NH,

The text was treated as if it were a fragment of pottery unearthed in an archeological dig…. It was...an object, an inert thing, something that passively received the scientific things we did to it and eventually yielded its objective meaning. That image is no longer adequate…. Our science is more appropriately now considered an art.

In Wilson’s homiletical theory and method, exegesis and therefore hermeneutics and homiletics are “considered an art.” As art, questions of referents are superfluous to sermon form and content. No one looks at a piece of art and asks about its transcendent referent.

People encounter art. It is an other image, a re-presentation of the world, which the

---

63 Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 33. Wilson says exegesis refers to the “what the text said and meant for its first hearers” and that hermeneutics connotes “a two-way process of bring the text’s meaning forward to today.” Ibid., 33, italics mine.
64 Wilson takes a theology of the Word as Event in part because he sees the goal of preaching as an event or experience of the Word by means of preaching. Others noted how the goal of exegesis shapes the kind of exegesis which is done, albeit in different ways and to different degrees. Some include Craddock, *As One Without Authority*; and Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989); Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 36-37.
65 Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 38.
66 That is not to say that Wilson does not believe in the objectivity of revelation. It is to say that Wilson’s theory and method do not require belief in objectivity (referent). They work regardless of whether scripture or sermons have within them any objective connection between “God” and humans.
community bumps up against. And this encounter with a re-presentation generates new images and therefore new possibilities for living. As Ricoeur said by way of Aristotle, art imitates what-is (e.g., doxic knowledge) with a re-presentation; the “what-is” is re-visioned and reshaped by the possibilities envisioned in the re-presentation. The re-presentation is imaginative (on the part of the preacher) and touches the imagination of the hearers.

Wilson says, preachers exegete a text for preaching because without it “the text can have no significant present meaning.” That is not to say that the text has a past or present meaning in and of itself. Rather, it is to say that if the text is to have present meaning for the hearers today (i.e., if the people are to hear the text as if it did have meaning today, if a text is to become meaningful), then the preacher must enter the flow of where the text has been (e.g., the church’s creeds) and where the text might go and therefore say today. The text has authority not because it has an inherent, objective authority but because it both is understood as having authority within the church and must be seen as having authority if it is to become meaningful and therefore generate internal and then external—social and political—transformation.

In regards to scripture as a loci for revelation, Long seeks the content of revelation from scripture; Campbell seeks the content of revelation from the person of Jesus rendered by scripture; Lischer and Wilson seek the content of revelation from the gospel which is found in texts and by means of texts. However, the next two homileticians (David Buttrick and Richard Eslinger) are less interested in seeking the content of revelation in scripture.

---


68 Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, 39.

69 Ibid., 41; and Knoke, “Generating Movement.”
Instead, they emphasize the *interpretation* of texts and *construction* of revelation within theology.\(^\text{70}\)

For David Buttrick, scripture is essential because present-tense naming of God-with-us must be done in light of how God has been with-us in the biblical narrative.\(^\text{71}\) And while scripture interprets the world, human experience also interprets scripture. How the preacher names God in the world is of utmost importance because people will tend to interpret scripture based on how preaching names God in the world.\(^\text{72}\) People’s experience of God is constituted through the interpretative frameworks used by preachers in how they name God in the world. The lens through which scripture is interpreted is God’s with-us-ness, and for this reason, his is primarily a constructive theological interpretation of scripture.\(^\text{73}\)

For Richard Eslinger, scripture creates a world in which to live. And the world created by the biblical narrative absorbs or assumes the “real” world.\(^\text{74}\) By living in the world created by scripture, it becomes more real and more determinative of our lives than what is taken for granted as real. Scripture *constructs* a world in which the church can speak of the word “revelation.” Revelation is constructed by the world scripture re-presents.\(^\text{75}\) While the method is different, there are some key similarities between Eslinger and Buttrick, especially

\(^{70}\) Although they emphasize interpretation and constructions (and are therefore somewhat contextual), they situate their readings *within* theology and the context of theology. As such, they are placed in theological constructions category.


\(^{72}\) Ibid., 19-20.

\(^{73}\) See Buttrick’s essay in *The Renewed Homiletic* in which he calls for a recovery of theology, 110-111. Reid says, “Core to most definitions or understandings of preaching’s purpose is the assumption that preaching is the holy calling to name God and to name grace for others. Naming God involves bringing theological reflection to the interpretation of our world and the preacher’s convictions about God’s purpose as testimony about God.” Note that scripture is not named as a source of revelation or preaching; however, this definition of preaching’s purpose does seek to employ theology to name God in the world and is similar to Buttrick in this regard. *The Four Voices of Preaching*, 21.


\(^{75}\) Ibid., 29. For Eslinger, it is the Spirit whose work is necessary to make the particular narrative of scripture the primary, authoritative one. Ibid., 35.
the creation of worlds through language. One key difference between Eslinger and Buttrick is the epistemic priority Eslinger gives to the context, namely, the church. But unlike Long and Campbell who also give epistemic priority to the church, Eslinger does not epistemologically ground the context, either in the narratively-rendered person (Campbell) or the “presence” (Long) of Jesus.

Walter Brueggemann’s hermeneutics take place in the crucible of suffering so as to re-present a new vision—an alternative to the empire and symbolic power.76 Brueggemann says, Paul Ricoeur’s work on imagination showed that “texts—in particular biblical texts—are acts of imagination that offer and purpose ‘alternative worlds’ that exist because of and in the act of utterance” and are “a legitimate way of knowing.”77 For Brueggemann, the use of scripture is for the purpose of a new iteration, which generates a new world and thus a new text. One preaches from scripture but revelation is not located there as much as in the new world (and new text) which happens and through its happening generates a new world of possibility. He says, preaching “is an act of making a new text visible and available. This new text is, in part, the old text, and is, in part, the imaginative construction of the preacher which did not exist until the moment of utterance by the preacher.”78 The problem with this proposal, as with Anna Carter Florence’s, is that while Brueggemann locates faithful interpretation of scripture

78 Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, x.
in the crucible of suffering, his interpreters do their work from the safe confines of “middle class” society.79

Each of the above homileticians use a different theological frame into which they place scripture. But they each see the task of preaching as primarily constructive. And they make theological constructions for preaching (God acting, naming God in the world, etc.) by using theological constructions given to them already.

2.1.2 Experiential Interpretations of Scripture

Charles Rice expresses a theological priority when he concurs with Edmund Steimle that a “sermon which starts in the Bible and stays in the Bible is not Biblical.”80 However, Rice is less concerned about the lens through which scripture is read than he is in generating the experience scripture intended to generate in its day within its hearers.81 Rice suggests that scripture and theology need to be broken open by culture (“dialogue with culture”) in order to distill gospel truths and translate them into the existential experiences of present day hearers.82 For that reason, Rice can discard of scripture altogether in his actual sermons and use art forms which, he believes, do the same thing.83

Henry Mitchell says that scripture is the first “basis of authority” needed to generate an experience in the hearers.84 Henry Mitchell employs numerous “vehicles” and says that the


82 Rice, Interpretation and Imagination, 5-10, 15.


sermon form depends on the genre of the sermon text. They include: a general narrative type that usually involves a conflict and resolution, as well as, parables, metaphors, stream of consciousness, expository preaching, and a combination of genres in a single sermon. Mitchell insists on “detailed images” and seeks imagistic moves in consciousness that promote an experiential encounter involving the whole person and generate new behaviors. While Mitchell may seem to be more committed to scripture than Rice in actual preaching, both Mitchell and Rice make the experience of the hearers the lens through which scriptural interpretation is done.

2.1.3 Contextual Interpretations of Scripture

Contextual interpretations analyze the larger power structures in which texts, interpretations and doctrines are implicated. They usually focus on the present social, political and economic contexts that surround and shape human interpretations of texts.

John McClure maintains scripture as a source of authority but says preaching “keeps the Bible from premature closure.” Scripture is a source of authority for McClure because it is repository of “memory”—the sort of memory necessary to remind us of past acts of violence and thereby prevent those acts from recurring. Preaching scripture without taking scripture too literally is the church’s way of transforming tradition and keeping the future

---

85 Mitchell, Celebration and Experience in Preaching, 41-114.
86 Ibid., 23, 25. See also, Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, 15.
87 For Mitchell, the experiential lens is primarily the lens of black experience. The experience he wants to move people to is the experience of celebration. Mitchell, Celebration and Experience in Preaching; see also, Cleophus J. LaRue, I Believe I’ll Testify, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011).
90 Ibid., 11, 27-32.
open and fresh to the Spirit. McClure retrieves scripture’s authority by opening the text up to other others (agents or subjects), but scripture is not a source of authority in and of itself.

The authority of scripture derives from what it knows about the myriad ways in which humans oppress or do violence to others.

Justo González and Catherine González call for a “rereading” of Scripture by the oppressed as a way to retrieve “a proper interpretation” that generates within the oppressed a new image of self, one that liberates them from the traditional, hegemonic reading which has oppressed them. When everything is interpretation and the authority of traditions are undermined, as McClure pointed out, then the only “proper” interpretation, says González and González, can be one that does not negate the self. Therefore, they look for ways to re-read scripture for the sake of liberation from self-negation created by (often unconscious) forces of colonialism experienced in concrete spaces and times. It is not the text itself which is revelatory; revelation comes through the interpretation of contemporary life in light of the text in order to expose oppression and re-image liberation. Revelation, then, is something that happens in the present by means of the text and tradition after they have been broken open in the crucible of oppression.

---

91 Ibid., 116-119.
92 Ibid., 123-126.
93 Ibid., 106-107, 135.
94 Justo L. and Catherine G. González, The Liberating Pulpit, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 14-15. González and González believe this way of reading “from below” provides a more accurate reading because it parallels a great portion of the Bible which “records the perspective of those who...are powerless and oppressed.” Ibid., 18-21. Also of import, González and González, locate the primacy of a meaning within the text more than the gospel (i.e., a theological reading of the text). Justo critiques a student’s creative sermon on the basis that while it may have been theologically sound (“true”, as he calls it), it was not a proper reading of the text. Which begs the question, What is “proper” interpretation? Is not a referent required against which to adjudicate “proper” from improper? Ibid., 100.
95 Ibid., 22-24, 98.
96 Ibid., 30, 52.
97 Ibid., 67.
The goal of preaching for Lucy Atkinson Rose, “is to gather the community of faith around the Word where the central conversations of the church are refocused and fostered.”98 This is done in order “to set texts and interpretations loose in the midst of the community, so that the essential conversations of God’s people are nurtured.”99 And the mark of successful preaching is the “work of the Holy Spirit.” As such, Rose re-contextualizes the place of scriptural interpretation; however, she wants to gather a community around scripture and to hear other interpretations of scripture. It is a contextual reading of scripture that emphasizes scripture.100

She seeks a homiletical theory and method that she feels better expresses her own “experience as a woman”. On her way, she gives a poignant critique of homiletical models until 1999, and is unwilling to accept one “universal, kerygmatic, or existential” truth because truth is beyond us.101 The previous models (including the NH), she believes, operate on a false and hegemonic assumption about truth. As such, she says preaching is “a proposal offered to the community….a wager on the part of the preacher.”102

Her goal then is to foster conversations around scripture that get at this truth which is beyond us. The goal is to explore truth, search it out, look for it, play with it. Conversation and the multiple perspectives it engenders draw us closer to the “Mystery”, a mystery which the Holy Spirit oversees and orchestrates.103

---

99 Ibid., 98.
100 One might ask whether a difference between Rose and McClure is whether Rose puts scripture over context and whether McClure puts context over scripture (i.e., context as the real context for scripture).
101 Rose says, “The only way I can speak of ‘truth’ is eschatologically.” Ibid., 5.
102 Ibid., 5. One might ask whether Rose has conflated exegesis and homiletics because while this may be an ethical way to exegete scripture, one might wonder whether it generates desire for ethics. See my critique below.
103 Ibid., 98. Rose notes this aspect of language in her critique of “kerygmatic” theories, when she says that the “kerygmatic” theory rests on “the positing of a reality that exists apart from language.” Ibid., 43. She associates this theory with Barth; Barth does not posit a reality apart from language. See my chapter on Barth.
Excursus: Critique of Mystery beyond Language in Rose’s *Sharing the Word*: A Case Study

Rose is right that there is no such thing as objective, propositional truth which only needs to be discovered by the preacher and then transmitted to the congregation.\textsuperscript{104} Her suggestion though is based on the notion that truth is beyond us and reality is unknowable \textit{by means of language itself}.\textsuperscript{105} That is, Rose does not believe reality is unknowable, only that it is unknowable \textit{through language} because language is entrapped in power structures and is thus “sinful.” She still believes there is reality out-there and can be known in a limited way, even if its full disclosure awaits the eschaton.\textsuperscript{106} In other words, human words do not disclose God’s truth because of how they are inculcated in the “discourse situation” (which is why she believes “transformational [NH] voices” are an inadequate model for preaching). However, she believes God’s truth (content) is still \textit{accessible} and that homiletics requires a better \textit{form} by which truth can be accessed and expressed.\textsuperscript{107}

Rose’s proposal rests on belief in “truth” being out-there\textsuperscript{108} (albeit in the eschaton).\textsuperscript{109} Her theory and method are in search of what is real and true, and it is \\textit{her belief} in the existence of truth which becomes the foundation for her theory and method. The

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 16-17. The “gap” (and therefore power imbalance) between preacher and congregation.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 54-55.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 8-10, 108-109.
\textsuperscript{107} One might ask about a potential dualism between form and content here.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 10, 108-109, 10.
\textsuperscript{109} Rather than allowing the out-there-ness to be an out-there that comes from in-here and therefore is not intrinsically a \textit{being} or thing as much as it \textit{becomes} a \textit{thing}. A tension which McClure does seem to maintain. In other words, McClure does not base his homiletic on an autonomous, out-there referent or Being like Rose seems to.
conversational search for truth becomes the means by which her goal (preaching’s “wager”) is achieved.

