

The
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of Homiletics



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Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of the International Journal of Homiletics!

For our first two issues we have chosen to focus on the theme *Preaching in Times of Transition*. We invited some homiletical scholars to submit an article, but we have also accepted unsolicited articles addressing the theme. As a consequence, the present issue consists of seven articles from authors from India, the Netherlands, Fiji, the United States, Germany, as well as a joint article from scholars from Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

The homiletic focus on transition uncovers the many shifts of perspectives and changes of traditional practices that characterize the theology and practice of preaching across the globe. At the same time this focus shows how different cultures and nations share the challenges of trying to cope with various groups of people in exile and transition. Since preaching is a boundary transcending genre in itself, we find that these different international contexts shed light on some common and some very distinct international homiletical insights.

For the next issue of the International Journal of Homiletics, we invite unsolicited articles on any theme within the research field of homiletics – regardless of faith tradition. All articles will be peer reviewed and must be written in English. However, we are very keen on publishing articles in the author's native language in addition to English.

The articles in this issue

In her article on “Exodus or Exile” *Jerusha Matsen Neal* analyzes hermeneutic shifts in a Fijian Methodist Church trying to cope with the effects of globalization, climate change, and military coups in the Fiji Islands. Through sermon analysis, Neal points to the potential of preaching as a way of making room for new understandings of place and direction in a world in transition.

In another article, *Theo Pleizier* explores the development of homiletics in the Netherlands as a case-study for recent international homiletic thinking. Based on the material of doctoral theses published since the turn of the century, Pleizier focuses on the role of pneumatology, language, and empirical research in the development of recent international homiletical research.

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale analyzes developments of historical transitions as she traces the itineraries of Early Women Preachers in the United States who were preaching long before women were officially ordained into ministry. Based on her study of Quaker, evangelical, and Holiness Women

in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, Tisdale reflects on this history in relation to preachers on the margins today.

Bryan Nash discusses the practice of topical preaching in light of postmodern transitions. He analyzes the potential of a topical preaching approach that embraces otherness and conversation rather than allowing only one text to be heard at the exclusion of all others.

Preaching among contexts of growing numbers of refugees runs as a common thread through several of the articles in this issue. In his portrait of an Indian context, *Alfred Stephen*, analyzes the challenges of refugees who are forcefully dislocated from their home countries outside India and relocated in Tamilnadu. Stephen suggests a three dimensional narrative approach to preaching as a way to address the existential experiences of trauma and alienation.

Two other articles that focus on the situation of refugees in relation to preaching are interrelated: firstly *Alexander Deeg* presents a new European research project in which homileticians from Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, Sweden and Denmark have collected sermons from various European countries and analyzed them with regard to the so called European ‘Refugee Crisis.’ Deeg provides a brief overview of each of the seven studies. Thereafter, the results of the three Scandinavian studies are presented in a joint article written by *Tone Stangeland Kaufmann, Carina Sundberg, Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen* and co-authors from Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The research project touches upon the fraught topic of preaching and politics as it traces the influence of public discourse on preaching as well as the reverse influence of preaching on public discourse.

Finally the group of articles are rounded off with a ‘homiletical squib’ in which *David M. Stark* discusses the dilemma of “Preaching Politics” in light of the current North American presidential administration seen from the perspective of Germany where Stark has spent the past year as part of his Ph.D. studies. We are also very glad to welcome David Stark as the the English language editor for the IJH.

Alexander Deeg

Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen

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From Dislocation to Relocation¹

Preaching in Times of Transition

Alfred Stephen

Abstract

This article dwells with 'Preaching in Times of Transition' by focussing on the existential reality of the 'Refugees' (as we call them) from different parts outside India and relocated in Tamilnadu, from the perspective of their socio-cultural and familial dislocation that has created for them a new world in which they are forced to live. Dislocation from the home-land can result in multi-dimensional disturbances and interruptions. In my opinion, dislocation from their land is like uprooting a fully grown tree from its original place of sprouting and germination and planting it in a new place. Relocation of these people into a new context that is different in every possible way is an experience of humiliation and dehumanization. In most cases relocated peoples are unwelcome, discounted, overlooked, irritated, and rejected, In the process of dislocation and relocation, they not only go through alienation from their own land but also experience psycho-traumatic outbursts. I propose that a story method of preaching would lead to a psycho-therapeutic experience. The theory I propose here is three dimensional narratation.

1. Walking Backwards into A New Land – Cruelty of Dislocation and The Paradox of Relocation: An Introduction

People in times of transition, in the realistic sense of Homiletics, seem to be the subject of preaching. So-called refugees, are those who have been dislocated from their own homeland and relocated into a new context for reasons which are also not of their own. Uprooting, discontinuity, and re-rooting are the practical events leading to emotional outbursts and imbalances in the existential reality of these refugees. Situations of politically motivated agendas, of civil wars, of linguistic and ethnic discrepancies and divergence, of intolerance to religious traditions, of non-acceptance of fellow human beings, and of perpetrated riots have dislocated innocent, weaker, and vulnerable sections of people from the very soil that has been their identity for generations. In their own, unique way of expressing their pain, these refugees use a powerful physiological metaphor “our umbilical cord is cut off.” This metaphor is the

¹ This article is written taking the dislocated people from various parts of the world and relocated in Tamilnadu. They are people of multi ethnic background with their own problems to share.

strongest expression of the pain of separation from the people of Sri Lanka in Tamilnadu. Medical sciences explain the cutting of umbilical cord as part of the child birth process, which makes space for the child to be nourished through other means and move towards growth. It also speaks of the nourishment of the child in its fetus form, received from the mother through the umbilical cord. Their perception of the cut umbilical cord is conditioned by their experiences of a new context and of a new identity as ‘refugees.’ The situational perception and description of the metaphor reveals the agony of separation from the mother earth of their own birth and growth where they were nourished with life resources. Imperative to their perception and description of this metaphor is their rootedness and dislocation. They have been rooted in their land, drawing life from the very source of the land. In their view, dislocation has cut off the very sources of life, leading to discontinuity of life. Fear, frustration, helplessness, anxiety, loneliness, and hopelessness are a few of their emotional states as they move into a new land as people who are fallen and at the mercy of those whom they do not know. Fears of being found in vulnerable situations--including the fear of being mutilated and crushed-- threaten their very existence and crumple hope for the future. Not only are the issues of fear complex and deep, but they also engage their life left behind: homes and houses violently destroyed, relationships ruthlessly severed, and pieces of longing hearts scattered around the places where their lives were rooted and shared. We readers (most of us) of these articles about *Preaching in Times of Transition* are so rooted in our ethnic and socio-cultural setting that it is difficult for us to conceive of the world of dislocation and uprooting of these people except as a variant of existential reality. Looking at their past situations synchronically by comparing the present situations as factors of coexistence at a given period of time, ignores their emotional and psychological longings. Emotional outbursts are common phenomena among these people. Therefore, a fuller conception of refugees in transition demands that their situations be studied within the context of the forces which caused dislocation and led them to their present state.

Relocation in a new land apparently opens new avenues of hope of future, of promise of protection, and of situations and forces that do not disturb basic living conduciveness and exercise of human rights. However, discontinuity with their cultural, social, religious and familial life has drastically changed their perception of life and future hope even to the extent of questioning their relationship with their very life and with the life situation in the place of relocation. Anything that is known of their situations and future, seem to come through the interaction with persons within the fenced protected area called “camp” and not with the wider world. Language and thought of all within the “camp” are similar to that of the other person as the place they live does not provide space for plurality of perception. Detachment (because

of dislocation) and attachment in the relocated place and accommodation into the new environment pose an ironic emotion within these people. As they claim, civil war disturbances in their places seems to have kept them away from their own land, their own cultural arena, and their own people. The socio-cultural and economic situations in the new places seem not to go deep into their very being, because they feel that the present comfortable and safe situations are not their own. It is not something that they have earned and accumulated and made part of their life. Comfort, over against their hard earning, sense of security over against the right of living with freedom in their own land, government grants over against their own earning in their own places, stigmatized status as refugees over against the national identity are the ironical reality in their lives. The paradox of relocation speaks volumes about the longings for the 'lost.'

2. Story/Narrative as Preaching in Times of Transition

Stories of childhood, neighbourhood, playground, shopping, school, and classes of unique and long lasting memories, teachers who made an impact, who tortured with punishment for not doing home work, stories that were recited in the school assemblies, stories of street fights and petty quarrels, stories of reconciliation, stories that filled the elementary syllabus, stories that were told in the Sunday Schools, stories of proud expression of achievements and of family background, stories in the houses, stories about the qualifications and positions of parents, stories of horror, and stories that gave the glimpses of the earlier generations and culture – stories seem to be more powerful and invasive medium of communication than any other medium as the content and reality behind each story are remembered, cherished, celebrated as they bridged generations with values of the past and present. Recollecting all the stories and their contents, one feels like living in a universe of stories. Stories trace back their roots to the beginning of human history.

Stories have been a very powerful mode of communication. "Storytelling is as old as human family. At the beginning of human history we find tribal storytelling."² Stories, for a very long time in the history of traditions, were considered as a primary medium. Story is a powerful technique of sharing the truth and reality of a context and person. It is a mode that brings out the truth and mostly imprints them in memory for the rest of the life of the listeners. Story shapes our thinking and thought patterns. Referring to Roger C. Shank, David Larsen writes that story has great impact on our memory as our memory is story-based and our understanding in the real sense is correlation of past story and the one in the present.³ As mentioned above,

² *David L. Larsen*, *Telling the Old Old Story. The Art of Narrative Preaching*, Grand Rapids (MI) 1995. 13.