Rose discloses her main two convictions, which end up being two-sides of the same coin about power: the one side being the “gap” between preacher and congregation and the other being the ways in which language does not have an unchanging referent but participates in and reinforces unjust power relations. Her answer is an epistemology of connectedness because “linguistic ambiguity does not preclude the possibility of knowledge.” That is, for her, truth is still humanly accessible; one just needs different means or “voices” to discover it. That is, she shifts the referent from language to the eschaton, but her theory still requires a referent. Without a referent, the conversational search becomes pointless.

Rose is right that there has been a shift from “one consensus [propositional preaching] to a second consensus [NH] to no consensus” in homiletical theory and method over the past 150 years, but consensus about the goal of preaching is not necessary to achieve one’s goals through preaching. After all, what if homiletics is not about helping us find out what we believe (or even discovering an out-there truth) but is instead about helping us get where we want to go?

---


111 Ibid., 91.

112 This seems to be a distinction which Rose does not uphold. A distinction which cannot be upheld unless one objectifies the objectifying distance in order to see that what the world treats as objects are merely objectifications-of-subjectivity. Of course, this also means a relativizing of goals. See Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 7.

If the goal is to “know something”, then the goal is information. And she may indeed offer a paradigm for such (though not as philosophically cogent as McClure’s). But if the goal of preaching is to be a means (Aristotle’s productive science) for transformation (Aristotle’s practical science), then “consensus” is neither necessary nor desirable for a homiletical theory and method capable of generating transformation (which the NH was concerned about, albeit in different ways). The issues here are the same ones raised in readings of scripture. See the footnote above about Paul Wilson’s distinctions between exegesis, hermeneutics and homiletics.

113 The goal of which is to explore the means of transformation (Aristotle’s productive sciences) rather than to “know” (Aristotle’s theoretical sciences) a more ethical goal/transformation (Aristotle’s practical sciences).
Two summary points. First, whereas some within the NH say the goal of preaching is transformation (and thereby social justice) by generating a response in the hearers by constructing words using theological constructions given to them, she makes her goal in preaching to “know” something that is “true” and her foundation, for preaching, the existence of this truth/referent. Second, one might ask if she has not, while describing a better ethic and more just (and desirable) social arrangement, uprooted the path necessary to get there?¹¹⁴

2.1.4 Implications

Though some homileticians who use contextual approaches question the ability of language to disclose God or God’s will, it would be helpful to revisit the nature of language (as metaphor) and some issues about the role of language (to generate social justice) for preaching. As such, the next subsection surveys various understandings of language, primarily among homileticians sympathetic to the NH. As a result, an understanding of language should emerge that honours concerns about contextuality (and power relations) raised by “postmodern” critics.

2.2 Revelation and Metaphor and Narrative

A new appreciation for the roles of metaphor in language and narrative did much to precipitate the NH, and it gleaned some of these insights from the New Hermeneutic, which applied a theological context to developments in linguistics.¹¹⁵ The Word of God was the context for general language theory. Ebeling said the Word of God is a spoken event; it is an event in which Christ is present in order to act.¹¹⁶ For theologians working within the New Hermeneutic of the 1950s and 60s, the Word of God “does not ‘exist’ in the mind or in

¹¹⁴ And thereby made preaching, in Aristotle’s typology, a theoretical or at best practical science rather than a productive science.
books, nor does it flow so readily off the end of our pens and pencils:...it is something preached.”

The Word of God was considered an oral event that happened as a response in the hearers by means of the Holy Spirit who made Christ present.

### 2.2.1 Imagination and Revelation

Craddock suggests that the Word of God is not an autonomous reality existing independently of its form in the sermon. Speaking about the Word, he says of words, “All the words we know are human words.” That is, he advocated for an eventfulness of language as it moves inductively in the sermon. Through inductive movement in language, it may be possible to speak of the Word of God as an event.

For Craddock, words create life. Humanity is constituted through words. Words do not refer to verifiable, out-there realities; they are not signs pointing to an ideal which exists independently of words. Instead, words create the realities they describe. An acting, divine agent is necessary to generate images in the mind so that humans can “hear” God speak; images generated through inductive movement in language are capable of moving the hearers for social transformation.

---


119 Revelation is not just content it is a “mode.” “The way of God’s Word in the world is the way of the sermon in the world.” Craddock, *Preaching*, 51-52.

120 Ibid., 90.


123 Ibid., 8, 27-32.

124 Ibid., 27-32.

125 Wilson, probably more than any other homiletician provides homiletical method to the major components of unity and movement found in Craddock’s *As One Without Authority*. Craddock and Wilson share a common view of language as a means to touch the imagination and thereby generate movement, particularly toward ethics. Of particular interest is how Wilson places this view of language and the imagination within the theological context of the gospel (What is God doing?). See Ibid., 20.
Craddock poignantly articulates the consequences of applying the scientific method to understandings of words in order to prove the existence of revelation. He says, “The scientific method understands words as signs, as indicators pointing to information that can be verified” or that have a referent standing behind them. Instead, he urges preachers to consider the ability of words “to create new situations.” Craddock says the goal of preaching is not “to communicate knowledge, a special kind of knowledge, information about God and eternity.” The goal of preaching is to help people to “see.” When people see differently, they live and act differently (more ethically) in the world. And the ear is as fundamental as the eye in constructing a narrative world that people can see.

Craddock calls into question the whole notion of the hard sciences as carrying out an autonomous, objective enterprise which discloses things out-there in the world. He says the scientific task of classifying and organising phenomena is an arbitrary human construction, which does not express the nature of things but instead is “rooted” in the filtering mechanism of the mind. Craddock has a high view of images in the mind to generate transformation (and words as a vehicle for images).

While Wilson’s model might appear to some as being hegemonic (and thus unethical), it is his notion of the imagination as the means for change that is the basis on which he treats homiletics as a means toward an end rather than a thing or end in itself. This may be why Wilson says, “Homiletics is conservative in terms of its innovation and radical in terms of the gospel.” Homiletics, as a productive science, is a means to the construction of ethics because ethics is constructed and does not exist out-there in any objective way. Ethics is entrapped in the same arbitrariness as that of the “discourse situation” in that it has no referent either. Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, 153. Compare with McClure, Other-wise Preaching. My own suggestion is that preachers do not remake the gospel of Jesus; instead, they remake their re-presentations of the world through new re-presentations of the gospel—re-presentations which show Jesus acting in different ways (e.g., show Jesus being open to the other).

126 Craddock, As One Without Authority, 8.
127 Ibid., 8; that is, a productive science.
128 Ibid., 9.
129 Ibid., 9-10.
130 Ibid., 9. Thomas Troeger has done much to bring attention to the imagination, but he does not go so far as Craddock. He seems to suggest a referential power to the imagination but nonetheless hails the power of the imagination and art. Contrary to pejorative claims that “it is all in your imagination”, Troeger asserts that imagination leads us toward reality and is not an escape from it. Thomas H. Troeger, Imagining a Sermon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 28, 35. God uses the creative imagination of the preacher to do his creative
Frederick Buechner takes a similar view on the priority of the imagination, that is, images are generated in the mind by means of language and these images produce transformation (in whatever way one envisions transformation or social justice). Buechner places language *beside* revelation when he asks, “What is truth?” And his answer is stunning, for he admits that it is at least possible that “there is no answer” and precisely because there may be no answer to that question, is why we must give an answer.\(^{133}\) For while the gospel fairy tale might be too good to be true—and therefore not true (in a hard scientific sense)—“maybe the truth of it is that it’s too good not to be true.”\(^{134}\)

Buechner calls for preachers to be “fabulists”—people who *make things up*—who speak the “impossible” word of the gospel.\(^{135}\) Because if the preacher does not “stretch our imagination and strain our credulity and make our jaws drop…, then of all people he is almost the only one left who does not.”\(^{136}\)
The task of preaching then is to hold Jesus “up to our gaze” by means of the language of poetry (metaphor, image) because the image of Jesus acting on our behalf does “not say something [i.e., it does not disclose objective referent] as much as…[it] make[s] something happen.”

What sets Buechner apart from many homileticians on the topic of metaphor is that he does not treat metaphor as an object, (as a thing, as information). Instead, like metaphor in literary theory, language is a closed, impenetrable circuit that produces the “thing” it describes. The language of God-in-action is valued because it is capable of creating or evoking the reality it describes, not disclosing the reality to which it refers.

Rose critiques “transformational” preaching on the basis that “performativ e language is valued because it is deemed capable of creating or evoking the reality to which it refers.”

One might ask if Rose’s critique of the nature and role of language in transformational preaching may be based on a caricature of the nature of language, and if, instead, it is her theory which ultimately depends on a referent.

2.2.2 Theological Movement and Revelation: Law and Gospel Structure in Language

Eugene Lowry, like Craddock and Buechner, asserts that the content of sermons is not a compilation of various out-there theological parts. The content of the sermon and the revelation which happens are an action described, not a thing known and defined. “Good” sermons are events in time that occur through narrative-like movement. However, he roots

---

137 Ibid., 25, 22, 73-74, italics mine. Buechner says of fairy tales, “Once upon a time, there was…”: “which is to say that if you are to believe that there was, you have to give up other beliefs you believe in including the belief that there was not because there could not be such creatures as these.” Ibid., 16, 73-74.
138 As Bourdieu’s socio-linguistics show, the closed-circuit of language means that words create the reality regardless of referent. Indeed, there may be no referent.
139 Rose, Sharing the Word, 81, italics mine.
140 Lowry, The Homiletical Plot, 4-7, 39.
141 Ibid., 9-12.
language in theology when he says that the movement happens at the intersection of trouble (felt need or bind) and the gospel (content).\textsuperscript{142} As such, the movement in language is a theological movement, and the experience of grace within the hearer which is produced by this movement in language is an experience of God. However, like Davis and Randolph before him, the notion of “revelation” is more assumed than discussed in detail.

Paul Scott Wilson, however, does make it much more explicit. Like Lowry, Wilson places language under theology but employs a notion of metaphor in which theology is the particular context for language in general. “The trouble/grace dynamic in itself is metaphor writ large.”\textsuperscript{143} That is, theology provides the particular context in which general understandings of language (in literary theory, etc.) take on a concrete expression. The concrete expression of language within a theological and ecclesial context is the gospel.

He says, by juxtaposing trouble and grace, a world is built in the imagination, and this means “momentarily” resisting “deconstructive tendencies” in order to say something about God acting so that a world can be built in the imagination and movement can be generated in the social and political sphere. The Word is the concrete language for a concrete context as it comes to us in scripture. That is, Wilson does not place language under abstract theology; instead, the language of theology is the language for the preaching context.

Wilson does not make a blanket theological claim in which theological \textit{a priori} commitments determine (or challenge) literary theorists notions of metaphor. Instead, he appeals to the nature of language itself as metaphoric, in order to suggest that there is an excess of meaning which language seeks to capture but cannot and which is always breaking

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 19-21.
\textsuperscript{143} Wilson, \textit{Preaching and Homiletical Theory}, 99.
open dead (static) language to generate new meanings. Just as language breaks itself open from within; the language of (biblical) preaching—i.e., the gospel—breaks open the “discourse situation.” In other words, the Word opens up a reality that otherwise might be closed just as language opens up realities that otherwise might be closed.

Wilson says imagination is engaged by juxtaposition of opposites that retain their tensive quality so that by the proximity of two, distinct images, the hearers’ imaginations are sparked. Harnessing the tense nature of language as a means to the imagination which re-presents the world and generates new possibilities for self and world. Such a paradigm honors the hearers as dialogue partners and gives them room to participate and respond.

What Wilson calls for is the creation of new worlds through language by means of an acting subject (God revealed in Jesus Christ). Imagining new worlds in language sparks the imagination of hearers where they can then respond and live into these alternative worlds. Thomas Troeger instructs preachers on the importance of seeing; Wilson tells us how to do it—make God the subject of the sentence.

Wilson suggests that the imagination (and metaphor) are a vehicle for revelation. The language of God in action is the language of the gospel (the language of revelation) and this

---

144 See Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 46.
146 See Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 35-40. Also, Wilson, *Setting Words on Fire*, 41. The proximity of two, distinct images—law and gospel—is “metaphor writ large.”
147 By invoking the hearers’ imagination through tensive language, we involve them in the making of meaning. It is in this way that we speak to the affections (those deepest drives where fear, love and hope reside) that allow for a re-orientation toward an alternative reality. In other words, Wilson gives us concrete tools whereby the gospel can be experienced through preaching and whereby people can see the world differently.
149 Like Troeger, Leonora Tubbs Tisdale affirms Brueggemann’s insistence that the purpose of preaching is to “provide a world in which the congregation can live.” *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 119. Randolph makes a similar argument when he instructs preachers to “show” not tell. Wilson’s theory tells us *how* to do this using language: God as acting subject of the verb; four movements with a central theme as *one* way (among several) *through* the text; based on scripture and church tradition.
type of language (the gospel) is the goal of proclamation. Wilson places Craddock’s general view of language explicitly within the theological context of the Word of God (revelation) in order to help the NH regain its bearings. Finally, linguistic movement and structure is rooted in a theological movement and structure—law and gospel.

2.2.3 Testimony and Revelation

Anna Carter Florence also situates language within a theological context and does so by connecting language to testimonial language, citing the work of Paul Ricoeur. She says, revelation is not based on facts but on testimony. “Testimony is not perception; it is the report itself… We focus not on what is seen but on what is said.” That is, the experience of God as it is testified to in words (written and spoken—scripture and preaching) is what becomes revelation.

Florence’s work is particularly interesting because of how she attempts to root experience in language (experience becomes a text!) by arguing that words are testimonies (said or written by subjects) and thereby to assert a theological context for language. She celebrates, “Finally!—a decent way to talk about the role of experience in preaching!!”