³ *Richard A. Jensen*, *Thinking in Story. Preaching in a Post-Literate Age*, Lima (OH) 1995, 14. Cf. *Roger C. Shank*, *Tell IJH* vol 2: 1–15

stories are all over—with and in everybody and every culture. “Thus the universal appeal of story must be taken into serious consideration....”⁴ Fred Craddock, talking about the power of words, states that much of life is mediated and even constituted verbally.⁵ Stories, as they are told in the power of the words, bring out the depth of life in its totality. At the advent of literacy in which writing was considered to be more authentic as it is in the print form, stories earned a secondary treatment because they were thought to be used to narrate some practices in the premodern times. As it is widely known, we are in the process of shifting from one mode of communication to next – from orality to print and from print to electronic. Richard A. Jensen observes, “The unique reality of our generation is that we are living on the forefront of a shift from one communication era to another [...]. A shift in communication media has occurred only once before, in human history. That was the shift from oral to Print and written communication. Today we move from the world of print to the world of electronic. This is a revolution. It is an evolution that calls upon us to seriously re-think most of what we do. This is certainly a revolution that calls us to reinvestigate preaching in our time.”⁶

Where are we moving from the electronic media is a question we need to ask ourselves in the context of story preaching in the field of Homiletics. Stories have gained momentum in the homiletic circle with many scholars in the postmodern times who have accumulated their academic scholarship on this so called premodern medium and made it a powerful and invasive medium. Narrative preaching or Story preaching occupies a major part of the syllabus of the Homiletic courses. Preachers also have acknowledged the power of narrative preaching when they recalled to their memory the long lasting impact stories or narrations have created and sustained. Walter Ong, who researched to the core of human existence and identified the medium that connected people, made sense of life, and gave meaning to social living, assimilates the power of story and narration over against the written contents. He writes, “Many of the features we have taken for granted in thought and expression in literature, philosophy and science, and even in oral discourse among literates, are not directly native to human existence as such but have come into being because of the resources which the technology of writing makes available to human consciousness. We have had to revise our understanding of human identity.”⁷

This concept of Walter Ong subscribes to story preaching, especially within the context of the refugees who struggle not just with the problem of dislocation from their homeland, but

me a Story. A New Look at Real and Artificial Intelligence, New York 1990.

⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁵ Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, Nashville 1971 (Religion – Online) part 2 p. 3.

⁶ Ibid. 8.

⁷ *Walter Ong*, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*, London 1982, i.

more with problem primarily of knowing and asserting their identity as human beings in an overcrowded world of humans and then to understand the dynamics of living together in a place which is alien to them in many senses of pragmatic reality. In story as preaching, the story itself generates passionate involvement of the preacher in the very life of the subject of stories and their existential realities far too numerous to be itemised than disconnected, unattached formulation of theoretical framework, making the preaching abstract and impersonal. As it has been observed in the Indian context, human identity, in most cases is understood in terms of the socio-cultural ethnic affinity one holds. The background to which one belongs, determines the identity. In other instances, human identity has been labelled on a group either with stigmatized effect or with inerasable tagging of humiliation, dehumanization, and disgrace.

Story creates space for knowing a person through the process of auto-narration that resurges to the root identity. Narrative identity leads to root identity through the process of self resurgence of anyone who narrates self story. Knowing takes place through narrative identity. Kevin M. Bradt, S.J., discussing Story as a Way of Knowing writes, “Story, then, is not just a frill, an illustration, a diversion, or an entertainment, as the modern scientific mindset maintained. Instead, story is much more basic. It is a way by which and through which we come to know and understand ourselves, others, the world around us and even God.”⁸Analysing the subaltern treatment of story at the advent of the modern mind in the seventeenth century, which was caused by the shift in the dominance of epistemologies, until which it was considered as one of the most elemental forms of knowing, Bradt argues that story is not just an art form but a way of knowing one’s own self and others, an epistemological process and reality. Without venturing into an exhaustive treatment of ‘story’, which would demand volumes, and considering the limitations of the paper, I intend to confine to story as a way of knowing. I do not stop with knowing oneself, others and God, but move further to the interpretation of the ‘knowledge of knowing’ towards the construction of sermons.

Preaching in times of transition demands knowing as well as transformation of knowing in the form of sermon. In my perception, epistemological process functions well within the context of refugees and subscribes in volume to the construction of sermons because these people are given space to visualize the past, explicate the present, and look forward with optimism in the preaching process. In this sense, preaching in times of transition, in my opinion, calls for deeper understanding of the very psyche of those who are in transition from their own land to a strange land. This transition is not out of their willingness but a forced reality. I employ the following three main modes namely (1.) Autodiegetic Narration or

⁸ *Kevin M. Bradt S.J., Story as a Way of Knowing, Kansas City 1997, viii.*
IJH vol 2: 1–15

Homodiegetic Narration, (2.) Co-Narration and (3.) Re-Narration as homiletic process of story preaching. I intend to locate these trajectories of narrative epistemology within the hermeneutic of story preaching to pragmatically present the reality of the situations of the refugees through storying with them.

3. Narrative Identity/ Autodiegetic Narration/ Homodiegetic Narration⁹

I propose this theory of Narrative Identity/Autodiegetic Narration/Homodiegetic Narration primarily because of my own experience of listening to the experiential events of the refugees in my place. I, as a preacher and teacher of preaching, find that the self expression of experiential events opens up various avenues for hermeneutic process for preachers to move towards the construction of sermons. In the process of any narrative context, one of the main aspects that dominates the process is the narrative voice, in other words, one who speaks or tells the story. One could always get a written material or story or a document on refugees, or a documentary film, or newspaper highlights or even a book on refugees. Printed words, of course have truth and authenticity. But these printed and video documents do not create space for a conversation with the subject of the content of narration. My argument here is that knowing the hearers of our sermon must derive from the interaction with the characters and living beings of any situation and not through texts and documents. “Print assured stasis, continuity, stability, permanence, fixity. The truth today, yesterday, and tomorrow—always and forever is the same. Print would not endure or tolerate persons “playing” with truth. Print removed truth from the conversations of people, from their speaking and listening. Truth was in the words, words fixed on a page, the words of a printed text. Truth was not in dialogue or the crafting and refining of knowledge, not in the amplifying and modifying of thought; the tempering and clarifying of opinions; the revising and modulating of belief. Gone was the give-and-take of storying, the constructive play of language, the exchange of ideas interacting with each other, the co-creation of shared truth and meaning.”¹⁰

Borrowing the terminology of Gerard Genette, I propose, in the story preaching in times of transition, and in the first step of hermeneutics of narrative epistemology, the narrator is

⁹ I am borrowing these terms from the French Literary Theorist Gerard Genette who has contributed extensively to narratives, rather ‘narratology’ as he refers to it. *Gerard Genette, Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Translated by Jane Lewin, Ithaca 1983. I deliberately use these terms of Gerard Genette to present the situations of the refugees because Genette uses this term to mean that there is no dialogue involved in autodiegetic or homodiegetic narration as opposed to mimesis. I switch over to mimesis in the second trajectory of the narrative epistemology hermeneutic.

¹⁰ *Bradt* (note 8), x–xi. Bradt is alarmed about the imperialism of print media which claims to have the truth and the way it has dominated the choice of people in the field of technology. He writes the printed text does not need anything to co-work or co-create. It has become the preferred technology of the “modern” knowledge; truth has been identified with or confined to the text which is no longer an interpersonal or interactive process.

the very subject of the narration, the main character in the narration around whom the whole narrative is built on. S/he narrates the personal story of dislocation from the homeland and relocation in the strange land. Preaching in times of transition, in my opinion, demands listening to the narrative identity or autodiegetic narration. This could also be named as Homiletics from the Underside.¹¹ The subject becomes the narrator. In the process of autodiegetic narration, the very self comes out as the narrator being part of the narration. Emotions are brought out, reality of experience is expressed, and ventilation takes place. Some facts may not be known but there is always expression of the self and identity. Objectivity of the content of the narrative, authenticates the experiences as they have been lived out with pain and anxiety and the very reality of the past. Objectivity is the reality that needs the most consideration in this process.

At this point, it would be appropriate to refer to two important scholars of Homiletics Fred Craddock and Charles Rice, because both these homileticians have viewed experiential event as main part of the homiletic process. They have laid emphasis on human experiential events which take a dominant role in the movement of the plots. Craddock claims that words spoken in the context of one's life situations speak of their life in depth with all types of experiences.¹² When people speak out their experiences and narrate their situations, they powerfully express in their own words; what they speak is their very experience and the words are the medium of their expressions. Autodiegetic narration reveals not only the authenticity of the content of narration but also the depth of emotions which are involved in their experiences. Their psyche and emotions are involved in their expressions. To refer to Craddock again as he speaks of a healthy personal and social life which are mediated and constituted by words that come as the expression of one's very self,¹³ it is to be observed that the individual narrating her/his experiential event, narrates the social bonding which was cut off from their homeland which has led to the loss of identity and made them 'no people.' It is in the auto-narration, that the reality of everything comes to real expression. Childhood dreams that were shattered, youth challenges that were crushed, adults' planning that was smashed, and the peaceful and satisfying old age that was traumatized are the psychological expressions of the people whom I came across.

The other side of the auto-narration of the experiential events revealed the social discontinuity and dislocation. Cultural reality which is filled with events, festivals, celebrations,

¹¹ For detailed reading on Homiletics from the Underside, refer to *Alfred Stephen, Homiletics from the Underside: The Art of Contextual Preaching*, Madurai 2015.

¹² *Craddock* (note 5), part 2 p. 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*

community based activities, and social affinity which is emotionally gratifying and personally affirming the social identity do not and cannot come out of a second or third person in the narrative context. They are more realistic in auto-narration. Cultural events, as far as Craddock's method is concerned, plays a major role in the homiletic process and especially in his inductive method of preaching.

I wish to go a step further to say that auto-narration of the cultural events not only gives authenticity of content of narration but also reality of the realities.¹⁴Craddock referring to Gerhard Ebling writes, "The power of words as an event is that they can touch and change our very life, when one man tells another, and thus shares with another something of his own life, his willing and loving and hoping, his joy and sorrow, but also his hardness and hates, his meanness and wickedness."¹⁵ In light of this perspective of auto-narration, I foresee the absorption of the contemporary situation into the scripture as the beginning of sermonic plots.

Auto narration leads to having a clear pre understanding of one's history, culture, life, and experiences. This would also mean revisiting and rehearing the history of these people from a new stand point and with new insights and perspectives within a new situation. This process of auto-narration leads to disclosure of many realities of their original situations. First and foremost, it exposes facts about their origin and their present struggle for survival in a strange land, revealing that they have been dispelled from the main land and chased off to a strange land. They have been denied a dwelling place for no mistake of their own. This reveals the injustice done to them, on the one hand, and the sense of separation and segregation which the people experience, on the other. Not only the segregation, but also loss of their own land and loss of freedom to live in it has led them to lose confidence in themselves and hold a low estimation of their own self. In preaching, especially in the process of auto-narration these factors are brought to light for theologizing in the process of sermon preparation. Auto-narration not only brings to light the facts related to the origin of these communities of people, but also the way they are put to suffer through the policies introduced on the basis of their status as refugees. This again reveals the point for theological understanding and for reflection in preaching, i.e. discrimination. Yet another factor which has caused suffering for these people is vocational plight and poverty. Because they were forced to do menial jobs for which they were paid very low wages, they were forced into poverty. Therefore poverty becomes yet another factor that is revealed for addressing in the sermon.

¹⁴ For another rather homiletically profound reading, refer to *Charles Campbell*, *Preaching Jesus*. New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology, Eugene 2006.

¹⁵ *Gerhard Ebeling*, *The Nature of Faith*, translated by R.O. Smith, Philadelphia 1961, 186. Cf. *Craddock* (note 5), 4. IJH vol 2: 1–15

In the process of auto-narration two main events take place. First, the issues that need to be addressed are brought to light in order to enable the preacher to have clear theological understanding on the issues and address them in preaching. The preacher is able to put together the events from the existential reality of the hearers with the view of identifying the substance of the problems and cause for their sufferings. Second, the preacher is able to cross over to the horizons of the refugees, keeping her/himself open to their situations and trying to understand them in their situations. This would imply first of all, that the preacher has the objective reality of the situations of the hearers. It also implies willingness on the part of the preacher to accept the reality in which the hearers live. Thirdly, the process of auto-narration helps the preacher-narrator to develop the narrative plot for re-narration. It is here, that preaching really becomes preaching from the underside, because auto narration forms the basis for rest of the sermon preparation process. Expression and authentication of reality are both means of ventilation for the people as well as functioning as the launching pad for co- and re-narration. I end the part on auto-narration with a note that the listener begins the process of narration by narrating her/his story while the preacher-narrator takes it over to co-narrate and re-narrate.

4. Co-Narration

Co-narration simply entails the process of interaction of the preacher-narrator with the listener-narrator with her/his experiences that were expressed through auto-narration, configuring of the experiences together with focus of knowing the reality of the situation. This process is also named as ‘storying’ by Kevin M. Bardt S.J.¹⁶ In the process of co-narration, primarily a preacher moves from using the existential reality of those who would hear the sermon towards mediating the gospel through their very experience. In doing so, the preacher revives the reality of their past, not just by identifying their socio-cultural, political and economic issues, but also by analyzing them together with them and searching for possibilities of a new and different living to be proclaimed. The process of reviving the past includes understanding the confused, ignorant, and helpless state in which people are.

¹⁶ *Bradt* (note 8), ix. “By ‘storying’ I mean the making of stories together, the thinking together in story form, and the cocreation of stories by tellers and listeners. I generally use the word ‘storying’ rather than the more conventional “storytelling”, because the latter term locates the action in the one telling. This perpetuates the mistaken notion that the listeners are merely passive recipients of the word, who do not influence, shape or affect in any way the teller, the telling or the tale. When I do use the term “storytelling”, it is in conjunction with ‘storylistening’ or ‘storyhearing’ to indicate the inerasability and interaction of the two.”

Reviving their story and perceiving it differently together, with a vision of new prospects of life, creates (please retain cabricates) entirely fresh opportunities of action and response. This would be possible when the reality of their past and present are redescribed, bringing into challenge, all earlier situations of their lives and status. When their past is redescribed in light of the present, presumptions about their present status would have been reviewed and a new understanding about their present sufferings would emerge. Again, Kevin Bradt writes to this effect, “In story, both listener and teller imaginatively ‘leave’ the constituted self or enter an alternative storyworld constructed from different hypotheses, assumptions, presuppositions, and possibilities. This imaginative journey concludes with the return to the self, but now a changed self, a self changed in and through the cocreative interaction of storying with another. This storying and restorying is what ultimately makes healing and hope possible.”¹⁷ This takes us to the eminent scholar and philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s threefold structure of narrative: prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration.¹⁸ Mary Catherine Hilkert elaborates Ricoeur’s mimetic structure of narrative, prefiguration, configuration and refiguration, by applying it to the Emmaus Narrative.¹⁹ She writes,

In the passage as narrated, Jesus walks with his friends and listens to their prefiguration of their lives in terms of confusion and dashed hopes, before speaking a word of new possibility. Only then does Jesus as preacher make the key narrative move: he configures experience in a new pattern or plot through the imaginative “grasping together” of disparate or previously unrelated events (the crucifixion, the women’s story, an empty tomb, their previous tradition and hopes). This new configuration transforms the succession of events into one meaningful whole and imposes the “sense of an ending” on the indefinite succession of incidents.²⁰

This process of co-narration will not only enable the preacher to challenge the forces behind the present status of the refugees, but also encourage her/him to be in solidarity with and get involved in bringing out a message in which the refugees listen to the echoes of the gospel. This process also gives us another truth of homiletics, that is, we must not preach the Gospel to them but make them experience the Gospel within the context of their life. Co-narration takes place powerfully as the preacher goes back and forth through the reality of the refugees fabricating the sermon.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ix–x.

¹⁸ *Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative*, Volumes 1–3, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago 1984. For a comprehensive helpful review of Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*, please also refer to *William C. Dowling, Ricoeur on Time and Narrative: An Introduction to temps et recit*, Notre Dame (IN) 2011.

¹⁹ *Mary Catherine Hilkert, Naming Grace. Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*, New York 1997, 92–107.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

In this process, another factor also surfaces. When the life situational reality is co-narrated with difference, the refugees are exposed to new possibilities of living and they respond positively with hope and aspiration. They not only visualise a hope in their life but also experience it in reality. This is exactly what preaching is expected to do through the event of preaching. Co-narration has to be done in such a manner that it brings out new hopes and aspirations and new possibilities of living. When this is achieved, then preaching becomes Word of God by participating in the purpose of God, by giving new hopes of living to the hopeless and doomed group of people. Preaching is an endeavour, in the realm of divine purpose of God for humans, to dialogically bring together the gospel message and the existential human situation, to make sense of both in the light of each other, in order that the purpose of God for humans be fulfilled.

In the process of co-narration, the preacher not only re-views the original situation of the auto-narrator and analyzes the issues, identifying the cultural symbols, but she or he also grapples with the relationality of these issues and symbols to the scripture. Auto-narration reveals the problems the refugees underwent and are undergoing. In their socio-cultural life they develop symbols which are unique to them. These symbols explicate their sufferings and inner feelings. While the preacher may not be able to have direct parallel for these issues in the scripture, it is always possible to reflect on the symbolic expression of these issues theologically and develop a particular theological basis for these issues. The symbols could be translated in the light of the scripture as deeper meanings and realities that underlie each symbol. These symbols, when translated, bring out the meanings which underlie them and the reality behind the emergence of these symbols. The cultural lives of these people play a major role in the process of theological reflection and in preparing a sermon, because their cultural symbols are their faith expressions and these faith expressions are based on their experience of living in shame and sufferings, humility and oppression, loneliness and pain. These theological bases, in turn, will have parallels in the scripture. Any problem, when placed against the theological reflection and basis, will reveal the issues to be addressed, on the one hand, and the scriptural parallel, on the other.

Theological reflections of the preacher pose yet another problem. Every preacher, like any human person, is born into a particular culture and social system and brought up in a particular faith tradition which has a strong influence on the thinking patterns. The background of the preacher has a deeper effect on the theological orientation as well. The way one thinks is basically the result of the influence of one's background. In such case, theological reflection on the problems of the hearers will also be influenced by the same background in which the

preacher has grown. It is at this point the preacher has to detach her/himself from their original background and cross over to the horizon into the arena of the refugees and analyse the problems from their standpoint. It is exactly the dialogical reflection on the human condition or existential reality.

In co-narration it is no longer the background of the preacher that controls the thought development. Rather, it is the background or the existential reality of the hearers that influences the thought process and functions as the basis for theological formations. In so doing, the preacher does not preach the good news to these suffering masses, but listens to the good news they have to share within the spectrum of their existential reality and then reads the scripture from their stand point. Preachers are expected to listen to the scripture in the light of the present existential problems and sufferings the refugees undergo and identify what good news could be shared with them. When the preacher is able to listen to their stories and understand the good news they want to hear, real convergence takes place. This is a twofold convergence: (1) backgrounds of the preacher and the hearers and (2) existential reality of the hearers, the preacher, and the scripture. Thus convergence brings together the existential reality of the hearers, the preacher with his theological reflections, and the scripture.

This raises a question as to whether it is the human situation or the scripture that needs to be preached? But it is obvious in the discussion, that in preaching, the preacher listens to the echo of the gospel in the existential reality of the migrants, theologically reflecting on them and trying to find parallel from the scripture.

5. Re-Narration

Re-narration is reconstructing, reformulating, reunderstanding, revisualizing of the life situation through a process of mutually collaborative sharing of truths about the existential reality. The listeners, who entered into a new relationship and partnership with the preacher in the process of co-narration and agreed upon listening to a new perspective and new possibilities, start listening to a new narration of their life and life situation. This act of re-narration opens up new possibilities of living and focusses towards a new ending and new effects. The auto-narrator's narration and the listener-narrator's (i.e. the preacher at the first level of the process) listening have created new space for re-narration. These new possibilities and new endings will be materialised in the process of re-narration.