The only “proof of a sermon [that God discloses God’s self through it] is the engagement of the preacher: whether we are willing to seal our lives to our words.” In other words, the preacher should preach (give a verbal report of) scripture (the written report) and mean it. And it is possible for preachers to believe and mean what they say (as if it were true) because they trust “the veracity of the prior witness.” However, as McClure points

---

150 See Wilson’s discussion of “proclamation” in Setting Words on Fire, 1-4.
151 Florence, Preaching as Testimony, 61-80. See also LaRue, I Believe I’ll Testify, 102-111; Long, The Witness of Preaching, 2nd ed., 45-51; and Wilson, Setting Words on Fire, 149-164.
152 Florence, Preaching as Testimony, 62.
153 Ibid., 69.
154 Ibid., xviii.
155 McClure, Other-wise Preaching, 124.
out, Florence’s program is a “simple reframing exercise...somehow managed by a still autonomous subject.” One might question the ability of an autonomous subject to deliver a perfectly open sign (i.e., a sign that cannot become statically objective). Indeed, the ability of an autonomous subject to give voice to a perfectly open sign that breaks open injustice is called into question by socio-linguistics, which exposes the ways in which our language becomes “self-perpetuating binary opposition” because it does not account for the proximity of other Subjects and the networks of power and marginality in which language is entrapped.

2.2.4 Implications

Understandings of language have been very important for homiletics since the 1950s. With Randolph, language and theology were united in a Word-event theology of the New Hermeneutic. Craddock’s As One Without Authority emphasizes inductive movement through images. Lowry seems to place language under theology but he does it implicitly, seeming to assume revelation was the preaching content without making it explicit. Wilson draws attention to the theological context for general discussion about language in which imagination is a vehicle for revelation. Florence’s work attempts to address some social justice and contextual critiques about language. For Buechner, language and theology exist side by side without impinging on (and thereby pre-determining the meaning of) the other; yet, they do meet in the imagination.

However, critiques about the capacity of language to bear revelation which were raised (albeit, not by homileticians) in the 1960s have, in the past 15 years, become a serious

---

156 Ibid., 131. Cheryl Bridges Johns critiques such reframing exercises of the middle class who prefer “a slow, steady process of inviting each other into a counterstory about God.” “Epiphanies of Fire,” 17. McClure’s suggestion is for erasure testimony (rather than counter-testimony).

157 See McClure’s critique in Other-wise Preaching.
consideration of homileticians themselves. The next sub-section looks at some who seem to identify revelation with social justice and concludes with a critique of one of its more prominent and influential proponents.

2.3 Power and Revelation: Preaching and Unjust Systems

In the subsection on scriptural interpretations, distinctions were noted between constructive theological interpretations and contextual interpretations of scripture. Here, the demarcation between those approaches becomes more explicit as some non-biblical sources of revelation are discussed. Many homileticians, even constructive theological homileticians, are concerned for social justice. For constructive theological homileticians, humans have access to God’s vision of justice and are to preach toward that end. For others, humans do not have access to God’s vision of justice. Therefore, preaching participates in deconstructing constructions because of how theological constructions (scripture, church doctrine or tradition) do violence to others and other-ness.

2.3.1 Revelation and Social Analysis

These approaches incorporate social science in their attempts to speak of God. Some depend on social science; that is, they put reality (and revelation) within the context of the world as it is described by social science. Other homileticians simply use social science without making it a new foundation for their homiletical theory.

---


159 See André Resner, “Social Justice,” in *New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, 135-137. There he connects social justice with God’s will and “vision for healthy, loving, and harmonious community life.”

160 Ronald Allen embraces relativity and also a constructive approach. He identifies two strands of (as he calls it) “postmodernism.” One is deconstructive; the other is constructive. Within the constructive strand, he parses out a post-liberal and revisionist approaches (and says African American, feminist and liberation approaches are sympathetic to this latter constructive approach). See Ronald J. Allen, Barbara Shires Blaisdell and Scott Black Johnston, *Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 17-20.

Here, I too am distinguishing between constructive and destructive approaches (though without the term “postmodern”). However, the point-of-view from which I seek to describe these views of revelations attempts to remain in the social sciences rather than in theology.
Christine Smith presses preaching to reflect more intentionally about “the larger social context in which we live our lives.”\textsuperscript{161} She is concerned that preachers “be pulled back time and time again to the \textit{real} world in which we live.”\textsuperscript{162} She suggests a homiletical theory that situates scripture and the church within the context of the “real”\textsuperscript{163} world. And her method engages in social scientific analysis of unjust situations as the means by which to access this “larger” and (more) real world of society in which scripture and the church exist. For Smith, there is something real out-there; the social context is real; and this reality or standard—such as “evil”—which exists ontologically can also be known epistemologically; and finally, in order to overcome this evil (which can be known), it must be exposed because, in Marxist fashion, exposing evil empowers resistance.\textsuperscript{164} That she believes truth can be known (through exposing evil) reveals that truth and revelation are not (totally) subjective for her.\textsuperscript{165} They exist and can be known by exposing them. She treats social justice as though it were real instead of being just another power-laden context (like language).

The “Listening to Listeners” project focused on analyzing how listeners hear and respond to sermons using Aristotelian categories of ethos, pathos and logos, as well as, embodiment and congregational culture. This project is different from previous homiletical works (like Craddock’s) which tended to homogenise the plurality and diversity of hearers by assuming an universal human experience; it sees and explores the different ways people hear

\textsuperscript{161} Smith, \textit{Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance}, 1.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 5, italics mine.
\textsuperscript{163} The quotes demarcate her opinion from my own. That is, I do not grant the \textit{a priori} foundation that the larger social context is “real”. It may be objectified and \textit{become} real, just as all practical responses to life-and-death issues can generate \textit{doxa}, and thereby produce a practical logic which is \textit{experienced as} real. I cannot grant “reality” any autonomous ontology from which it can then be used as an epistemological standard by which to adjudicate good or evil.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 6-9.
\textsuperscript{165} In this way, she is similar to Rose. But unlike Rose, who gives priority to scripture, Smith prioritizes the larger social context.
and respond to a sermon.\textsuperscript{166} But as some have pointed out, the study does not include “listeners who have never come to church.”\textsuperscript{167} In iterations of this study, the other is the context but the other is not every other (not an Infinity of Others) but only \textit{the others within the church}. So while it promotes a form of justice by means of othering, those who constitute an “other” are not very other.

John McClure calls on preaching to broaden its understanding of context and to consider a context well beyond scripture, theology or the church, even the context beyond language. The context for preaching, he says, is the “other” and not just \textit{an} other but an Infinity of other-ness. He constructs a homiletical option which seeks not to replace but to critique and keep fresh traditional houses of Christian authority (scripture, reason, tradition and experience). The way to do this, he says, is to give primacy to the “other” upon which these houses of authority demarcate themselves. By giving primacy to others rather than to Christian’s own identity and language, Christian churches might better know themselves in an ethical and productively critical way.\textsuperscript{168}

The result of other-wise preaching, says McClure, is that the out-there (ontological Being)—which cannot be said or known—speaks. When priority is given to an “other” (who is a subject\textsuperscript{169}), we can overcome our experience of the inadequacy of language and “the complicity of language in potentially violent, oppressive, and self-perpetuating” definitions of self (and faith) which depend on knowing themselves by means of exclusion.\textsuperscript{170} McClure carves out space for an out-there God to actually address humanity when our language, our

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{168} McClure, \textit{Other-wise Preaching}, ix-xi, 1-3. This is the “erasure” cited earlier.
\item \textsuperscript{169} Compare with Florence’s testimonial speech, i.e., words said by a \textit{subject}.
\item \textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 5.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
houses of authority (scripture, tradition, experience, reason), and our boundaries are pried open by “others”. By becoming open to otherness, our houses of authority can be critiqued and made fresh again, capable of bearing the impenetrable, mysterious, out-there Infinity (i.e., God). 171

McClure notes what the social sciences have made us gravely aware of—namely, there is no human (and therefore no linguistic) access to an out-there reality of (God’s) Being. Therefore, says McClure, when the church “turns in” on itself, it entraps theology in its own subjectivity (which it mistakenly objectifies as divinity) and leads to “social closure” and oppression. 172 If there is a referent behind the word “God” and if preaching is to disclose the out-there God, then, he says, it is revealed by paying attention to the encounter between the church’s houses of authority (scripture, tradition, etc.) as they bump up against (and are critiqued yet renewed by) the other, who we cannot know but only encounter as an other. Such a method keeps preaching open to critique as it draws on its memory and tradition. 173

True knowledge (of God) and revelation, is “the one-for-the-other.” 174 McClure implies that this method permits access to an out-there-ness which is not out-there or in-here but beyond-there (i.e., Infinity). 175 An act of vulnerability which is other-than-Being discloses the Infinite Other. “Pure alterity” that is “pre-dialogic” (prior to and above language), in which I, as a subject, am broken open and become a witness to infinity, which

171 The proximity of the other and the glory of infinity that surrounds us ruptures our narratives (testimonial speech) so that they are open and changing. Ibid., 125.
172 Here, McClure’s philosophical underpinnings align with Bourdieu’s practice theory critique of religion. However, rather than giving up on the possibility of God and God-talk, McClure attempts to procure the possibility of God-talk through alternative means. Ibid., 7.
173 Ibid., 106-107, 110.
174 Ibid., 120.
175 Ibid., 124-127.
is beyond all speech and being, is the only epistemologically viable way to see/encounter the Infinite Other (God).

In this way, McClure contends that knowledge is intrinsically ethical rather than ontological. That is, rather than seeking a fundamental, ontological, out-there knowledge or revelation, McClure seeks to find God in and through encounters with others that break open the church’s tendency toward closed and oppressive over-formations of self (identity). McClure, however, does not believe that God is unknowable and ineffable. Ethical knowledge is, for McClure, real knowledge, even though such knowledge is not an objective thing.

2.3.2 Critique of McClure: Exposing and Deconstructing Arbitrariness vs. Constructing What-Is-Possible in the Imagination

McClure’s proposal is a commitment to others, an “openness to the absolute mystery of the other” as other and not as object. A commitment by the preacher to live in proximity with human others involves, among other things, a “disorienting feeling of being under erasure.” McClure contends that this commitment to the other (as subject of their own life), who exists out-there beyond the self (an other subject), cracks open the nutshells of the

---

176 “In other words, I know nothing in my self except that I am a sign to another, and that other is already obliterated, erased, in my knowing. In the purest sense, therefore, witness, although grounded in pure alterity, is a pre-dialogic (not non-dialogic) ethical criterion for truth and ultimate value. It is a passive, passionate signing that reveals an unknowable but signifying infinity.” Ibid., 123.

177 Ibid., 9, 120. It is knowledge that is not knowledge as we typically think of knowledge. It is knowledge as a disposition not as a thing or referent which is known.

178 McClure, Other-wise Preaching, 134.

179 Ibid., 134-135. McClure correlates his notion of “erasure” with Victor Turner’s notion of “liminality.” For Turner, liminality is a mechanism of continuity. It is a space outside the boundaries of the mainstream, but it is finally a transition through chaos back toward the order of the establishment. Liminality is a way of managing change not a way of fostering it as McClure’s proposal seems to suggest. Cf. the contrast between Turner and Bourdieu as I discuss it in my earlier chapter on 1 Corinthians.
closed-circuit of language, which tends to merely reify the subject. By “sealing” their speech to other subjects (so that they are no longer autonomous subjects speaking completely subjective and hegemonic words) one’s preaching can be “absolutely free of the [closed-circuit] discourse situation.”

As a result, preaching can disclose an out-there-ness which is beyond Being and thus reveal what cannot be revealed within the closed-circuit of language (the self-referential and thereby hegemonic “discourse situation”). But is it really possible to transcend the subject given the seemingly infinite ways in which “reality” is arbitrarily constituted through language and practice?—languages and practices which may not refer to anything as much as they disclose the practical logic which generates practice and is then wielded by those with symbolic power within their particular contexts?

And even if it is possible to establish a Being-ness which is more ethical than ontological (which it may indeed be possible to do), what is the means by which a subject opens one’s self to an other that is not the self? For it is at least plausible that exposing the arbitrariness and therefore hegemony of the “discourse situation” does not open the subject beyond one’s self and instead does quite the opposite—that is, it may simply re-instantiate the priority of the self and leave nothing but the self to fill the vacuum of infinite arbitrariness which the “discourse situation” has exposed as being merely symbolic power.

---

181 McClure, *Other-wise Preaching,* 149.
182 Ibid., 100, 120.
184 McClure, *Other-wise Preaching,* 9, 120.
Is it possible that movement, in any direction (but particularly centripetal movement which McClure desires\textsuperscript{186}), is constructed and not just deconstructed?\textsuperscript{187} And could it be that the juxtaposition of images through language (and thus the construction of worlds in the imagination) is a means by which subjects use (and are used by the closed-circuit of) language, for the sake of becoming the kind of subjects who do not sacrifice others at the altar of their own self and (infinite) freedom?\textsuperscript{188}

McClure seems to need access to truth to speak of truth, and, for him, access to truth comes by means of exposing and deconstructing. However, for Buechner, it seems at least possible to construct a world in the imagination by means of language, not in spite of the “discourse situation” exposed by McClure and others, but precisely because of the discourse situation and the arbitrariness of the social order. It is at least plausible that theological constructions by means of language in and for the imagination may be a more effective means to generate (other-ing) movement than that of exposing and deconstructing theological

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 10-14, 18-31, 144, 147.


Action is also key for McClure, but it is not (imaginative) action. That is, it is not showing people in action through words. Instead, it is an act of erasure, an act of hospitality to the other, in light of the glory of Infinity. For McClure, revelation (so to speak) is more embodied than it is spoken, in that, it can be spoken particularly by attention to other bodies.

However, if reality is arbitrary, and if it is altered by means of touching the imagination through representations, then the point of Being-in-Act is not to form or secure Christian identity because the point (of Being-in-Act) is not to establish a referent. It is at least plausible that the point of Being-in-Act is to give the mind an other image by which to re-vision its encounter with others as an ethical one, one in which the subject cares for the other as an infinitely mysterious other.

\textsuperscript{188} Douglas John Hall, citing Paul Tillich, says, “What most Westerners need to be saved from today isn’t dread of death, and it isn’t a crippling sense of guilt…. It’s the gnawing suspicion that humans may be purposeless things, a species just as accidental as all the others—equipped, ironically enough, with all the attributes necessary to purposeful living, but in the end random, arbitrary, and … ‘superfluous.’…When people feel superfluous they are not only unhappy, they are frequently destructive.” Why Christian? For Those on the Edge of Faith, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 47. Cf. Aristotle’s, Nicomachean Ethics.