Re-narration is nothing but application of the developed theological reflections. The preacher is expected to listen to the echo of the gospel in the midst of the existential reality.

Therefore, when the developed theological reflections are fused both with the situational reality of the people and the scripture, there emerges need for openness among the hearers and then new issues to be addressed. While the preacher is willing to cross over to the arena of the partners of the story, they must be willing to invite and accept her/him in order for a re-narration to take place. This is, in fact, a mutual openness from both sides. This would result in symbolic transformation of the preacher and the hearers, because they enter into a mutual relationship of explaining the reality of the listeners and then allowing for a review and re-narration to take place.

This mutual relationship is never ending in the process of preaching. In this process of auto-narration, co-narration, and re-narration in preaching, the gospel is not oppressive and irrelevant. Instead, the gospel or the good news is heard among those who suffer and the message becomes relevant. The interactive partnership and relationship that was created in the state of co-narration facilitates a fresh and innovative perception of elements of one's life situation. As the truth of life is re-narrated, the listeners listen to their own story not in the way they described, but with newness that they would not have known had they stopped with listening to their story as they narrated it. Re-narration refers to the application and appropriation of the text. One cannot stop at the critical explanation of the text in the process of auto-narration but move forward to the post critical explanation level. In the same way one cannot stop at the co-narrated state of the story but move forward to the appropriate re-narration of the story of the listeners who are right under the nose.

In the Emmaus narrative, we see that Jesus re-reads the past from the perspective of the future with a new ending through re-narrating, fusing the horizons.²¹ The new ending is the ending of hope of resurrection. It is the same story that Jesus was retelling the disciples, but he co-narrated with the disciples' realities from the past and appropriated the message of hope of life and living. For the disciples, the story ended with the suffering and death of Jesus, but for Jesus it stretches to the resurrection of Jesus, the suffering messiah. When we relocate the Gospel through the ministerial paradigm of mimesis, the end would be hope. To quote Mary

²¹ Although the theory of Fusion of Horizons of Hans Georg Gadamer is an appropriate one to study the situations of the migrants and story preaching, I deliberately abstain from doing so for the want of space. However, in *Fusions of Horizons* he explains the way in which one can understand the past and the discourse without any mistakes or prejudice. For him, hermeneutics is not a method for understanding, but a process which clarifies the conditions in which understanding takes place (*Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method*, London 1975, 263). What Gadamer emphasizes is that in the process of interpretation the interpreter must be willing to transcend her/his own horizons while pulling the text also out of its original horizon until fusion takes place. Here the interpreter can also use the imagination with regard to the subject matter. The questions the interpreter raises on the subject matter, considering the context in which it was said, guides the interpretations. On this basis, Gadamer claims that the meaning of the text is not absolute and the same for all time; it changes on the basis of the way and the context in which it is received and read. Thus, for him, to understand is to understand differently than the author's point of view or even one's own earlier interpretations, because the process is guided by the present reality of the interpreter.

Catherine Hilkert, who holds a similar argument when she explains the mimesis paradigm of Paul Ricoure, “Refiguration of life called forth by the configuration of the human story in the light of the story of the gospel involves the necessary move through the liturgy toward a deeper involvement in life, through doxology to praxis.”²²

The mimesis paradigm demands that ministry in general and preaching in particular must start with the analysis of the human condition in which the human experience is recognised. Most of those who listen to the gospel come with questions about their living condition and with hope of a better future. The disturbed conditions in which they live make them long for a possibility of a better future which they, in fact, hope will open up through the Gospel. Ministry and Preaching must recognize this longing in the hearts of listeners and tell them the story of the gospel as their story, which will help them to understand the gospel as their own story. The situation of the listeners must be part of the hermeneutic process. When I say situation of the listeners, I mean the socio-cultural experiences they go through in their day-to-day life. Therefore, preaching must start with the analysis of the existential situation of human beings. This analysis will explain the deep seated needs of human beings. This awareness of the human situation will give meaning to the proclamation of the Gospel. Preachers, in the process of re-narration, take human misery in general and the living existential reality of the migrants in particular as to how it could be reconstructed in light of the Gospel for a future hope and a new ending. The task of our ministry is to help the listeners understand and respond to the misery of their living condition and their fundamental questions about their life.

When the contextual reality of the migrants opens up and invites the preacher into their arena, re-narration brings out the inner truth about their situations. This process has two effects: On one hand, it creates new possibilities for better living through challenging the oppressive elements, and on the other it retells the community who they are. Both effects, together, encourage and challenge hearers to accept their real identity.²³ This means, issues related to justice, discrimination, oppression, inequality, denial of basic rights to be human, denial of human rights, and the rejection of human dignity, freedom of speech, and living respectfully are to be challenged and addressed in and through preaching. It is through this challenge that new possibilities of a new ending would emerge. A new ending would mean the possibilities of visualizing and experiencing a new status of life and a new social order in

²² Hilkert (note 19), 101.

²³ This point is made here only to make a fact clear. There are some Dalits who do not want to accept themselves as Dalits, because of their better living conditions and better status in the society. Although in the recent Dalit theology the dalitness is emphasised as an instrument for dalit liberation, still there are people who do not want to identify themselves as dalits. However, here the emphasis is made on those who are willing to accept their real identity with view of getting recognised identity and liberation.

totality. Re-narration must address the possibility of this re-formation of realities. As Hilbert puts it, “retelling the story of a suffering people becomes a ‘subversive’ way of reinterpreting history, criticizing oppressive power, and empowering the impulse toward liberation. Precisely because they foster freedom, anticipate a new social order [...]”²⁴ Therefore to reflect on the existential reality is to reflect on sufferings and struggles. Like any other preaching, preaching in times of transition also has a particular aim. Preaching is not just liberating from all oppressive forces, regaining self dignity and freedom of speech and all basic human rights, but also helping hearers to understand God within the context of their existential reality, functioning as a catalyst for living together as a harmonious community.

Walking Forward into the Future – A Conclusion

“The over determining power of the status quo is destabilized and a closed future broken open with possibility. If an alternate future can be imagined, then hope can be kindled in the present and action taken now to make that future possibility a reality today. That, in turn, can re-contextualize the meaning of the past and re-open questions about the judgements of history. In its ability to transform action and imagination, together with our understanding of events in the past, present, and future, story can then be viewed as a radical change agent.”²⁵

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²⁴ Hilbert (note 19), 97.

²⁵ Bradt (note 8), xii.

Exodus or Exile

Hermeneutic Shifts in a Shifting Fijian Methodist Church¹

Jerusha Matsen Neal

Abstract

*Over the past 30 years, the effects of globalization, climate change and multiple military coups have reshaped the Fijian landscape. The “lines in the sand” around issues of land ownership, rising tides and Fijian identity have complicated the relationship between the Fijian Methodist Church and the land which grounds its culture. The historical fissures between the majority Methodist indigenous church and Fiji’s large Hindu population continue to place the rights of first peoples in tension with rights of ethnic and religious minorities, even as the country’s secular government stresses the possibility of harmony. In recent years, the church’s primary responses to these demographic, political and environmental changes have been homiletic and hermeneutic. In spite of declining membership and reduced political influence, the church’s present experience has been re-read as a “New Exodus” journey toward a promised land. This theme of “New Exodus” has become a dominant trope in sermons, church education events and Fijian Methodist self-understanding. A more complicated hermeneutic, however, mines the biblical theme of exile to describe the current situation. In *iTaukei* (indigenous Fijian) understanding, the ‘vanua,’ or land, connotes the traditional culture of those who live on that land. As change impacts the culture of indigenous village life, the land itself is understood to change. Though 80% of Fijian land is tribally held, many Fijian Methodists experience the land on which they have lived for generations as suddenly unfamiliar. My paper will explore these disparate biblical readings of the Fijian Methodist experience through a homiletic analysis of four Fijian sermons, pointing to the importance of pulpit rhetoric in creating new conceptions of place and direction in a world where familiar markers are washing away.*

1. Vanua and Fijian *iTaukei* Identity

In his seminal work, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*, Ilaitia Tuwere describes the connection between space, time and human community in a Fijian understanding of land. For indigenous Fijians, the “land” (*vanua*) does not simply refer to the soil which makes up the 300-plus islands of the South Pacific archipelago. It includes all that grows in that soil and all who are sustained by it. The word “land,” in other words, includes animals, people – and significantly, human culture and

¹ Presented at “Lines in Sand: Borders Conflicts and Transitions,” International Society of Religion, Literature and Culture, University of Glasgow, September 10, 2016.

history. It is a word that knits together space, event and time to create a nuanced understanding of context. Tuwere suggests the word “place” as the start of an appropriate English translation.² This relational understanding of *vanua* has far-reaching repercussions for *iTaukei* identity. The word *iTaukei* can be defined as “those who own” the Fijian *vanua*, but this ownership does not connote detached objectification. In the theological college where I teach, coconut trees are planted with the placenta of a newborn child, tying together person and place. Funerals and celebrations recognize students’ long-standing historical confederacies, determined by the location of their familial village. In a Christmas sermon, an *iTaukei* preacher notes Mary and Joseph’s need to journey to Bethlehem to “confirm themselves again in their land” prior to Jesus’ birth, mirroring the regular Christmas homecomings that keep *iTaukei* Fijians tied to their traditional villages.³ Tuwere explains that from an indigenous person’s perspective, “One does not own the land; the land owns him [sic].”⁴

Such an understanding can lead to deeply conservative social structures. Under normal circumstances, land does not undergo rapid change, so *vanua* can come to represent “a way of life from time immemorial.”⁵ As a theologian, Tuwere connects this understanding of *vanua* with the Hebrew scriptures. Embracing Walter Brueggemann’s classic treatment of the subject, Tuwere argues for a Christianity that emphasizes the land-aware values of continuity, community and belonging.⁶ Matt Tomlinson notes the negative way in which “newness” is viewed, particularly in the context of the heavily-*iTaukei* Fijian Methodist church. In the Methodist Church in Fiji (MCIF), “oldness is a source of legitimacy.”⁷ A careful reading of *vanua*, however, complicates this conservatism. As my students’ explain in our discussion of the relationality (*veivakani*) at the heart of the *iTaukei* worldview, it is not just that humans do not have meaning without the coconut tree. The coconut tree does not have meaning without the human. Human culture, history and action necessarily impact the land, changing it in physical and symbolic ways. Under normal circumstances, continuity and change are tied together in relational balance.