In light of Greek and Greco-Roman ways of knowing (see chapter on 1 Corinthians) and ways of producing an ethical society, it is at least possible that religion was a contextually-attuned response to an ethical problem. And then one might ask whether religion is an ethical problem (with all the intrinsic power relations it entails) as much as it resolves an ethical problem?
constructions. Granted, theology must, at times, be broken open by the other, but if other-ing movement is generated by constructions in the imagination, then deconstruction would not be the primary basis of a homiletical theory and method.

**Conclusion**

The NH arose as a response to the “discourse situation” first noted by non-homileticians, and it began as a theological response rooted in scripture and transformation by means of language. However, doctrines of revelation were more implicit than explicit in NH theories and methods. By assuming revelation, the NH became susceptible to critiques from the right and the left.

Approaches to scriptural interpretation were surveyed. Some perspectives emphasize the production of an experience in the hearers as the lens through which to read scripture; other perspectives focus on constructive theological readings. A number of contextual approaches focus on the present context that surrounds and shapes human interpretations of texts. They seek to expose and deconstruct power relations inherent in systems, texts and the interpretation of texts.

Next, this chapter explored the relation of language and revelation. Some homileticians connected revelation and metaphor with the imagination; others said law-gospel was “metaphor writ large” and thereby gave a theological structure to metaphor and revelation; others sought to turn experiences into texts by means of testimony.

Finally, perspectives on power relations and revelation were heard. Some place theology within the “real” world of social scientific analysis. Others merely use social
analysis within a more traditional theological frame. And others abdicate pure ontology and instead root epistemology in ethics.

It was suggested that alternatives, which attempt to expose and deconstruct power relations, seem to operate on the same foundations they debunk and rely on models for generating movement that, while complementary, cannot be primary. As a result, it is at least possible that one way forward in the field of homiletics would be by going back to insights from the NH, particularly as those NH insights are situated within an explicit doctrine of revelation.

Some critiques of the NH could be addressed if theology and language are not conflated but exist side by side (without the need to establish a referent). With such a non-foundation “foundation”, one could use a law-gospel structure because it is in and through this theological language (and structure) that God is shown as an acting agent in the world.

God is known where God is seen as being an agent in the world. Revelation “depends” on an acting divine agent. While the means and content are important considerations, they grow out of the primary one, namely, the author or origin of revelation. When God is shown as acting, then God may indeed be experienced as acting. And such imaginative language may be what is most effective in generating movement toward the other. In the final chapter, I will bring together the various theological, linguistic, socio-linguistic, biblical and homiletical threads to evaluate sermons and to make recommendations about hermeneutics and homiletical theory and method.

\footnote{Cf. chapter 1 on Barth.}
Chapter 5

Proclamation as Revelation: Manifestations of Revelation in Preaching

This chapter uses the previous four chapters to suggest markers of revelation in preaching. As Barth’s doctrine of revelation shows, there is no humanly accessible point-of-contact between God and humans. God always remains the subject of God’s self-revelation and never the object of human scrutiny. As Aristotle and Ricoeur demonstrate, the real is seen in act; it is constructed in the imagination by means of re-presentations. The good (and ethics) is always being re-conceived; but movement toward the good (however it is conceived) is generated by means of re-presentations which produce desire for the good represented. The good is relative to the context and the goals of that context; the means are not.¹ Homiletics is a means not a goal.

Paul’s response in 1 Corinthians 12-14 to power contestations over authoritative speech is not to discard tongues (which make an extremely high authoritative claim as a word from God) but to reframe them in the context of other-ing love. The truth claims Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 12-14 are neither more nor less true because they are entrapped in power relations.

My presupposition is that power relations are arbitrary, but they are also inescapable. The truthfulness of truth claims does not depend on whether or not they exist as an autonomous (and verifiable) truth; truth, as an autonomous referent, is inaccessible (if it exists at all). Instead, truth claims are adjudicated based on their desirability (Question #1:  

¹ Aristotle’s practical sciences (Ethics and Politics) are relative to the context; Aristotle’s productive sciences (Rhetoric and Poetics) are a means to the goal constructed by ethics and politics.
are they desirable? That is, do they generate movement toward the good envisioned?) and how “good” they are (Question #2: is the good envisioned a good which the context really wants for itself?).

Regarding the first question, we are asking about the capacity of a sermon (as a means to an end) to generate desire and movement toward an end (e.g., the ethical and political re-arrangements which we believe desirable and ethical—about which the “practical” sciences, as Aristotle called them, are concerned). If a sermon does not generate movement toward some (ethical and political) re-structuring of power, then it fails its test as a truth claim. That is, it is not truthful because it is incapable of generating movement toward its goal or end. In other words, if homiletics is a means (and not an end) and if a sermon fails to generate movement toward an alternative (what-is-possible) ethics and politics (e.g., re-arrangements of power), then it fails this test. That is not to say that the sermon is a failure in and of itself—no one can definitively say one way or the other. It is to say that the sermon was not as good of a means as it could have been. And on this account—does the sermon generate desire (and therefore movement) toward some alternative arrangement or system of power (i.e., political and ethical arrangement)?—sermons can be (humanly) evaluated.

Regarding Christian proclamation, Christian proclamation which generates movement toward a good or goal (as it is constructed within particular contexts) will re-present the world in light of God’s action in Jesus Christ. One of the primary markers then of revelation is when God is seen as acting. For it is when people see things as possible that they come to believe that it is indeed possible. God is seen as acting when God is shown acting in the world. God is shown acting in the world when God is the subject of active verbs

---

which image God’s action. Hearers are moved toward the good re-presented (arbitrarily re-presented as it is) when they see God acting in a way that both is desirable and generates desire for the world built as a result of God’s action (imaged as it is by means of re-presentations). Proclamation is a means of world-building which creates desire for God’s “Kingdom”³ and hope (or belief in what-is-possible) capable of generating an affective movement within the hearers toward others, namely, by adopting a posture of other-ing love.

In the Christian context, God is said to act in Jesus Christ. Christian proclamation then, which is capable of generating movement toward an end/goal or good, will show Jesus Christ acting in a way in which people can see the impossible (re-configuration of power in social and political spheres⁴) being done and thereby becoming possible for them.

Regarding the latter question, a second primary marker of revelation is whether or not the good imaged in proclamation is a good that the context really wants for itself. It is suggested that what counts as “the good” will change and that re-presentations of what God is doing in the world will need to change. Goals, ends and “the good” are contextual, and they are discerned in the practical sciences (as Aristotle called them)—ethics and politics.

“The good” will always be changing because it is discerned by humans. However, based on the first test noted above, revelation (in the context of Christian theology) happens when God is seen acting, and proclamation of the gospel images God acting in the world. As Paul Scott Wilson says, “Homiletics is conservative in terms of its innovation and radical in terms of the gospel.”⁵ That is, as a means to an end, homiletics is conservative in that it re-presents the world using the gospel; however, as a means to an end, homiletics is radical in its re-presentations of the world as it uses the gospel to do so. In other words, we can image God

---

³ I.e., the world in which the goals and outcomes of God’s action in Jesus are achieved.
⁴ And cf. Bourdieu in *The Logic of Practice* and *Language and Symbolic Capital*.
⁵ Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 153.
acting in Jesus Christ in any way we want; or as Barth, constrained as he was by God’s assumption of humanity in the Incarnation, might say: God in God’s freedom can act any way God wants in Jesus Christ.

Good, as a category for adjudication (as I have suggested), is not an ideal, existing independently, against which truth claims can be measured. That paradigm would ultimately be a formalist project with untenable foundations. Good, as I have suggested, is a desired end or outcome—an end or outcome that is considered good within the particular context where it is considered good. It is thus provisional, tentative and relative. To borrow and paraphrase from a legal text, the meaning of good and its application never simply is; it is something to be argued for or with, and not something to be argued from.\(^6\)

However, a “good” or goal is still capable of being measured and critiqued.\(^7\) Indeed, when “the good” is understood as a desired outcome (Aristotelian) and not an autonomous ideal (Platonic), it is inherently open to and must be constantly critiqued. Indeed that is how Western common law systems work—when we don’t like the outcome of a law (or “the good” as it is envisioned in various contexts), we change the law in order to generate the kind of social and political arrangement we want. Neither “the good” nor a “law” exists as an autonomous truth; instead, they are adjudicated based on whether the good (goal, end or outcome) envisioned is a good we really want for ourselves.

---

\(^6\) The author’s actual words as he describes a “postmodern” definition and theory of law are, “The meaning of a law and its application never simply is; it is something to be argued for or with and not something to be argued from. Law is a special kind of activity or game that is defined by rules and roles; one where the nature and effect of those rules and roles are always in play. When properly understood, the critical claim is not that ‘anything goes, but that ‘anything might go.’” Allan C. Hutchinson, *The Law School Book: Succeeding at Law School*, 3rd ed., (Toronto, ON: Irwin Law, 2009), 49.

\(^7\) Indeed, within Aristotle work, it seems like that the practical sciences (ethics and politics) were the measure against which to measure in what direction the productive sciences (rhetoric and poetics) were moving us (or the context).
As such, Christian proclamation will re-present God acting in Jesus Christ toward some end that we (in our current context) believe to be good in this time and place. God is free to act in a different way in the future, and sermons at that time will need to adjust how they re-present God’s action in Jesus Christ. But Christian proclamation (if it is to be Christian proclamation) will continue to re-present the world in light of God’s action in Jesus Christ.

1. Markers of Proclamation; Markers of Revelation

The proposal made here is that revelation depends on proclamation, and proclamation depends on re-presentations because re-presentations generate desire and activate human agency (Aristotle’s productive sciences) toward a constructed ethic (Aristotle’s practical sciences) as those ethics are constantly critiqued and revisioned. In other words, I suggest that homiletics is a means toward an end, and in so far as it is such, then where the sermon does not generate desire or activate the agency (of speakers and hearers) toward an ethical end (critiqued and envisioned by ethical inquiry, namely, the practical sciences) the sermon may be said to not be revelatory.

1.1 Can It Get Us Where We Want to Go? Building a World in the Imagination by Means of Re-presentations

Ethics is constructed; ethical posturings (towards others) are a construct. Even if they produce a better world, a more desirable world, that desire is a constructed one. As such, goals are always changing. Goals or the end (against which Aristotelian logic is adjudicated) is provisional, tenable and relative. The question is not whether preaching names the truth but whether homiletics constructs a kind of world the
hearers find desirable at this given point in time, given what they know or believe about the world (or about “justice”). To adjudicate homiletical theory and method based on objectified ends is an inappropriate standard against which to measure the various theories and methods. Instead, homiletical theory and method, I have argued, can be adjudicated on whether or not the theory and method are capable of generating movement toward particular (provisional and tenable) ethical (and political) goals or ends.

Homiletics does not begin with where we want to go (goals or ends). For Aristotle, where we want to go as a society or an individual (goals or ends) was the subject matter of ethics (and the practical sciences as he called them). Homiletics, I have argued, is a productive science and thus begins with the question, “How do we get where we want to go?” (or, How do we get to the sort of ethical configuration which we envision?). Within the Christian context, the answer is the gospel.

According to Aristotle and Ricoeur, the way to generate movement toward ethics is to produce or construct a world by means of re-presentations or what novelists call world-building. The productive sciences are means to an end; they produce the image they re-present by showing them as being possible (what-is-possible). I have argued that homiletics is a productive science (in the Aristotelian framework) and works in the production of worlds of possibility. It is thus non-foundational; that is, it does not depend on the existence or verifiability of truth or a referent that exists out-there (even if it may be possible to philosophically establish God’s existence\(^8\)). Homiletics is the production of a world by naming God’s action (i.e., grace) in Jesus Christ (i.e., the gospel).

---

\(^8\) McClure seems to need or depend on a philosophical referent for speaking of God in the world. See John S. McClure, Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).
Wilson makes a distinction between world-building (producing or making a world)\textsuperscript{9} and foundational approaches (which seek to know the “truth” about an object of inquiry before saying anything about it) when he differentiates between proclamation and teaching. He says,

Teaching at its best provides what people need to know about who God is…. Moreover, teaching leaves people with a sense of duty…; they are to accept, believe, and integrate it…. Having information about someone is valuable, but it is no substitute for actually meeting the person and hearing that person speak. Proclamation introduces people to God…. [Through proclamation] People hear God saying words like, ‘I love you.’\textsuperscript{10}

Teaching tries to establish the truth of what-is; proclamation tries to show what-is-possible and thus allow people to “hear” God say something to them. Teaching looks for and names verifiable foundations; proclamation creates its own foundations where there are none.

Preaching as proclamation builds narrative worlds by means of re-presentations. Re-presentations show a subject in action. Re-presentations make believe(able) the action so narrated.

As such, preaching that is capable of getting us where we want to go will have a subject with active verbs. In order for a re-presentation to generate desire, it must tap into

\textsuperscript{9} And it is thus a productive hermeneutic. In this regard, it is like reader-response criticism in that it focuses on the subject(ive), rather than evaluating a work on how it is received by readers (i.e., reader-response criticism is not concerned with whether or not the readers desire the world constructed in the narrative and it is not concerned with the ways the work changes the readers but is instead interested in the response of the readers, regardless what their responses may be), a productive hermeneutic evaluates a work on what kind of change it generates within the subjects who hear the work/sermon. A productive hermeneutic would ask, What kind of world (of possibility) does it re-present and produce in the (imaginations of the) hearers/subjects.

Reader response criticism evaluates a work after it has been responded to by its audiences; a productive hermeneutic would evaluate a work (or sermon) before it is delivered to an audience as to what kind of response the work (or sermon) is likely to produce.

For more on the idea of a productive hermeneutic, see my discussion of Aristotle’s distinction between theoretical, practical and productive “sciences” in chapter 2.

Finally, while I note the difference between non-foundational (world-building) and foundational approaches, that is not to say Wilson has a non-foundational approach. Instead, it is to say only that his distinction between teaching and proclamation is consistent with my own distinction between non-foundational (world-building) and foundational approaches.

\textsuperscript{10} Wilson, \textit{Setting Words on Fire}, xi. For more on world-building in \textit{Setting Words on Fire}, see pp. 41, 72, 114, 182, 197.
some desire of the context and also be seen as possible. However, there are some visions of justice (justice might be one example of a “good” within a particular context) that are so large that they may seem impossible; and a sense of impossibility often leads people to feel powerless and therefore paralyzed from acting to generate change. The re-presentation of new possibilities by means of an acting divine agent who is capable of doing the impossible creates the possibility (within the hearers) for change, new-ness, transformation in the self and in the public sphere and thereby activates human agency to work for the (desired) change.

For this reason, Christian sermons that can get us where we want to go will move toward proclamation of the gospel (i.e., of God’s action in Jesus Christ) and thus have God as the subject of active verbs. Examples of theme sentences in which God is the subject of active verbs include the following: God holds on to us; God feeds the world; God finds us; God turns doubters into disciples; God welcomes others. As Wilson has said in class lectures, theme sentences are not what the text says (as though theme sentences purported to be the one right interpretation of the text); rather theme sentences are one way through the text.

When God is the subject of active verbs, then preaching images grace. Grace is God’s action on behalf of the world. Wilson says, proclamation is naming God’s action in the world, which often culminates in putting words in the mouth of God. That is, using first person language for God; as in, “God says to you, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

---

11 These could also be theme sentences. They do not however have to be the theme sentence. These sentences, however, did function as theme sentences in my own sermons.
12 They thus help provide unity and movement within the sermon as a way to generate movement—in the hearers and in the social and political sphere.
Furthermore, when God is the subject of active verbs, then preaching does not have to ask hearers to believe anything. The reason for this is that the hearers see the action in their imaginations when an agent is the subject of active verbs. The re-presentation generates an image in the mind of the hearers that they can see. Re-presentations penetrate the imaginations of the hearers who in turn can “see” what-is-possible; in which case, seeing is believing. By re-presenting the world as a sphere in which God is acting by means of world-building then people can see God acting. Preaching, as I propose, is not about getting people to believe a set of verifiable dogmas, doctrines or creeds. It is helping people see the world as a sphere in which God precedes them and in which God acts with them and for them and so makes possible what was once thought to be impossible.

Using my work to this point, I will examine published sermons. In doing so, I will be looking for the following three components, which I consider important in order for proclamation (and therefore revelation) to occur in sermons:

1. Re-presentations: Show Don’t Tell.\textsuperscript{13}
   - The sermon which re-presents the world will not ask people to believe something, but will simply re-present the world in light of the gospel in such a way as to make believe(able) God as an acting subject in the world.
   - The sermon which re-presents the world will not step outside of the world being built; it will not redirect consciousness to the world behind the text (except to make the re-presentation believable or possible).
   - It will engage primarily in world-building not primarily in providing foundations for its claims nor in deconstruction.
   - Re-presentations are essential for revelation, even “foundational” (in that they create their own foundations).

2. Gospel: Re-presenting the world in light of the gospel.
   - A sermon that employs re-presentations and becomes Christian proclamation will have God as the subject of active verbs.

• This component is essential for Christian proclamation (and thereby Christian revelation).

3. Divine First-Person Statements.

• Sermons that employ re-presentations (showing subjects acting in the world) and name grace (God as the subject acting in the world) build a world in the imagination of the hearers and have the potential to employ divine, first-person statements. That is, once people have seen God acting (through the re-presentation), then they can hear God “speaking” to them. A world is re-presented in which it is so believable that God might act in our world that the hearers can “hear” divine first-person statements (i.e., where the preacher puts words in the mouth of God). For example, after describing God’s action for people in Jesus Christ, the preacher could build toward a divine first-person statement, like “God says, ‘I love you.’” The preacher is the one who says it; but the people “hear” God saying it to them.

• This component is complementary but not necessarily essential as a marker of revelation.

I will be looking for the above listed things in the following sermons. They are markers of revelation, and they serve as a sort of spectrum along which to plot degrees of Christian revelation. First, where preachers employ re-presentations (a subject acting), a world is built in the imagination of the hearers that can be “seen” by the hearers. Second, where preachers preach grace (God acting), people “see” God acting. Third, where preachers make divine first-person statements (God says, “I love you”), people “hear” God speaking to them.¹⁴

The thesis statement of this work is: where people see God acting, God reveals God’s self. And as I have attempted to show, revelation thus depends on showing God acting by means of re-presentations. On the linchpin of proclaiming God’s action in Jesus, I now look at published sermons. I chose the sermons below in an attempt to hear a number of different

---

¹⁴ It is probably not too much of a stretch to suggest that each one depends upon the earlier one (number two depends on number one, etc.). But it may be possible (even if not preferable) to skip number one and start at number two. However, number three (divine first-person statements) definitely depends on number two (God acting in Jesus, i.e., the gospel). As I have said, world-building means creating foundations where there were none.
voices from different contexts. Seven sermons are examined. Regarding gender, there are five men and two women; regarding denominational affiliation, there is one Presbyterian (Frederick Buechner), one United Church of Canada (Paul Scott Wilson), one from the American Baptist Churches USA (Henry Mitchell), one Disciple’s of Christ (Fred Craddock), one Pentecostal (Claudette Anderson Copeland), one Methodist (José Míguez-Bonino), and one United Church of Christ (Christine Smith). Three countries (Argentina, Canada, and the United States) and two continents (North and South America) are represented. The ethnicities include the following: two African-Americans, one Hispanic, and four Caucasians.

2. Proclaiming the Gospel: Re-presentations and Revelation in Published Sermons

2.1 Frederick Buechner’s Sermon: “The Road to Emmaus”

Frederick Buechner is an ordained Presbyterian minister from New York City and a prolific fiction writer, whose work has been nominated for a Pulitzer prize. In his sermon, “The Road to Emmaus,”¹⁵ Frederick Buechner says we have all gone to Emmaus with the two disciples; “Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred…. Emmaus is where we go, where these two [disciples] went, to try to forget about Jesus and the great failure of his life.”¹⁶ In this instance, and throughout the sermon, Buechner never asks us to believe something. He is not simply communicating information. Instead, he tells the story of Luke 24:13-35 in a way that makes it feel believable. He does this by going back and forth between the world of the text and our world, making seamless, narrative re-presentations.

¹⁶ Ibid., 85.
The sermon does not interrupt the world being built through the language of the sermon by redirecting consciousness to the world behind the text. Where historical aspects are raised, Buechner moves back into our world so that there is (narrative-like\textsuperscript{17}) movement. He says of Emmaus, “They [the two disciples] went to Emmaus. And where was Emmaus and why did they go there? It was no place in particular really, and the only reason that they went there was that it was some seven miles distant from a situation that had become unbearable.”\textsuperscript{18} Notice that Buechner does not just tell the audience about Emmaus; he does not abstract the details of its geographical and political importance nor its distance from Jerusalem. Instead, he weaves these details into his re-presentation of the present in light of the world of the text.

Regarding the question of the proclamation of God’s action in Jesus Christ, Buechner concludes this sermon saying,

The greatest miracle that Christianity has to proclaim is that the love that suffered agonies on that hill outside the city walls was the love of God himself… And for us the meaning of that love is that \textit{we can now raise our own shrill voices} from the hills of our own suffering and say some such words as these: There is little that we can point to in our lives as deserving anything but God’s wrath. Our best moments have been mostly grotesque parodies…. But there is something to which we can point. Not anything that we ever did or were, but something that was done for us by another. Not our own lives, but the life of one who died on our behalf and yet is still alive. This is our only glory and our only hope.\textsuperscript{19}

Even though Buechner says, “something was done for us by another”, God is still not the subject of that sentence (which is as close as the conclusion gets to making God the subject of a sentence).\textsuperscript{20} God is rarely the subject of active verbs in this sermon. So while the

\textsuperscript{17} See Ronald J. Allen’s distinction between narrative and narrative-like. Fred Craddock calls for movement as a means to the imagination in \textit{As One Without Authority}.
\textsuperscript{18} Buechner, “The Road to Emmaus,” 84-85.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 89, italics mine.
\textsuperscript{20} Where God might be a subject in this excerpt, it is in the passive voice. As such, those statements do not re-present God acting in the world.
scriptural text is deemed believable as it relates to the hearers’ expectations (ethos), beliefs (logos) and feelings (pathos), God as an acting agent in the world is not “seen” as believable because it is rarely re-presented in the sermon. Buechner says that God acted, but he does not re-present God’s action. While he did world-building around the text (the story within scripture), he did not do world-building in regards to the action of God. As such, people do not see God acting in their imaginations, and grace (God’s action) is not bestowed on the hearers.21

While the sermon builds a world through language, it does not build a world in which God can be seen as acting in the world. Because God is not a primary actor in the sermon (i.e., re-presenting God in act), the sermon does not build to a divine first-person statement, in which the preacher puts words in God’s mouth (God says, “I love you”). In the end, Buechner’s message makes (having) faith believable but not God’s action in the present believable. Instead, Buechner seems to place a large degree of responsibility on the hearers to act. He says, “we can now raise our own shrill voices.”

While I do believe that preaching should encourage human freedom and thus the capacity to act as an agent, I do not believe that human freedom and agency is activated by casting the hearers’ on their own ability. In the theory of the preceding chapters, a component of my argument is that human agency is released by seeing (by means of re-presentations) new, expanded possibilities for human choice and living, which are created by (imagining) an acting divine agent in the world (grace).

I am sympathetic to Buechner’s theory (as I discussed it in chapter 4) in which revelation (the world in which God is an acting agent) seems to exist in its own closed-circuit alongside of our world as it is described by the social sciences, and I am sympathetic to

21 Again, regardless of whether or not, grace (itself) actually exists (out-there).
Buechner’s practice of world-building in his sermons. However, it seems a lack of making God the subject of active verbs (and subsequently, the lack of divine first person discourse) results in this particular sermon not quite becoming proclamation and thereby releasing the potential of re-presentations to activate human agency.

2.2 Paul Scott Wilson’s Sermon: “Futile Acts of Faith”

Paul Scott Wilson is ordained in the United Church of Canada and teaches homiletics at Emmanuel College in Toronto. In his sermon, “Futile Acts of Faith,“22 on John 12:1-8, Wilson begins the sermons using active verbs which re-present the text in action. He says, “Mary walked around the edge of her dining room…. Mary paused to study the faces in the candlelight….“ He proceeds to tell the story of how Mary found the alabaster box of nard; he even names the place from whence it comes (“India”) and how the box made it to Jerusalem (“by camel over the space of months”). Having built a narrative world, Wilson can now put words in the mouth of the merchant who sells Mary the box: “‘It’s what royalty use,’ the merchant laughed. ‘Costs a year’s wage.’”23 Hearers can begin to “see” Mary’s affection for Jesus, her desire to give Jesus a gift “that would be appropriate thanks to Jesus” for raising Lazarus, and hearers begin to feel how valuable this nard was.24 The story, whether it is factually or historically true, is believable (possible) because Wilson’s re-presentation of it makes it believable.

---

23 Ibid., 82.
24 Ibid., 83. See Wilson does not get caught up in proving why Mary does what she did. Interpreters could debate this. Instead, he picks one reason why it is possible she may want to do this act and re-presents the text (John 12:1-8) in light of this motivation. This is the difference between constructing and deconstructing in sermons; this is the difference between preaching using re-presentations and preaching using historical critical methods.
Wilson proceeds to our world. He says, “Would that our own ministries could be so extravagant, so spontaneous, so beautiful, so memorable.”25 But he notes, “Perhaps we are aware how little difference in this world we can make to the suffering of others.”26 Our efforts are often “too little, too late.” Yet, in Wilson’s re-presentation of present action, he does not stop at human agency to act on behalf of the oppressed. Instead, he moves to re-present the world in light of what God (might be) doing in the world. In his last sentence on “trouble”, he prepares us to receive “grace”, saying, “Or perhaps we are afraid to trust that God might make something of whatever small offerings of justice and kindness we can offer to others.”27

Mary’s gesture was a “waste” by most measures but so also was Jesus’ own death. “By the power of this futile gesture, this wasted life, this stupid deed, this extravagant act of love, you and I have been plucked from death, restored to life.”28 God has acted on our behalf to pluck us from death and restore life.

However, in this particular sermon, God is rarely the subject of active verbs, and there are no divine first-person statements. Of course, not every sermon has to build to a grand divine first-person statement. However, it does seem very important that God be the subject of active verbs in the section on “grace” (Grace in the Text; and Grace in our world). Yet, in his conclusion, Wilson focuses on the hearers. Directed to seminarians preparing for ministry, Wilson asks, “Is your act futile? It may seem so, especially when you are in the

---

25 Ibid., 83.
26 Ibid., 84.
27 Ibid., 84.
28 Ibid., 85.
midst of it. And yet yours is an extravagant act, offering your life to God and your neighbor. It has the aroma of Christ and the power of God’s love.”

Wilson constructs a narrative world by re-presenting people in action. He shows rather than tells. Yet, it is possible that more time in the sermon could have been devoted to re-presenting God’s action in the world and that the conclusion could have built toward God’s action rather than returning to focus on human action.

Wilson’s return to human action, however, is not a commandment to do something but is an “invitation” to “encounter the risen Christ in the power of a new era begun even in the preaching of the gospel.” In this sense, Wilson sees it as an extension of grace—namely, “Calvin’s third use of the law as an excitation to obedience,” where “mission itself is transformed from an onerous, even impossible, task” to something possible because of “Jesus’ death on the cross.” Wilson, therefore, returns to human action in this sermon but, for him (and Calvin and John Wesley) it is human action “transformed by the new creation.” Wilson’s hope is that “presented in this light, people ideally reach for their ministry, want it, need it as the essential response to God. Response becomes a delight and privilege.” Because of God’s action in Christ, humans can act “with hope” (italics mine) that their actions will result in transformation (e.g., social injustice, etc.).

My proposal in this thesis is that human agency and action is produced (i.e., Aristotle’s productive sciences) by showing something that is desirable (e.g., some good—ethics, mission) as being possible. And that possibility (in the imaginations of the hearers) happens by showing something as having already happened, showing the hearers that someone else has already done it—that is, by re-presenting an acting subject in the world (in

---

29 Ibid., 86.
this case, God acting in Jesus Christ). That is, people see someone else do it before they believe they can do it. What is needed therefore, I suggest, is not as much for people to be invited into a ministry that could possibly be efficacious (even as it has been transformed by the action of God in Christ) but that people see places where action has already resulted in transformation.