² *Ilaitia S. Tuwere*, *Vanua. Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*, Suva 2002, 33.

³ *Matt Tomlinson* translates the sermon of *Ratu Josaia Veibataki*, *In God’s Image. The Metaculture of Fijian Christianity*, Berkeley 2009, 100.

⁴ *Tuwere* (note 2), 49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶ *Ibid.* Cf. *Walter Brueggemann*, *The Land. Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, Minneapolis 2002, 199–201.

⁷ *Matt Tomlinson*, *The Generation of the Now. Denominational Politics in Fijian Christianity*, in: *Matt Tomlinson/Debra McDougall* (eds.), *Christian Politics in Oceania*, New York 2013, 93.

2. The Shifting of the *Vanua*

The last 30 years, however, have been anything but normal. In 1987 and 2000, a series of political coups challenged democratically-elected governments as indigenous Fijians feared the growing influence of religious and ethnic minorities in the country.⁸ The issue of land ownership was particularly volatile. Though there was little evidence to support the claim, political rhetoric of the time emphasized the danger of losing legal protections reinforcing exclusive *iTankei* ownership of tribally-held lands – an area that exceeds 80% of Fiji’s land mass.⁹ Fiji’s diverse population can be traced to British colonial policies that brought Indian indentured laborers to Fiji in the late nineteenth century to work in sugarcane plantations. Today, over 45% of the population is of Indian descent, the majority of that population being Hindu or Muslim. In this multi-religious context, indigenous concerns over traditional land holdings coincided with religious calls for a Christian state. The close relationship between the *vanua* (indigenous culture/land), *lotu* (church) and *matanitu* (government) has been part of indigenous Fijian self-understanding “since the advent of Christianity in the first half of the 1800’s.”¹⁰ When democracy threatened this braided cord, military leaders like Sitiveni Rabuka – a lay Methodist preacher – “justified the coups in overtly religious terms.”¹¹ The Methodist Church in Fiji explicitly or tacitly supported these military interventions.

In 2006, the church found itself in different circumstances. When military leader Voreqe Bainamarama seized power from an elected prime minister that the church supported, the Methodist Church became an awkward defender of democracy and experienced governmental restrictions on religious freedoms first-hand. From 2009-2013, Bainamarama’s government banned the Methodist Annual Conference and Choir Festival, obstructed church operations and monitored free speech. The loss of political influence, monetary support and membership during these years is a crisis to which the MCIF is still responding.

The political shifts severing the *matanitu* from *lotu* and *vanua*, however, are only part of the picture. In the midst of this political upheaval, the culture of Fijian society was also undergoing rapid transformation. Manfred Ernst’s *Globalization and the Re-shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands* makes the strong case for the imperialistic dangers of globalization in the Pacific. Whether through economic policy, the embrace of technology or well-funded denominations from the West, Ernst argues that “cultural values not compatible with the Western world are disappearing” at an alarming

⁸ Ibid., 80–84.

⁹ *Tuvere* (note 2), 174.

¹⁰ Ibid., 52.

¹¹ *Tomlinson* (note 7), 80.

rate.¹² Esala Nasaroa agrees that a colonial domination is being replaced by a “cultural domination [...] through the over-influence of trans-media and new communication networks.”¹³ While the changing culture of a new generation is a perennial challenge for churches around the world, it is exponentially more difficult in a context where *vanua* and *lotu* are so closely identified.

Finally, the physical land itself was changing. Michael Green notes that, “over 60 [Fijian] villages have been identified for relocation” for causes related to climate change.¹⁴ Given the connection between *vanua* and identity, the movement of a village is no small thing. The land itself – and the stories it tells - become unfamiliar. Cliff Bird notes the importance of the “readability” of nature in Oceanic understandings of home.¹⁵ In Fiji, for example, the yearly calendar is determined by the growing seasons for particular plants and the breeding of certain kinds of fish. As coral reefs grow sick and precipitation and temperatures change, the traditional legibility of the world is obscured.

These fissures that have developed between the *vanua*, *lotu*, and *matanitu* have created a profound sense of loss for many indigenous Fijians. Familiar “lines in the sand” are fading. In his study of Fijian Christianity, Tomlinson notes this quality of “loss” as a heuristic in interpreting Methodist Fijian practice. “The image that many indigenous Fijians have of present-day society,” he states, “is one in which properly unified relationships are breaking down [...] and as a result, the people’s *mana* (spiritual power) is diminished or lost.”¹⁶ This sense of diminishment plays out in practices of faith and biblical interpretation, as preachers exhort their congregations to return to a golden age that has slipped away.

It is in this context that the MCIF introduced a new logo and a new motto in its 2014 celebration of fifty years of church autonomy. In this Jubilee year, the church leadership claimed the theme of “New Exodus” as a guiding vision for the church’s next fifty years. The metaphor has quickly become a powerful trope. It is invoked regularly in sermons and denominational literature and education events, though it is not always clear how the metaphor is being used. Often, different ministers have different visions of what bondage the church is leaving and in what promised land it should settle. The church’s embrace of the word “new,” however, is significant.

¹² *Manfred Ernst*, *Globalization and the Reshaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands*, ed. Manfred Ernst Suva 2006, 4.

¹³ *Esala Nasaroa*, *Vakatagi: A Hermeneutical Redefinition of Fijian Music from a Fijian Perspective*, in: Na Uli, *The Davuilevu Journal of Theology and Practice*, Issue 2, August 2016, 32f.

¹⁴ *Michael Green*, *Contested Territory*, in *Nature: Climate Change* 6, 817–820 (2016).

¹⁵ *Cliff Bird*, *Hermeneutics of Ecology and Its Relationship to the Identity of the Oikos in Oceania*, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology (Series II)* No. 46, 2011, 32.

¹⁶ *Tomlinson* (note 3), 65.

The “New Exodus” is a metaphor grounded in movement and change. How does this metaphor intersect the theology of continuity that Tuwere describes in his analysis of *vanua*?

3. The *Drua* of the “New Exodus”

In his discussion of the 2016 WCC theme of “Pilgrimage,” Tongan theologian Jione Havea questioned the theme’s relevance for the Oceanic context. “Pilgrimage,” he claims, “is not part of some of our cultures. It is not part of our daily routine.”¹⁷ In some sense, this is true. Christianity in the Pacific is less about traveling to someplace unfamiliar and more about honoring one’s home. Again, Tuwere is instructive, describing the importance of “home-grown knowledge” in a Fijian epistemology.¹⁸ This, however, is only one part of the Fijian story. At the same time that the MCIF embraced the language of “New Exodus,” it embraced a new logo: a large, ocean-faring *drua*, designed to carry whole villages to new islands. In contrast to the church’s old logo of a fishing boat, this new image communicated the danger of the church’s current situation, a reclaiming of change and movement as a strength within Fijian history, and a recasting of the church’s vision to be inclusive of the community and the world. The image of the *drua*, blown by the wings of a dove toward unknown lands, interpreted the language of the “New Exodus.”

In the Fijian context, it is a term that continues to need interpreting. Even within biblical studies, the term “New Exodus” has a multitude of connotations, prompting scholars like Daniel L. Smith to worry that its “free-wheeling usage has diluted the value of the phrase, and a descriptive term runs the risk of becoming a simple buzzword.”¹⁹ In the highly charged Fijian socio-political context, fears about loss of land ownership can make New Exodus language ring with triumphalistic overtones. Preachers have used the phrase to call for spiritual revival, political protest, ethical reformation and cultural reassertion. On occasion, the term serves as shorthand for modernization and keeping up with the times. One speaker at the 2015 MCIF Annual Conference connected the language of the New Exodus with the goal of having a working fax machine in every district office. While the image rings with the promise of the future, the content of that promise remains unspecified. *What is the promised land to which the church is traveling? And more pointedly, what is the relationship between that promised land and the vanua?*

¹⁷ Jione Havea, We’re moving from missionary thinking into a pilgrimage culture, World Council of Churches interview, June 7, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdbJIPHykak>.

¹⁸ Ilaitia S. Tuwere, At Home. A *Were-Kalon* Response to Epistemology, paper presented at USP.

¹⁹ Smith traces the term from its use in the 19th century in relation Israel’s exile to its more recent uses in New Testament studies, “The Uses of ‘New Exodus’ in New Testament Scholarship”, CBR 14.2 (2016), 207–243. For examples of New Testament uses, see Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*, Grand Rapids 2001, or more recently, David Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, Eugene 2016.

The most common homiletic responses to this question define the relationship as one of a.) reformation or b.) reclamation. The promised land of the New Exodus will be a purified *vanua* of the future or it will be the powerful *vanua* of the past. An example of the former goal can be seen in a sermon preached during the 2014 MCIF Conference's Jubilee celebration. Taking "Jubilee in the New Exodus" as her theme and Isaiah 44:1–8 as her text, the preacher stresses the reformation of the thirsty land brought about by the "pouring out of the Spirit" from above. She calls the congregation to "agonize" for this act of God and prepare with anticipation. The New Exodus, in her view, is a revived land, marked by godly living, prayer, scripture reading, fasting, and unity. She quotes John Wesley as saying, "My ground is the bible," using the Fijian *vanua* in her translation to make the point clear. For this preacher, the New Exodus is a journey to a future land made holy by the external intervention of God and the spiritual discipline of God's people.²⁰

In contrast to this goal of a reformed *vanua*, the goal of a reclaimed *vanua* is seen in a sermon preached to the MCIF Annual Conference two years later. Stressing the dangers of gnostic spiritualism, this second preacher discusses Jesus' "coming toward" the disciples in the gospel of John (1:29, 1:38) and the disciples' decision to follow. The preacher is specific in describing Jesus' destination in the passage: Jesus leads the disciples to the home in which he is staying. "Jesus has a house," the preacher insists. "And Jesus's house is the Methodist Church in Fiji." He then references the fears of the past decade: Bainamarama's secular government, the push for "human rights" – understood by many in the MCIF as a euphemism for gay rights, and climate change. In this case, the New Exodus is a confrontation of these current realities with the proclamation that "Jesus is the Son of God," reasserting the church's authoritative place in society.²¹ The "promised land" is a reclaimed alignment between *matinitu*, *lotu* and *vanua* – a following of Christ away from the homelessness of the present.

Neither of these preachers attempts a systematic treatment of the questions surrounding the New Exodus. They preach with diverse texts, agendas and communities in mind. But in their referencing of the New Exodus, they provide a representative snapshot of the current conversation in Fijian pulpits. There are diverse visions of this New Exodus promise and even more maps for the journey. *What the sermons share, however, is a call to movement.* Both sermons posit hope that the church can leave behind the loss of a broken present. They challenge the status quo with a call to active engagement and change. In this sense, even the reclamation of the past represents a desire

²⁰ *Paulini Naimani*, Golden Jubilee in this New Exodus, sermon presented at MCIF Annual Conference, Centenary Church, Suva, August 22, 2014.

²¹ *Tomasi Tarabe*, Jesus is the Son of God, sermon presented at MCIF Annual Conference, Centenary Church, Suva, August 26, 2016.

for something “new.” Concrete, material transformation lies at the core of the New Exodus imagery.

This call for movement and change within the MCIF brings helpful complexity to caricatures of Pacific theology that over-emphasize stasis and tradition. To connect the powerful Fijian *drua* with such a call reminds the church that when crises come, the Pacific community has the capacity and will to move. All the same, there is a tension between this linear image of leaving and Tuwere’s stress on the continuity and rootedness of place. Perhaps the concern is best expressed in Havea’s observation that those who go on pilgrimage too often travel *through* a place rather than noticing the people already living *in* a place.²² The “promised land” can become an idealization or objectification that neglects the land currently under the church’s feet. What of the *vanua* that is currently shifting with insecurity and struggle – a *vanua* that is now multi-ethnic and multi-religious? In trying to reclaim the past or purify the future, does the “New Exodus” of the MCIF abandon the living *vanua* of the present?

4. The “New Exodus” in the Sermons of Rev. Dr. Tuikilakila Waqairatu

Given the significance of these questions, it is worth tracing the origins of the MCIF’s “New Exodus” imagery. The themes of reformation and reclamation are certainly not new in the Fijian pulpit. They are especially apparent in the sermons of the church leader most influential in the adoption of the “New Exodus” theme. The late Rev. Dr. Tuikilakila Waqairatu frequently referenced the topics of nation-building and spiritual cleansing in his sermon notes, and it is following his 2013 election as president of the church that the new logo and Jubilee theme make their debut. In the years leading up to his election as president, the theme of the “New Exodus” slowly emerges in Waqairatu’s thinking as a way to make sense of the conflict with the government and cast a positive vision of the future. In 2011, he uses the term “our New Exodus” to describe the process of Fiji’s “liberation” in comments to church leaders from the United States,²³ and he frequently uses Exodus imagery to discuss the necessary cleansing of the people prior to entering the promised land (Josh 3:1–17).²⁴

His most developed application of the Exodus narrative to the life of the church, however, occurs in a 2012 sermon emphasizing four themes: liberation, covenant, wilderness journey, and

²² Havea (note 17).

²³ *Tuikilakila Waqairatu*, Farewell to Bishop Warner Brown, unpublished notes, December 9, 2011. The implicit critique of the government in this New Exodus language is never explicitly developed in *Rev. Waqairatu’s* sermon notes. Given the fact that *Waqairatu* was placed in jail for his public opposition of *Bainamara*, such subtlety may have been politically necessary.

²⁴ See, for example, *Tuikilakila Waqairatu*, Na Lotu Ni Mataka, unpublished sermon notes, November 14, 2010, and The Needs of a New Exodus. The Installation of Rev. Iliapi Tuiwai, unpublished sermon notes, 2013.

destiny. The goals of reclaiming the *vanua*'s political authority and reforming the *vanua* through spiritual cleansing are touchstones in Waqairatu's assertive, holistic theology, and these themes are present in his discussion of liberation and covenant. But in its final point, Waqairatu's sermon adds a third perspective on what the "promised land" might mean in the Fijian context. When he speaks of the church's "destiny," he does not just argue for the reformation of the land or the reclaiming of the land. Instead, he recasts the *vanua* itself – in its current state – in the light of God's mission and presence. Strikingly, Waqairatu describes the promise of the Exodus as the practice of the Lord's Supper. Taking Mark 14:22–25 and 1 Cor 11:23–26 as his texts, Waqairatu translates the "promised land" of God's people into the shared proclamation of Christ's death and a new covenant in Christ's blood.²⁵

The *drua*, in this case, leads the people on a journey of rediscovery, rather than reclamation or reformation. Finally, for Waqairatu, the "New Exodus" is less about moving away from the *vanua* or towards it. Rather, it is a hermeneutical movement which transforms how *vanua* is understood in light of the gospel. It is, in certain ways, an *iTaukei* response to Havea's concern about "pilgrimage," and dislocation in Pacific theology. In Waqairatu's sermon, the broken *vanua* of the present is not abandoned in the Exodus journey. It is made new in the familiar celebration of a sacramental meal.

5. Exodus as Exile?

This new reading of the promised land may sound hopeful, but there are costs to this hermeneutical shift. Fears of movement and newness notwithstanding, it is easier to talk of change in hopes that, by moving, the church will reclaim a *vanua* of the past or purify a *vanua* of the future. To re-envision the current *vanua* as a promised land, in the midst of its weakness and struggle, means settling in exile. The Hebrew exile may seem an unlikely metaphor for the experience of *iTaukei* whose very name denotes ownership of the land. But the *vanua* has shifted, and today, many find themselves in unfamiliar territory. What would it mean to find God's promise in this place?

It is a question raised in the sermon, "The New Exodus: The Land of Promise in our Exile"²⁶ by yet another contemporary Fijian preacher – a student in the theological college where I teach. Taking Jer 29:4–14 as his text, this preacher posits that, just as God was present with the Israelites in Babylon, God's New Exodus promise for Fijians "is now. It is in our very current conditions of a secular state, without a Great Council of Chiefs." The preacher notes that Jeremiah turns away

²⁵ *Tuikilakila Waqairatu*, Na Lako Yani (The Exodus), unpublished sermon notes, November 4, 2012.

²⁶ *Tui Nuki Smith*, The New Exodus. God's Promise in our Exile, unpublished sermon notes, September 6, 2016.

from false hopes of a quick return to the land of Israel and instead stresses going about life as normal: “Build a house and settle down, plant a garden and eat, find wives and seek the peace and prosperity of the city.” In engaging the exilic land, Israel rediscovers that its “true promised land is its coventantal relationship with God.” The preacher argues that Fiji’s New Exodus journey has a similar vertical, rather than horizontal, character.

The sermon’s argument (and Jeremiah’s) has its dangers. There is a risk of embracing political passivity or adopting a spiritual vision disconnected from material transformation. And yet, in this call to “settle” and “seek the peace” of the land of exile, there is also a commitment to place and genuine engagement with the present. There is an attention paid to the ground on which one is currently standing. There is respect for the *iTaukei* insight that we do not have complete control over the land – or over the people who live on it. We impact it, but we do not make it in our image. It forms us, even as it shifts.

Of course, the promise of a return from the land of exile never disappears in Jeremiah. Instead Brueggemann argues, there is a complex dialectic between “grasping [the promise] with courage” and “waiting in confidence for the gift.”²⁷ Such a dialectic is currently happening in sermons across Fiji as preachers map the promised land of the New Exodus onto the *vanua*. I would argue that both sides of the dialectic are significant. The active energy required to reform and reclaim the land complements the interpretive energy of recasting it. The recasting, however, ensures that the MCIF’s Exodus journey does not disconnect people from place. Waqairatu’s image of promised land as communion feast is particularly adept in holding these threads together. His image of the church’s destiny as a table spread in hope grasps the gift of the present Body, remembers the past and tastes the future, daring to believe that the Exodus of an exiled church is “now.” As Brueggemann observes, it is “precisely in the context of landlessness [that] the promises loom large.”²⁸

Conclusion

Cliff Bird has argued that land is read like a manuscript by Oceanic people. Tomlinson notes that manuscripts like the Bible can also be read “like a topographical map.”²⁹ My paper has outlined the ways in which preachers are reading both, redrawing the borders of text and *vanua* through pulpit rhetoric. Whether using the New Exodus to call for a reforming, a reclaiming or a recasting of the

²⁷ Ibid., 157.

²⁸ Brueggemann (note 6), 8.

²⁹ Matt Tomlinson, Anthropological Perspectives on Oceanic Biblical Interpretation, in: Pacific Journal of Theology, Series II, Issue 50, 2013, 104.

vanua, preachers are reshaping the hermeneutic Fijians use to read their world. In this way, they reshape the world itself. This homiletic approach has been a significant strategy in the MCIF's response of the difficult shifts in the Fijian context. It is a response that breaks down the dichotomy between movement and rootedness, continuity and change and even land and landlessness. Instead, it relies on a promise that demonstrates the *veivakani* (relationality) between each. Fijian preachers understand the critical connection between place and text. As they reinterpret the ground on which they stand and the land they have been promised, they are redrawing their own lines in the sand.

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Spirit on the Loose in Times of Transition

Early Women Preachers in the U.S.A.