So for example, rather than saying it is possible that the hearers’ acts may not be futile (that divine action may transform human action into something miraculous), show the hearers where a subject has acted (whether divine or human action) in a way where their actions were actually (i.e., narrative actuality) not futile.31

2.3 Henry Mitchell’s Sermon: “Living Epistles”

Henry Mitchell is an African-American, ordained in the American Baptist Churches USA. Mitchell preached a sermon entitled, “Living Epistles,” on 2 Corinthians 3:1-4.32 He employs a number of engaging, contemporary data and stories which generate interest. These include the following: a market analysis to understand mainline decline; a story about his own failure; the struggle of Roberta Bondi to discover her value as a woman; aspects of Harry Emerson Foskick’s preaching; and a gripping piece from Adam Clayton Powell, Sr.. While there are gripping stories that each contribute to the main theme (there is unity), Mitchell neither re-presents the action of the text nor re-presents the present in such a way that hearers/readers can see the action happening. We feel things; we hear stories; but a (narrative) world is not built in the imagination.

31 My suggestion is that people believe something is possible because they believe someone else has done it already not because someone tells them it is possible. For social scientific basis, see chapter two and the first section of chapter three. For a theological basis, cf. Barth’s use of “in concreto” in Church Dogmatics, 1.2 and my discussion of Barth as a theologian of the imagination in section three of chapter one.

However, in the conclusion, Mitchell does what others have not done, which is name God as an acting agent in the world. And while he does so in the form of a poem, Mitchell even employs divine first-person statements. He says,

God called Jesus and used Jesus also as a living epistle, the very Word of God Incarnate. Advent season was drawing near, and I pondered how I might celebrate its meaning. I remembered James Weldon Johnson’s sermon-poem, ‘The Creation.’ Then I thought of a sermon-poem, and I entitled it ‘The Incarnation.’ With a little help from Zora Neal Hurston, this is what it says:

And God convened the Hosts of Heaven
In solemn assembly and said,
I done made me a world,
And I done made me some women and men,
But I’m lonely still.

These people don’t love me like I planned.
I made them in my own image;
And I gave them free will,
But they done run off with it.

I gave them powerful patriarchs,
And passionate prophets,
And they almost killed Elijah,
And threw Jeremiah down a well.

I gave them judicious judges,
But they had to have a king.
Solomon built me a temple, and
Then ran off chasing after other gods.

Then from the majestic mercy seat
God paused, and with hand-held head
And furrowed brow, God toiled
And God thought and God toiled.

The angels hung their harps on the willow tree.
Ev’ry eye ‘neath heaven’s canopy
Peered up to gaze upon the throne.

Then after just about one eternity,
God rose and severed the silence.
The energy of sacrifice
penetrated the universe, and then

the Great I Am spoke.
God decreed, I’ll send my Son,
Birthed by a maiden poor,
To be my Word made plain,
A loving letter sent from me.

Ol’ Gabriel went to bring the news
To Mary, afraid and young,
But when she seen the wonder unfold,
She rejoiced and sang,
My soul doth magnify the Lord.

God waited and watched, and watched and waited.
And when sweet little Jesus boy was born,
God, the mighty God, God, the holy God,
God, the loving God, rejoiced.

Then the choir began a Hallelujah chorus
That resounded throughout the precincts of heaven.
Hallelujah, Forever and Ever!
and Ever and Ever, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!
HAL-LE-LU-JAH!! Amen.”

Mitchell’s poem is a powerful statement of God’s action, and he even uses divine first-person statements. In so doing, he distinguishes his preaching from that of many others. However, it is possible that Mitchell’s preaching could have been more effective at re-presenting a world (and thereby penetrating the imagination of the hearers) had he removed the references to self, “I pondered…. I remembered…. I thought…. I entitled it…” Such references to himself, distract from building a world in which people can see God as acting (in their imaginations). Furthermore, the sermon may have been more productive if he had just preached the poem, rather than telling us he was reading a poem, especially because he drew attention to the fact that he wrote it. As a preacher, in other words, my suggestion is to produce the world (you are trying to produce) rather than telling the hearers that you are producing it.

33 Ibid., 20-21.
2.4 Fred Craddock’s Sermon: “Doxology”

Fred Craddock is ordained in the Disciples of Christ and is the Bandy Distinguished Professor of Preaching and New Testament, Emeritus, at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, Georgia. Craddock begins his sermon, “Doxology,” with a re-presentation of his own life.34

In the fall of the year, even after the days grow short and the air crisp, I still go out on the patio alone at the close of the day…. But this particular evening was different. I sat there remembering, trying to understand the painful distance between the day as I planned it and the day as it had been.35

He uses first-person language like Mitchell, but unlike Mitchell, Craddock does not tell us why he did what he did. Instead, he recounts what he did. That is, he describes his actions; he doesn’t explain them. Re-presentations describe actions, whereas explanations distract from constructing a believable world in the imagination of the hearers. In this sermon, Craddock does the former; in the sermon above, Mitchell seems to do the latter—i.e., use first-person language to explain the proclamation he is about to do.

Furthermore, Craddock’s use of first-person language draws attention to the story and to the action; whereas Mitchell’s use of first-person language draws attention to himself, the preacher. The former use of first-person language is productive (i.e., produces a world); the latter is not.

Craddock continues,

It was this evening on which the Idea came to me…And it returned the next evening….. The following evening I spent more time playing with the Idea and feeding it. Needless to say, I grew attached to the Idea before long, and then I had the fear that it belonged to one of the neighbors and that I would not be able to keep it. I went to the neighbors.

‘Is this your Idea?’

‘No, it isn’t our Idea.’
I claimed it for myself and exercised an owner’s prerogative by giving it a name. I named it Doxology.  

Craddock makes an Idea (Doxology) a character in the story. Doxology is not an abstract theological category or even just an idea or object anymore; instead Craddock has turned it into a subject. In this way, people can see it and touch it in their imaginations. Rather than tell us about a theological category, rather than explain it to us, he concretizes it by showing it in action. This is exactly what re-presentations do; they produce a world by showing a subject acting in the world.

Obviously, doxology does not exist as an acting subject in the world, but because Craddock has re-presented it as a subject/agent, it can be seen as an acting subject in the world within the imagination of the hearers. The world built by the acting subject produces a world in and for the hearers in such a way as to activate their own agency.

And in the case of this sermon, the re-presentation activates the hearers’ agency to choose to invite praise and gratitude into their own places of pain and suffering (not just into the happy and joyful places of life). Craddock says, Doxology belongs at his family dinner table because “supper is a good time and pleasant.” And “There is no question: Doxology belongs on a vacation.” But Craddock (or the first-person speaker within the sermon) questions whether Doxology is necessary at seminary; he says, “We do not need Doxology when we are heavily engaged in theology.”

Yet his categories for where we might expect to find Doxology acting in the world are challenged in group discussion. He says,

---

36 Ibid., 132.
37 Ibid., 132, 133.
38 Ibid., 133.
The class soon discovered, however, that in this weightiest and most influential of all Paul’s letters [Romans], the argument was often interrupted by Doxology. Early in the letter, in the midst of a discussion of the spiritual state of all those who live out their lives without Bible or knowledge of Christ, Paul insets a burst of praise to the ‘Creator who is blessed forever. Amen….

Notice, here, Craddock does indeed treat historical and theological background information. Instead of telling us about them; instead, of treating them as background or contextual information; he inserts them into the action, into his re-presentation of the world. Rather than tell us the context of Paul’s letter, Craddock inserts the historical context into his re-presentation. He uses the context (theological understandings of Romans in relation to the Pauline corpus) in building his own world (or context). There is a two-fold benefit here. First, the hearers learn something about the letter of Romans (Paul injects praise into theological treatise); and second, Doxology is seen as an acting agent whose scope of activity extends even into the classroom (we need to insert praise into even our theological work). Craddock says, “Paul is aware that Doxology is most appropriate to his task as a theologian. Theology begins with words not about God but to God.”

Yet, Craddock is not only teaching his hearers about theology; and he is not only challenging them to incorporate worship into every part of their lives; but he is also re-presenting a world in which worship is absolutely essential for life. He says,

Once in a while we have a seminarian who gives it up. Not suddenly but slowly; zeal cools, faith weakens, appetite for Christian enterprises disappears, the springs dry up, the soul is parched…. What happened?…. He lost his Doxology, and died…. It was from the class on Romans that I was called to the phone. My oldest brother had just died. Heart attack. When stunned and hurt, get real busy to avoid thought. Call the wife. Get the kids out of school Arrange for a colleague to take my classes. Cancel a speaking engagement. And, oh yes, stop the milk, the paper, the mail; have someone feed the dog. Who can take my Sunday school class? Service the car. ‘I think I packed the clothes we need,’ the wife said as we threw luggage and our bodies into the car. All night we drove…. When we drew near the town and the house, I searched

39 Ibid., 134.
my mind for a word, a first word to the widow. He was my brother, but he was her husband. I was still searching when we pulled into the driveway. She came out to meet us, and as I opened the car door, still without that word, she broke the silence: ‘I hope you brought Doxology.’

Doxology?

No, I had not. I had not even thought of Doxology since the phone call.

But the truth is now clear: If we ever lose our Doxology, we might as well be dead. 40

The result is that hearers’ agency is activated to choose to worship God in and through the pleasant and difficult times of life. A possible theme sentence could have been, praise sustains life. Such a re-presentation does not ask the hearers to make a decision to accept or reject an autonomous treatise. Regardless of whether or not anything Craddock says is verifiably factual, the world he has created by means of re-presentations (subjects acting in the world in believable ways) opens up the possibility (what-is-possible) for the hearers to live into the world Craddock has re-presented—thereby liberating their own agency to choose this new possibility for living in the world.

Craddock employs re-presentations (doxology is an acting agent in the world—he even makes it a proper noun by capitalizing it throughout the sermon), but Craddock does not re-present God—i.e., God is rarely an acting subject in this sermon. So while the hearers will feel the necessity to worship God, they may not see what God does to free their agency to worship God. In other words, one might ask, in what ways does God’s action provide a safe space in which people can take the risk of living out of gratitude and worship when life feels like its falling apart? In Craddock’s sermon, people may be liberated to worship (liberated to practice religion) by means of Craddock’s sermon, but people (as subjects in the world) may not be liberated by means of worshipping God (liberated by means of religion to act in the

40 Ibid., 135-136.
world in a new, alternative way). Proclaiming God’s action liberates human agency to desire and seek what-is-possible not just to practice more religion.

As such, while Craddock’s sermon is incredibly moving (the interior feelings of the hearers), one might wonder about its capacity to generate movement in the public sphere. Regardless, Craddock has showed us appropriate uses of first-person discourse (in regards to the preacher as the “I” in the sermon) and employed re-presentations beautifully. The sermon could have been even more sensational had the world the sermon built moved from a human “I” and a human action (doxology) to a divine “I” and divine action.

2.5 Claudette Anderson Copeland’s Sermon: “Tamar’s Torn Robe”

Claudette Anderson Copeland is an African-American, Pentecostal minister from San Antonio, Texas. She opens her sermon, entitled “Tamar’s Torn Robe,” drawing attention to family life.  

She says, “Christian life calls us to make decisions. But life sometimes has already made some decisions for us. The issue of family life, and its impact upon a woman’s physical, emotional, and spiritual health, is one of these areas. Sometimes decisions have already been made for us…” particularly in cases of abuse.

“Persons are about as healthy as the families we come from…. God knew the problems of first families, the problems of Adam and Eve, or the problems of you ‘mama and daddy.’ That is why we are invited into the family of God; why we need a new family…” She continues by elaborating on the pain inflicted on women by their families of origin and how such past situations “pollute” their present experience. She says, “Our robes have been torn. Our beauty has been spoiled. Our souls have been bruised.”

---


42 Ibid., 113.
In search of “deep and permanent healing,” she invites the hearers to “participate in…[their] own redemption” by considering the text, 2 Samuel 13. The remainder of the sermon consists of five deductive points, named from the text with applications made to present women (whose experience she has named as being “torn”, “spoiled” or “bruised”) to empower them to “make new decisions about…[their] own redemption.”

Her first point is “the created intention.” Copeland says, Tamar was the daughter of King David, and therefore, “she owns a position by relationship and by privilege.” These two sentences sum up her exposition of the text; she does not dig deep for historical facts. Instead, she uses this piece (Tamar as the daughter’s king) to make a point about Tamar’s identity and rights. It even seems that she ignores familial relationships within an ancient near eastern society and reads into the text more recent (Disney?) understandings of Kings and princesses. And while some might lament that she engages in eisegesis; she does however move to address what she perceives as the concerns/needs of her hearers. She says, “Your present trouble will make you forget God’s original intention for your life.” And in the midst of this so-named situation, she declares, “God intends women to live fully and well.”

By reading into the text her modern concerns about women’s self-understanding without paying attention to the historical context, she risks having her point rejected by some hearers, particularly those who assume there is a “real” world “behind the text” waiting to be found. However, many will accept her “exposition” of the text and see themselves in the situation so named by Copeland. Furthermore, she makes a bold move by making God the subject of an active verb. She takes a leap and constructs a world by naming God’s intention for women. As a result, those who can accept her lack of exposition and those who can

43 Ibid., 114-118, 113.
identify with her imagery (of being a princess—and many women today are bombarded with this self-identification in society), one could expect her preaching on this point to touch their imaginations.

However, one might challenge the type of image she re-presents (i.e., you are God’s princess) as tapping into a dominant discourse that our context would likely find problematic and therefore generating movement (with her re-presentation) toward an undesirable goal. In other words, while her sermon addresses a certain kind of person (women who believe they are princesses) and while for those kinds of persons her proclamation of God’s action would touch their imaginations and generate movement/change, we might reject where she is taking the hearers. In other words, present, Western, educated contexts might say that the world Copeland re-presents is not “good” because of what we know/believe about the patriarchy and misogyny lurking beneath such images of women.