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale

Abstract

In recent decades historians have demonstrated that women were preaching in the U.S.A. long before the ordination of women to ministry. Many Quaker, evangelical, and Holiness women were itinerant preachers who traversed the country throughout the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, encountering numerous hardships and obstacles as they went. In this essay I identify and examine three types of transitions in which the Spirit appears to have been “on the loose” so that women were able to claim their preaching vocations: ecclesial and theological transitions, political and geographical transitions, and personal transitions in the lives of the women themselves. I conclude by reflecting on what we might learn from this history for opening the pulpit to preachers on the margins today.

During the past two decades historians have written texts that give witness to the reality that women have been preaching in the United States since before its founding as a nation. Quaker women were preaching in the colonies long before the official birth of the United States in 1776. Evangelical women and women associated with Holiness traditions preached throughout the late 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries – long before the strong press for women’s ordination in mainline denominations that has often defined our conversation around women preaching today. Many of these early preaching women did not press to be ordained; they simply wanted to be free to preach the gospel as they believed God had called them to do, and often did so as traveling itinerants. Along the way they endured many hardships, suffered great ridicule, overcame tremendous obstacles, and enjoyed great success as multitudes were inspired and changed by their proclamation. Yet sadly, their story is little known among today’s preachers, female or male.

In her book *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad 1700–1775*, Rebecca Larson estimates that between 1300 and 1500 Quaker women preached on the British Isles and in the American colonies in the first three-quarters of the 18th century.¹ They traveled the east coast between

¹ Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad 1700–1775*, Chapel Hill/London, 1999, 63. Larson notes that “one source noted the deaths of 834 female ministers between 1700 and 1799 within the compass of the London Yearly Meeting alone. (Six yearly meetings existed in the American IJH vol 2: 26–36

South Carolina and Maine, with many of them preaching on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. They ranged in age from 17 to 69, and came from every station of life.² Many of the married women traveled while their husbands remained at home. Some were recognized by their communities to be “Public Friends” because of their giftedness in public speaking and vocal prayer, and were sent out by those communities with formal letters of introduction to other Quaker meetings in other places in Europe or North America.

One of these women, Rachel Wilson (1720–1775), preached in places as diverse as Faneuil Hall in Boston, the New Haven, Ct. courthouse, the College of New Jersey in Princeton (at the written invitation of 51 students), and the old Baptist Meeting House in Charles Town (Charleston), SC. She was likened in eloquence to the popular evangelist George Whitefield, and among those to whom she preached were: then governor of New Jersey William Franklin (son of Benjamin Franklin); Rev. Ezra Stiles, a Congregationalist minister who later became president of Yale College, Virginia Assemblyman Patrick Henry, and then governor of Virginia, Norborn Berkeley.³

In *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740–1845*, Catherine Brekus lifts up the preaching of evangelical women during the First and Second Great Awakenings in the U.S. She estimates that more than 100 black and white women – associated with sects and denominations such as the Freewill Baptists, the Christian Connection, the Millerites, the Methodists, and the African Methodists – preached in churches, at camp meetings, at outdoor revivals, and in gathering halls from the mid 18th to mid 19th centuries. Though they attracted large crowds and their influence on building up churches and inspiring their audiences was highly significant, “they were virtually written out of their churches’ histories in the mid-nineteenth century – a silence that has been perpetuated ever since.”⁴

In *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850–1979*, Bettye Collier-Thomas tells the stories of late 19th and early 20th century African American preaching women who became widely known in the U. S. for their preaching ministries. Women like Elizabeth (last name unknown), Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Amanda Berry Smith, and Sojourner Truth – some slaves, some freed – were trailblazers who

“overcame ridicule and rejection, penury, fears of re-enslavement and discriminations, and unhappy marriages, among other obstacles. After experiences with conversion and

colonies.) Male preachers initially outnumbered female preachers on the London Yearly Meeting list, but as the eighteenth century progressed, the number of women ministers equaled or exceeded the number of men in later decades” (63).

² Ibid., 86.

³ Ibid., 233–237.

⁴ *Catherine A. Brekus, Strangers & Pilgrims. Female Preaching in America 1740–1845*, Chapel Hill/London 1998, 7.

sanctification, in which the Holy Spirit commissioned them to preach, they each set out to answer this call. Nothing could deter them – not laws and attitudes that opposed women’s preaching, not even geographical limits. These women spread their message throughout the Northeast, the mid-Atlantic states, the South, the Midwest, and even across oceans.”⁵

Even before women began preaching in the “New World,” we have solid evidence that many women had already been preaching on the continent of Europe. Quaker women had been preaching in England since their founding in the mid 17th century. Margaret Fell, an early leader in Quakerism who later married George Fox, was herself a preacher as well as an outspoken proponent of women preaching.⁶ According to Curtis Freeman, Puritan women were also preaching during this era on the European continent. Freeman notes that between 1640 and 1660 as many as 300 “women prophetesses” who were radical Puritans were preaching and publishing their thoughts in England.⁷ By the 1760s Methodist women, such as Sarah Crosby and Mary Bosanquet-Fletcher had moved from exhorting to preaching in England with John Wesley’s reluctant approval. And the character of Baby Suggs Holy in Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* reminds us that though their histories are largely lost to us, women were spiritual leaders in slave communities long before emancipation arrived,⁸ and may well have been preaching in Africa long before they were forced into slavery.

In surveying this history, questions naturally arise around the conditions that allowed and encouraged women to preach. Are there any patterns that can be observed about the openings that women found for preaching, and what occasioned them? Were there any conditions – ecclesially, theologically, socio-culturally, politically, personally – in which women’s preaching was more likely to flourish than in others? How and where did these women find the inspiration, strength, and courage to preach, despite the very real obstacles they faced?

In this article I identify three significant types of transitions that seem to have occasioned the rise of early women preachers in the United States: 1) ecclesial and theological transitions; 2) political and geographical transitions, and 3) personal transitions in the lives of the women preachers themselves. In each instance I will examine what it was about these transitions that made

⁵ *Bettye Collier-Thomas*, *Daughters of Thunder. Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1950–1979*, San Francisco 1998, 55.

⁶ Fell’s most famous publication is a pamphlet entitled, “Women’s Speaking Justified,” in which she argued, on the basis of the spiritual quality of the sexes, that women had received the Inner Light just as men, and thus were capable of being prophets.

⁷ Cf. *Curtis W. Freeman* (ed.), *A Company of Women Preachers. Baptists Prophetesses in Seventeenth-Century England. A Reader*, Waco, TX 2011, 17.

⁸ Cf. *Judylyn S. Ryan*, *Spirituality and/as Ideology in Black Women’s Literature: The Preaching of Maria W. Stewart and Baby Suggs Holy*, in: *Beverly Mayne Kienzle/Pamela J. Walker* (eds.), *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, 267–287.

openings for women preaching possible. Finally, I will briefly reflect on what we might learn from this history for opening the pulpit to other people “on the margins” today.

1. Ecclesial and theological transitions

One of the things that stands out when reading the history of early women preachers is how often their opportunities to preach came in the midst of the emergence of a new sect or denomination. When the Spirit was “on the loose” – that is, not tamped down by church hierarchies and polity or hemmed in by church dogmas, but allowed to manifest itself in new ways – women frequently found openings to respond to the Spirit’s promptings in their own lives, and to preach the gospel.

Quaker women, for instance, were encouraged to preach from their founding because of the theology embraced by their founder George Fox. Among Quaker tenets was a strong belief that each person possessed the Spirit of God within her- or himself and could rely on the Spirit of Truth – the presence of the risen Christ within – to lead them into all truth. “Since ‘the light is the same in the male and female, which cometh from Christ,’ Fox believed that, by the power of the Spirit women had the same capacity as men to voice the Word of God.”⁹

Quakers did not rely on professional clergy to lead their meetings, nor did they observe sacraments such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Instead they sat in silence, waiting for the Spirit to speak within members of the gathered community. “Since Quakers believed that inspired words came from the same source, the indwelling Spirit of God, it was irrelevant who actually preached at the meeting.”¹⁰ Larson notes that their contemporaries were often shocked by the gender equality evidenced when Quakers gathered for worship. Young girls could be quite vocal at such meetings while leading men remained silent.¹¹

Fox also interpreted the early chapters of Genesis differently than did other Protestants of his day. Instead of seeing women as being the source of sin and the fall, Fox insisted that women and men had been created equal, and that woman’s subjection to man was brought about by the sin and the fall. In Christ the relationship of equality intended by God at creation had been restored, so that there is neither male nor female (Gal 3:28).¹² Early Friends also interpreted Paul’s injunction for women to keep silence in churches in light of other Pauline texts affirming the equality of

⁹ *Larson* (note 1), 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, 20–23 for a fuller discussion of the theology underlying Quakerism’s belief in the unity and equality of the genders.

women (such as Galatians 3:28), and argued that theologians had taken this admonition out of context.

In *Strangers & Pilgrims*, Catherine Brekus makes the case that many of the evangelical women who preached in the U. S. in the 18th and 19th centuries, came not from the more well established denominations (such as the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches), but from emerging sects and denominations such as the Millerites, Freewill Baptists, Christian Connection, and African Methodists, who believed that the end of the world was near, and that women were needed to herald Christ's imminent return to earth, calling people to repentance and salvation.

“[...] these sects invested female preaching with transcendent significance. Indeed, they did not allow women to preach in spite of their ‘femininity,’ but *because* of it. A female preacher was a religious outsider in a way that a male preacher could not be. She was a stranger and a pilgrim who had sacrificed everything – pride, money, family and security – for the glory of God. She was a ‘mother’ or a ‘sister’ who would nurture the family of God [...]. Most of all a female preacher was a living embodiment of Joel’s promise that women as well as men would prophesy at the end time.”¹³

Many of these emerging sects were taking root among people from humble origins, and in a climate that valued heartfelt religious experience and direct divine inspiration more than theological education. Consequently they “created a religious culture in which even the most humble convert – the poor, the unlearned, the slave, or the female – felt qualified to preach the gospel.”¹⁴

Early evangelical preaching women claimed their right to interpret the scriptures as they saw fit, and defended their right to preach by reference to Old Testament leaders such as Deborah, Miriam, Huldah, and Esther, as well as to New Testament Pauline co-workers such as Phoebe and Priscilla and the four daughters of Philip.¹⁵ They also deemed to be highly significant – as had the Quaker women before them – the prophet Joel’s promise that the Spirit would be poured out in the latter days on men *and* women. More than the Quaker women before them, it was important to these evangelical women to make a biblical defense of their call – which they frequently did both in their sermons and in their written autobiographies.