Copeland could be applauded for making something up out of the text and thereby naming God’s action in the world. However, in many contexts of Western society, her re-presentations could face rejection from hearers for at least two reasons. First, those expecting to hear what the text is “actually” saying might find her treatment of the text too superficial. Second, her notion of good (her goal or end) would not likely stand up to many women’s self-understanding in many contexts of Western society.

Her four remaining points (#2-5) are contemporary issues tangentially connected to and read-into the text: (2) “the collusion of men”; (3) “the confusion between love and lust”; (4) “the convenience”; and (5) “the cry and the consequence.” Each point is derived from the text about as much as the first one (“created intention”), but she makes a strong appeal in each of her points to perceived challenges in women’s self-identity (e.g., love vs. lust in
point three; and guilt vs. shame in point five). Furthermore, within these points, there is little
in the way of God’s action re-presented. Instead, in points 2-4, she calls on her audience to
make choices to act differently. She tells her listeners what they themselves need to do: “We
must remind our daughters to watch out for a certain kind of man”; and “Be present to your
daughters and sons.”

Yet in her final point, she juxtaposes human agency with God’s action. She calls on
women to name the violence done to them, to speak up but then proclaims what God does
(how God acts) in conjunction with human agency. She says,

Cry until a thousand poison rivers empty out. God is coming!
Cry until the rage gives way. God is listening.
Cry in prayer. God is about to restore.
Cry in therapy. God is sending help.
Cry at the altar. God will come with arms and a mighty embrace.
Cry until the confrontation arises. God will walk with you into a
fearful past.
Cry until the truth makes you stronger than all your violators. Silence
has protected the guilty too long.
Cry until you know the ear of the Lord has inclined toward you.
Cry out…there will be an answer. A healing answer…. There will be
someone to hear, someone to protect, someone to recover you of your
affliction.

The refrain she uses likely produced an embodied response from her hearers.

This closing could have been more efficacious in touching the hearers’
imaginations if her verbs were in the active voice rather than the passive. But it is a
moving refrain, and it brings attention to God’s action in concert with human agency.
And yet, in spite of incorporating grace in point five, her conclusion reverts back to
“trouble.” She casts the hearers on their own resources when she concludes, “Put on

44 Ibid., 115, 117.
46 Much like in Pentecostalism. E.g, maybe shouts of “Amen” or people lifting their hands—though
this would depend on both how the message is delivered by Copeland and the presuppositions of the church and
its people in which this sermon was delivered
the garment of praise…. Try the knob on Absalom’s door; leave your despair…. Pain is not your permanent address! Start walking! Amen.”

2.6 José Míguez-Bonino’s Sermon: “Much Will Be Required”

José Míguez-Bonino was a Hispanic liberation theologian and member of the Methodist Church from Argentina. In his homily, “Much Will Be Required,” Bonino preaches from the second half of one verse, Luke 12:48b. In the sermon, he exerts the text phrase by phrase.

He asks, Who are those to whom much has been given? He lists a variety of statistics relating to disparities in the allocation of the world’s resources. And he answers his question, saying, those who have much were not “given” anything; instead, they took it. Nevertheless, he concedes, “the gospel does not seem to be as concerned about how people got what they have as about what they are doing with it in the present and will do with it in the future.”

And in the present, “much will be required” of those who have much. Here, he employs a string of interrogatives aimed at the wealthy, “Will they have to account for the lives of the peasants who were left landless and had to migrate to the cities, there to live in overcrowding and to die in crime? Will they have to account for the hunger of two-thirds of humankind, for the children with atrophied brains due to undernourishment in their early years?”

However, he inculcates the church for its complicity in the injustice. He says,

But what about the responsibility of a church that hides the truth from those who ‘have much?’” It pats them on the back, goes with them to their celebrations, shows gratitude for their little presents, but it never tells them clearly that ‘much will be required’ of them. And thus, instead of leading them

---

47 Ibid., 118.
49 Ibid., 15.
along the path of salvation, the church makes the path to damnation sweet and agreeable to them.\textsuperscript{50}

The church, he says, has also been given much. They have been given the knowledge of the message of God and thus “the law of justice, the word of hope” to be announced.\textsuperscript{51} The church will be held accountable for how they use this knowledge and whether or not they proclaim the message of God’s justice to the wealthy. He says,

Most of the time we turn it [the message of the gospel we have been given] into a bland food with no flavor or nourishment. We proclaim to the rich a forgiveness without repentance and, therefore, without joy or hope. To the poor we proclaim a kingdom without struggle and, therefore, a call to apathy and a belittling of the gifts of God.\textsuperscript{52}

He concludes by celebrating those who are beginning “to respond to the requirement, to make that which has been entrusted to them bear fruit:… bishops who endanger their prestige and their acceptance by the authorities in order to stand for truth and right and to defend the lives of the persecuted.”\textsuperscript{53} Here he places the responsibility on Christians to speak up and thereby to make their message “bear fruit.” Not until the last clause of the last sentence do we hear of God’s action. There, he says, “And therefore those Christians who simply set out with alms to the needy, ‘because they had received by grace,’ now find themselves sharing their very lives and even surrendering them as another life, that of Jesus Christ, who was surrendered for them.”\textsuperscript{54} When Bonino finally does name God’s action, it is found in a dependent clause and in the passive voice.

Bonino gives a timely critique of the inequalities of our world. Bonino produces within the listeners a grief (even a lament) for the present circumstances of so many and the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 16.
  \item \textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 16.
  \item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 16.
  \item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 17.
\end{itemize}
complicity of Christians in these unjust systems. But in the end, one might ask whether the naming of injustice is enough in itself to produce movement within the hearers—both in their way of life and in their speech? Instead, it is possible that one might feel overwhelmed by the seemingly impossible task of turning an entire global system—entrenched economically, socially, politically—on its head. So while the sermon paints a vivid image of injustice, the sermon does not paint a vivid image of hope, an image where that which is (systemically) impossible (transformation of social, economic and political systems) now feels possible.

In addition, while the sermon seems to carry a unified theme throughout (albeit a theme of trouble rather than grace), it uses a lot of questions. Of the fifty sentences that comprise this homily, nineteen of them are questions; that is almost 40 percent! A well placed question can startle hearers and shake up uncritical assumptions. But with too many questions, an image will not be formed in the imagination of the hearers because questions pull the hearers attention out of the world being built by re-presentations. Indeed, while an important and timely message, Bonino never gets to proclamation and thus to the engine that generates the ethical movement he desires to see happen.

2.7 Christine M. Smith’s Sermon: “Resisting the Powers of Death”

Christine Smith is a feminist theologian and professor of preaching. She uses Isaiah 58:5-14 as her scriptural text. She opens with a poem from Salvadoran poet, Roque Dalton, and says that he was a man “in love with life” as evidenced by his struggle “for love, landscape, bread…and was willing to face them [oppression and death] and resist them.” Citing Isaiah and Dalton, Smith says, if one loves life, they will love justice. She exhorts her

---


56 Ibid., 168.
hearers, Isaiah “would challenge you to resist the powers of death”; and Isaiah “longs for his beloved community of faith to resist the powers of death in ways that it has not yet imagined, and he confronts the people with what will be required of them if they are to be God’s agents of justice and resistance.” Early in the sermon, Smith describes trouble (injustice) and employs a passive voice (Isaiah would tell you to…) in order to deliver “indicting words that are intended to remind” the Israelites (and her hearers) that “fasting is never enough” but “that they must move their feet, their bodies, and their resources toward those who are most oppressed.”

Smith does not re-present the trouble. That is, she does not show injustice in action. What she does do is urge her hearers to action on behalf of justice for the oppressed. In order for her approach to generate movement in her hearers, she must assume the following: (1) that her hearers already believe they live in a world of injustice; and (2) that by leveling a (biblical?) indictment upon her hearers they will move their feet, bodies and resources to correct it (in whatever way she imagines the “correction” to be).

Smith acknowledges that the task is “excruciatingly hard.” Yet regardless of how hard it is, this task of facing and resisting injustices is our “calling” as God’s people. “We who believe in God cannot rest. We must resist.” So, if a hearer either is not a follower of this God or is not convinced of systemic injustice, there is little in the sermon thus far to move them to change (much less to act for her and Isaiah’s vision of resistance, a vision to which she attaches God’s name). The one positive aspect she weaves throughout this section is connecting justice and life. However, while the content (life requires justice, and justice

---

57 Ibid., 168-169.
58 Ibid., 169, italics hers.
produces life) is good, the means she employs to generate movement may not be the most effective.

Next, she names present ministries in which her hearers are engaged and praises them as contemporary examples of Christian dissent which expresses, Smith suggests, their solidarity with Isaiah and with the church’s divine calling. Examples of Christian dissent “in the real lives of people” include: a prison-ministry, ministry with children at a local middle school, the local church’s support of the LGBT community, advocacy on behalf of those living with HIV and AIDS, and the delegations they have sent to Mexico.59

She then reflects on the “importance of tending community” and tells an emotional story about a young couple who lost their infant child and the community that gathered around them. She says, “This was the church at its finest…. And Isaiah’s promise was so true, for God satisfied our needs in a parched place that seemed unbearable, made us strong enough to endure what seemed so crushing, and enabled our community to be like a spring whose waters never failed.”60 Here, she does make God the subject of an independent clause. Her personal story of tending community is no longer a human act (nor is it an indictment against the hearers which calls for their action); instead, this one clause makes the whole paragraph a re-presentation of grace that is both persuasive—in that the benefits of tending community are set before the hearers’ eyes (especially for those who do not share her assumptions or beliefs)—and efficacious—in that the re-presentation of grace is capable of activating the hearers’ own agency to tend their own community.

After this re-presentation of God’s action, she returns to exhorting her hearers to act themselves, saying that their actions may “be the living embodiment” of God’s actions of

59 Ibid., 170.
60 Ibid., 172.
tending community. Rather than re-present God’s ongoing action through their actions, she returns to challenging and prodding them to do something about situations of injustice. In this way, she neither employs re-presentations nor makes God the subject of those re-presentations (i.e., she doesn’t name grace). In the end, the responsibility to act and the possibility of transformation rests on the shoulders of the hearers. Again, my point throughout has been—that while the truth of the matter may indeed be that the responsibility for action and the possibility for transformation lies with human agents—re-presenting the world in light of God’s action activates human agency by helping hearers believe that change and transformation is possible (and not futile). 61

Finally, she turns from the local community to the larger world. She starts to tell, what could be, a moving story. But she inserts herself into it. She says “I see Carmen, who lived in the barrio of La Esperanza for twenty-three years. I see her blood boiling… I see the women she works with… I can hear her saying…” 62 By making herself the subject of sentences about Carmen, Smith may “see” Carmen acting but Smith’s hearers cannot. 63

The last six paragraphs implore the hearers to break yokes and set the oppressed free, to resist injustice and so tend community and tend the world. The hearers are left with a large responsibility to act and achieve transformation against injustice in the world. But in the last six paragraphs, God is not named, except in the very end of the last sentence. And the dearth of God (as an acting agent in the world) in the last six paragraphs of the sermon is matched by an equally anemic action credited to God in the last sentence. It reads, “The heights of the

---

61 As discussed with Aristotle and Ricoeur, the what-is-possible is more efficacious and more “true” than what-actually-is.
62 Ibid., 174.
63 Smith does the same thing with the next four examples of people “tending community…tending the world”—about Calixta, Pastor Diego, Blanca and Sister Ana Marie Noth. She says, “I hear the voice of Calixta…..” And “I hear Pastor Diego…..” And “I see Blanca’s tears…” “I hear the soft and life-long committed voice of Sister Ana Marie Noth…” Ibid., 174-175.
earth *await you*, and may the grace and power of God be with you. Amen!"64 If God does anything in this sentence, it is to help the hearers do what God requires them to do themselves. While that may be the *truth* of the human situation (which is a key insight of Marxist critiques), it is not necessarily one that generates social and political movement.

### 2.8 Implications

Some of the sermons above employ re-presentations; they show people in action. A few of the sermons show God acting; they name grace and proclaim God’s action. One of the sermons employ divine first-person statements. Those sermons which named grace often did so anemically—employing passive voices or inserting the preacher’s self (human “I”) between God’s action and the hearers’ imaginations.

While many of the sermons employed powerful re-presentations, and while some of the sermons named God’s action in the world, very few consistently built a world in which hearers could see God acting to do what-is-possible or hear God speaking so as to empower them to act. It is beyond my epistemic access to assert or deny whether any one of the sermons above was revelatory, but based on the markers I have indicated, many sermons did not build an imaginative world (non-foundational world-building) by re-presenting the material world in light of God’s action in Jesus Christ. That is not to say that there were not moments where revelation could have occurred—that is, I cannot know what associations the hearers may or may not have made within their own imaginations. Indeed, there were several sentences and a few lengthier pieces within some of the sermons where preachers re-presented the world as a sphere of God’s action and thus revelation could have occurred. Yet, I suggest more is needed so as to make the entire sermon a re-presentation of subjects acting—first human subjects acting (re-presenting the trouble or injustice of what the world

64 Ibid., 176-177, italics mine.
may currently be like for some people—i.e., Aristotle’s what-is) and then a divine subject acting (re-presenting grace and what-is-possible).  

Regarding the second marker for revelation in sermons, in Copeland’s sermon, I employed the second marker (Is the good re-presented a good which the context really wants for itself?) in evaluating her sermon. But for the most part, my focus thus far has been evaluating sermons based on whether or not they re-present the world in action, generally, and particularly, whether they re-present the world in light of God’s action in Jesus Christ. This is the first marker of revelation and possibly the primary marker in revelation, as suggested in this thesis because, as I have proposed, homiletics is a means and not an end.

Question #1 (does the sermon generate movement toward the good envisioned (and therefore

---

65 This is basically the trouble-grace method of Paul Scott Wilson. I am suggesting that trouble be re-presented as the what-is lived experience of the hearers (described as humbly and as best the preacher can, recognizing their re-presentation of human experience is both flawed and incomplete) and that grace be re-presented as the what-is-possible transformation of the social and political spheres by an acting divine agent (as flawed and incomplete as the ethic re-presented may be at the present time).

Regarding particular texts, it is my hypothesis that one can name God doing something in almost any scriptural text. However, it may be more difficult to name God doing something (we consider) good or ethical (i.e., to name grace—God acting on our behalf) in some texts. Regarding preaching the gospel (God’s grace in Christ), there may be fewer texts still that lend themselves to this task. The goal in preaching (as I have proposed it) is to re-present the world in light of God’s action (i.e., grace). Some texts may be more difficult and even undesirable (and unethical) in the way they re-present the world, but I am unsure whether or not there are some texts in which it is impossible to re-present a desirable (and ethical) world out of those texts.

For example, in the story of the massacre of Jephthah’s daughter by her father, some might question what kind of God would require Jephthah to fulfill his vow. A homiletical perspective (a productive perspective) might ask, Who is doing the action in this text? In Judges 11:29-40, it is Jephthah who makes a sordid vow—sacrificing some as-yet-unknown human soul on the altar of his thirst for military victory—and it is Jephthah who feels he must fulfill it. Jephthah, not YHWH, is the subject of those sentences. A homiletical perspective might draw attention to the careless promises, we, humans, are prone to make. It might say that God would never have asked Jephthah to make that vow. It might even hint that Jephthah’s pride (and not God’s requirements) are what led Jephthah to massacre his daughter. Finally, a sermon could say that while humans make promises that they cannot keep and keep promises they never should have made, God makes promises of love and grace which God will keep (and that God will free us from our own pride which compels us to keep promises we never should have made). Whether or not this interpretation can be substantiated by our knowledge of Ancient Near Eastern society and the Judaism of the time is besides the point for homiletics (in my opinion)

In other words, one can completely reject what a text seems to sanction and yet still preach a text. It is not a task I enjoy nor a text I would recommend. In this sense, I do suggest preaching grace over and above preaching a literal, historical interpretation of the text. Indeed, one might ask whether my thesis suggests that the doctrine of grace itself is not productive (i.e., productive sciences and therefore a means toward an end)? I have suggested a hermeneutic (a productive hermeneutic) in which the goal in preaching is not to say what the text says (or what-is in the text) but what-is-possible by means of the text—and more importantly what-is-possible by means of grace (a divine subject acting in the world).
employ re-presentations?) is a question of means; Question #2 (is the good envisioned a good which the context really wants for itself?) is a question of ends. As such, while many homileticians are concerned with this question (and while it is a real concern of preaching in that the end determines the means), it is secondary if homiletics is the study of the means that produce movement toward an end (i.e., a “good”) and not the end itself.66

This proposal is sure to encounter opposition from those who seek greater epistemic certainty (and thus fear relativity) and from social justice proponents who may find world-building to be a power play that reifies the dominant narratives and perpetrates violence against the oppressed and marginalized. One of the main critiques to this proposal will be, “But who decides whether the good (goal) re-presented is ‘really’ good or not?” This question gets at the heart of the very presuppositions I seek to bring into question—namely, the world is infinitely arbitrary and there exist no out-there objective standards against which to adjudicate what is “really” good or not. The standard by which to adjudicate truth claims (and revelation) is whether or not the sermon achieves its goals. And I have suggested that using re-presentations (found in Aristotle’s productive sciences—Rhetoric and Poetics) are a means necessary to achieving those goals.

For Christians, the narrative of Jesus Christ provides the context in which to re-present God’s actions (past and present). But using Aristotle (in which the truthfulness of a story depends on its end or outcomes—that is, the kind of world it produces) rather than a pre-existing, autonomous ideal, those who “see” the gospel of Jesus Christ see an agent acting in

66 This understanding of homiletics is narrower than has been operating through history. Throughout much of its history, homiletics has included the end (goal, outcome) as an objective reality which guides and determines what is said and how it is said (e.g., from Augustine’s On Christian Doctrine onward there has been a good deal of suspicion toward rhetoric). I have attempted to show how homiletics can relativize its goals/ends/outcomes based on our contextual critiques and revisions of ethics but without ceding the gospel—the proclamation of God’s action in Jesus Christ. In this way, I have hoped to show how the gospel is socially-scientifically viable in and beneficial to a culture and society (at least in the Western world) that is less physically and financially invested in institutional religion.
the world counter-intuitively. Jesus Christ acts in scripture for the sake of an other, for the sake of all others. In a world in which language\textsuperscript{67} and social systems\textsuperscript{68} appear to be closed-circuits (which refer back to the subject and not to an out-there object), the gospel of Jesus re-presents a world in which a subject acts for an other and thereby opens up the (impossible) possibility that we might do the same.\textsuperscript{69}

This thesis suggests that in order to achieve one’s goals through preaching (whatever those might be, but especially the goal of openness to others and otherness), Christian preachers should employ re-presentations in which God is acting in the world in Jesus Christ. To summarize, we adjudicate based on outcomes not on ideals, and so we judge the truthfulness from the end not the beginning. It is possible that even if postmodern and social justice critiques are accurate in their diagnoses of the problems inherent in preaching (and in the gospel), proclaiming the gospel—re-presenting the world in light of God’s action in Jesus Christ—could be the best prescription.

3. Adjudicating “Good” and “Evil”

3.1 Constructing a Good

It is suggested that what counts as “good” will change and that re-presentations of what God is doing in the world will need to change. However, revelation (in the context of

\textsuperscript{67} See my discussion on metaphor in chapter two, section three and also in chapter four, section 2.2.

\textsuperscript{68} See my discussion of Bourdieu’s practice theory and socio-linguistics in chapter three, section one.

\textsuperscript{69} Bourdieu notes that there is no disinterested act. That all acts are in service to the self, even sacrificial ones. However, my claim is not that Jesus’ act does not in some way serve himself. Indeed, I have attempted to work within the closed-circuit of language and to still show that—while indeed such “sacrifices” may ultimately serve the self (and thus can be “technologies of the self”, cf. Nathan Mitchell’s treatment of Michel Foucault discussed in my, “Generating Movement in the Social Sphere.”)—they make “possible” the impossibility of getting outside of one’s self (and make “possible” the impossibility of getting “outside” of the closed-circuit of language and the closed, self-referential nature of the social system, cf. “objectification of subjectivity” in Bourdieu). In this way, I do not discount social scientific descriptions of religion, language and socio-linguistics, but instead I attempt to shift the standard of adjudication from essence (and ideals) to outcomes (ends and goals). A shift, which I believe, is more conducive with Aristotelian logic.
Christian theology) happens when God is seen acting and proclamation of the gospel images God acting in the world. God’s action in Jesus Christ (the means) is used to construct an alternative (what-is-possible) world (the end or desired “good”). It is counter-productive to deconstruct and re-invent it; instead, I suggest re-inventing the world (its systems of oppression, sexism, etc.) in radical ways by means of the gospel. Consequently, what the gospel does—i.e., the kind of world it makes possible—can be a radical new world that deconstructs the present age by juxtaposing the injustice of the present with new possibilities for living together.

This means that homiletics must always open up its ends or goals for critique and reflection. However, the sermon itself is not the place for doing this sort of critical reflection because the sermon is a means to an end. Instead, it is suggested that this type of work takes place under the rubric of (what Aristotle termed) the practical sciences—ethics and politics. Critical reflection about what kind of world is being re-presented must be done, and when it is done, it will expose and refine the content of preaching and the goals of preaching (e.g., we want a more inclusive world, a more compassionate and empathetic community; less violence against women or minorities, etc.). However, actual sermons which pull back the curtain to expose re-presentations as arbitrary only name the obvious. And in so doing, it is possible that such deconstructive sermons make a false dichotomy between what is arbitrary and what simply is in and of itself (and thus depends on something else for its “existence”).

Homiletical theory and method as I have described it focuses more on producing an end—a particular ethic or politic rather than judging homiletical theory and method on whether or not they conform to some a priori ethical ideal. The former is more Aristotelian; that is, it is

---

70 In other words, justice and ethics are themselves arbitrary. They depend on the justice and ethics of the context where said ways of relating are perceived to be just and ethical.
not based on ideals but on outcomes, ends or goals. It works with ends and goals; it does not say what the ends or goals are or should be. That work, I’ve suggested, belongs to what Aristotle called the practical sciences (ethics and politics).

3.2 But Is It Ethical?

An interlocutor might ask, “What prevents revelation from becoming evil, as in the case of Jim Jones (the leader of the Peoples Temple who is best known for the murder/suicide he orchestrated in Guyana in 1978)?” Well, maybe nothing (in and of itself), except the alternative contexts and narratives of the world which were quick to call Jim Jones’ acts evil. In other words, this means that we can call one interpretation or context “evil.” We can, and indeed, several other contexts and narratives did call Jones’ action evil. But there exists no autonomous ideal of good and evil against which to adjudicate whether theological claims (like Jones’) are good or evil.

However, using the Aristotelian paradigm and logic I have suggested—one in which narratives are adjudicated from the end rather than from a pre-existing, out-there ideal—we can call narratives (or the logic which generates practice, as Bourdieu might say) good or evil based on the kind of systems (and thereby worlds) they produce. That is to say, we can adjudicate from the end (from the outcomes of our narratives), even if we cannot adjudicate from a pre-existing, epistemologically accessible foundation.71

Personally, I would say that sermons which name God acting in a way that marginalizes women or reifies racist attitudes are evil (and so would most of the contexts in which I am located). I would call them evil—not because I have access to what constitutes

---

71 An epistemologically accessible foundation is an analogia entis and was consistently rejected by Barth. See Keith L. Johnson’s, Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology, Vol. 6, (New York: T&T Clark), 2010.
good or evil, but because that is not the kind of world I want to live in (and it is not the kind of world in which most people in my contexts would want to live).\textsuperscript{72}

3.3 Productive Hermeneutics

Productive hermeneutics (based on Aristotle’s “productive sciences”) is much like Reader-Response criticism in that they both focus on the subject (rather than the object or an out-there ideal). But rather than beginning with the text and asking about the response of the hearers (either what reader’s responses have been in the past or is likely to be in the present), a productive hermeneutic asks about re-presenting the world (e.g., a text—whether spoken, as in preaching, or written) in such a way as to generate or produce a response that will get us (the hearers, society, economic systems, etc.) where “we” want to go. So while reader-response criticism evaluates a work on how it is received and used by the hearers after they have heard it; a productive hermeneutic evaluates a work on what kind of change it is likely to produce or what effect it is likely to have in the hearers.

A productive hermeneutic then could and would evaluate the “truthfulness” of sermons based on the types of systems (and worlds) they produce. Do they re-instantiate current

---

\textsuperscript{72} The good or end (goals, outcomes) are relative. That is one of my assertions in this thesis. Therefore, when I say I would call certain activities good or evil, I do so not from some epistemic foundation but because the activity is something I (a subject) want (agency) and therefore call good or do not want (agency again) and therefore call evil. In other words, I call it evil or good, wrong or truth, not because it corresponds to any ideal evil-ness or good-ness which exists out-there and can be known autonomously (and scientifically) but because it corresponds to my (and my fellow subjects—who create the contexts we share) goals. It is, therefore, out-come based and not ideal-based.

Turning to the second order question of God, I would say that access to God is determined by how God is re-presented. I have no access to God beyond how I hear (and see) God acting in the world—thus the importance of proclamation for revelation (the thesis of this thesis). I like to put this way, “If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?” To which I respond, “It depends on whether or not I tell you, ‘A tree fell in the forest.’” In other words, even though it is subjective (i.e., it is a truth for you—the one who hears the re-presentation), that does not mean it is without any objectivity. However, the objectivity it has is only an objectification-of-subjectivity (that Bourdieu exposes but that I believe Ricoeur redeems)—which means I have access to it but it is an access which is constructed and does not exist autonomously.

What makes revelation revelation is its ability to reveal itself to me (or to you). And in order for it to reveal itself to me, I have to see it. And when I see it, then it is revealed to me.

Now, do I reveal it to myself or does someone else (human or divine) reveal it to me? I would say both. And, here, the importance of proximity to others (other subjects who I must not treat as objects)—who interact with my own agency—becomes vital. For I see myself in the face of an other.
power relations? or do they show alternative socio-political arrangements that are more desirable than the present? A productive hermeneutic adjudicates from the end and asks: Does this re-presentation, does this sermon, does this theology, move us toward acting in ways we believe to be more desirable? If it does, then, based on my proposal, a sermon could be said to be truthful.

However, even if it is truthful does not mean it is revelatory. Instead, I have suggested the revelation occurs when people see something, and in order for people to see something, they have to “see” a subject acting in the world. I suggested that revelation occurs when people see God acting in the world in Jesus Christ. In other words, proclamation of God’s action in Jesus Christ (i.e., a gospel re-presentation) determines whether or not Christian revelation happens; the goals/outcomes (ends) determines the truthfulness of the proclamation.

**Conclusion**

My thesis is that preaching is a means by which the world is moved toward an ethical vision of what-is-possible. Preaching that imagines God acting re-presents particular contexts with an alternative of what is possible within those contexts. Preaching may be adjudicated by its ability to reach its goals, to generate movement toward the (constructed) goal of what we believe to be possible ethically and politically. Ethical inquiry can serve to critique and refine preaching’s goals so as to discern desirable visions. In this way, ethics and politics (and the inquiry into what is considered ethical and good across contexts) are the ends against which we might adjudicate the truthfulness of re-presentations of God’s activity in the world. Re-presentations of God’s activity in the world produce a kind of world; we can
and should refine the kind of world we seek to produce by means of gospel re-presentations (i.e., proclamation), but we must be careful with deconstructing God’s activity in the world in sermons because gospel re-presentations (proclamation of God’s action in Jesus) are a means to ethical ends (ethical ends critiqued and discerned elsewhere than in the actual sermon).

It is suggested that homiletics is a means to an end and that the means are re-presentations. Re-presentations in the context of the Christian church require showing God acting in the world in Jesus Christ. Preaching that imagines God acting in the world in Jesus Christ may be conceived as revelation. Where people see God acting in the world, where this world is built or constructed through images, for them, God reveals God’s self.

It is my sincere hope that by employing this theory and method—in which preachers show God’s action in Jesus Christ—human agency may be activated and that the people and systems of the world might become “more” ethical.
Bibliography


Graves, Mike, and David J. Schlafer, eds. *What’s the Shape of Narrative Preaching?* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008.