In *Daughters of Thunder*, Betty Collier-Thomas notes that many of the African American women preachers of the late 19th and early 20th century were influenced by and drawn to the Wesleyan Holiness tradition in their preaching. For example, Julia Foote, the first woman to be ordained a deacon (1895) and the second woman to be ordained an elder in the AME Zion Church (1899)

¹³ *Brekus* (note 4), 160.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 217–219.

was heavily influenced by the Holiness movement within Methodism and its perfectionist doctrines of sanctification. For more than 50 years she served as an itinerant evangelist, “traveling and lecturing widely at camp meetings, revivals and churches in California, the Midwest, the Northeast, and Canada.”¹⁶

But Foote was not the only African American preaching woman influenced by Holiness beliefs. Collier-Thomas notes that with only one exception, all of the 19th and 20th century preaching women she identifies in her book were associated at some point with Methodism – and many with its holiness tradition.¹⁷

What were the essential tenets of holiness belief? Collier-Thomas identifies six: “Its doctrine (a) centered around experience, (2) had roots in Scripture, (3) emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit, (4) created an aura of freedom that encouraged experimentalism, (5) had a reformist and even revolutionary nature, and (6) encouraged the formation of sects.”¹⁸

Many of these tenets were especially conducive for encouraging the preaching of women. For example, the emphasis on a direct experience of the Holy Spirit led many preaching women to assert that they had been called by a power higher than the Church – namely, by the power of God made manifest to them through the Holy Spirit – and thus had to answer that call to preach. Many of these women also claimed that they had been sanctified instantly (as opposed to the gradual sanctification over the course of a lifetime that John Wesley had espoused), had been made holy by the Spirit, and thus were liberated from the sins that might have otherwise constrained them from preaching. The revolutionary nature of the holiness movement helped these women find the courage to leave their families and go on itinerant preaching missions for months at a time, often encountering dangers and hardships all along the way. It also empowered many of them to deny denominational law and polity that would restrict their freedom to preach, and to boldly take their places in the pulpits of camp meetings, churches, and other venues where people gathered for worship. As Collier-Thomas puts it: “Empowered by their beliefs in holiness and sanctification, they overlooked their own hesitations about the matter. They professed that they did not believe in having women preach, and agonized over how to preserve their marital relations and attend to their duties as wives and mothers, but then they all decided that they had to dedicate their lives to preaching the gospel.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Collier-Thomas (note 5), 59.

¹⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹⁸ Ibid., 13. Collier-Thomas refers her readers to the following article for a deeper discussion of these six tenets: *Nancy Hardesty/Lucile Sider Dayton/Donald W. Dayton*, Women in the Holiness Movement: Feminism in the Evangelical Tradition, in: Rosemary Radford Reuther/Eleanor T. McLaughlin (eds.), *Women of Spirit. Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, New York 1979, 241–249.

¹⁹ Collier-Thomas (note 5), 21.

One of the troubling patterns that can be observed in this history is that the more new sects and denominational movements became institutionalized, the more the preaching of women was silenced and their preaching history eliminated from church historical records. While the Spirit was often “on the loose” in the early days of such movements – especially among poorer and less educated populations of women – over time patriarchy and hierarchy in church governments silenced their preaching, and forced them to “stay in their place.” Perhaps the notable exception is Quakerism where the lack of an ordination process and a theology rooted in the equality of the women and men allowed women more freedom for a longer period of time.

It is also important to note that none of these denominations or sects approved the kinds of structural changes that would allow women to be ordained, and to perform churchly duties such as baptisms and the Lord’s Supper. Consequently, itinerancy was often the only mode of preaching ministry open to them, with only a handful actually serving in local churches.

2. Political and Geo-political Transitions

A second type of transition that seems to have opened the way for women to preach can be seen in political transitions and the new geographies for preaching they occasioned. For instance, the founding of European colonies in the “new world” occasioned opportunities for preaching across continents that otherwise would not have existed, and provided fertile new soil on which European women might preach. This reality is certainly evidenced in the history of the Quaker preaching women of the 1700s. Experiencing both the “push” from the British Isles where Quakers were legally penalized for being dissenters from the Church of England, and the “pull” to a new world where Quakers not only dominated the colonial governments of Pennsylvania and Rhode Island, but also served New Jersey and North Carolina governments in significant numbers,²⁰ Quaker women – often with the blessing and endorsement of their meeting houses in the British Isles – preached throughout the colonies in the 18th century. As Rebecca Larson notes, “Quakerism, with its unpaid, travelling ministry, ‘requiring no church building, a minimum of organizational apparatus, and offering a faith shorn of liturgy, sacraments, and an intricate theology’ was uniquely suited to colonial American circumstances.”²¹ These travelling Quaker women were known for their plain dress, their radical faith, and their eloquent speaking. They attracted large audiences and made strong positive impressions not only on women but also on leading men who came to hear

²⁰ *Rebecca Larson* notes that half the population of Newport, Rhode Island was Quaker in 1704, and that Quakers also controlled half the seats in the North Carolina General Assembly in 1703. Some historians have referred to this era as “the Golden Age of Quakerism in America.” Cf. *Larson* (note 1), 3–5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

them as well. Some of them, like Lucretia Mott, also became leaders in the abolitionist movement, and in advocating for women's equality in the rest of society.

Another example of how geo-political realities opened the way for women to preach is witnessed in the westward expansion of the American frontier in the nineteenth century. Here – as in the case of the early Quaker preaching women – political and ecclesial realities were often intertwined in opening the way for women to preach. For example, because there were not enough seminary-educated men willing to preach in the western territories, some denominational bodies began waiving their high standards for clergy education, which opened the door for women's proclamation. One such example can be found in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, a group which broke away from the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., because it advocated less stringent clergy education, greater sympathy for some of the Great Awakening revival techniques, and greater doctrinal freedom of expression. Louisa Woosley, a Cumberland Presbyterian from Caneyville, Kentucky, traveled by horseback for many years in order to preach in the western territories in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and was such a successful itinerant preacher that her presbytery actually ended up ordaining her in 1889 – the first woman ordained in any Presbyterian denomination.²² A number of other evangelical women were also enabled to expand their territories for peaching with the westward expansion of the U. S.

Of course not all geo-political realities in the U. S. were conducive to women preaching. Catherine Brekus notes the tremendous risks African American evangelical preachers of the early 19th century took when they dared on occasion to preach below the Mason Dixon line or in other states where slavery was the norm. Furthermore, she notes that most of the evangelical preaching women before the Civil War came from the northern U.S. states, and not from the more conservative southern states where societal pressures were stronger on women to stay in their place.

3. Personal Transitions in the Lives of Early Preaching Women

What empowered these women to preach, and what gave them courage to do so in the face of tremendous ridicule, persecution, and opposition, was their deep-seated belief that they had been called by God to do so. Whether it was through a dream, a vision, or a personal encounter with God while fully awake, whether the call came through study of the scripture or while at prayer or during a religious meeting, evangelical preaching women consistently testify in both their sermons

²² In her autobiography, *Louisa Woosley* reports that during the first four years of her ministry she preached 912 sermons “for which God has given me two souls each.” Indeed, she could not answer positively all the invitations she received to preach. Over 500 new members were received into the Cumberland Presbyterian Church through her ministry during that four-year period. Cf. *Louisa M. Woosley*, *Shall Woman Preach? Or the Question Answered* (Originally published in 1891 by Louisa Woosley. Reprinted in Memphis, TN 1989), 100–101.

and their autobiographies that it was God who had called them to preach, and that they had had nothing whatsoever to do with that call. Indeed, many describe themselves as being poor, uneducated, and lacking in eloquence, and marvel at being called in spite of their many limitations.

Yet despite that strong sense of call, many of these women delayed answering that calling for months or even years because of the opposition they faced. “Nancy Towle [a 19th c. nondenominational preacher], debated for two years before finally becoming an itinerant; Jarena Lee [an early 19th c. African Methodist preacher] waited eight years; and because she was illiterate and a slave, Elizabeth [a late 18th c. African Methodist preacher] procrastinated for twenty-nine years.”²³

What is even more striking, however, is that in nearly all the recorded cases, evangelical women only began preaching after significant illness or tragedy struck their lives. Louisa Woosley recounts going through several serious battles with physical illness including one in which “I was reduced to a frame, and as helpless as an infant” before finally acquiescing and agreeing to preach the Gospel.²⁴ Ellen Stewart, a Methodist from Ohio, “tried to quench the spirit by choosing to get married rather than to preach, and as a result, she sank into a deep depression.” It was not until two years later that she began preaching.²⁵ Elleanor Knight (a Christian Connection preacher) had suffered abuse from her husband²⁶ and had lost two children to death—children she believed God had taken away from her as a result of her spiritual disobedience—before she actually began preaching.²⁷ Jarena Lee lost her husband and several children to death, and was a widow supporting two infant children alone when she finally began itinerant preaching.²⁸ And Zilpha Elaw, an early 19th c. African Methodist preacher, almost died from an internal inflammation before commencing her preaching ministry.

One cannot help but wonder, when reading the stories of these women, how much the societal pressures to conform to the “feminine” norms of the day, and the ecclesial and societal roadblocks raised to their preaching as women contributed to their illnesses of mind and body, and to their despair. Pressured to marry and have children, ridiculed and admonished for “exposing themselves” when they dared speak in public, and encouraged to live into a feminine ideal of subservience, piety, and humility, these women faced obstacles at every turn. What is remarkable is that they nevertheless persevered, believing in their heart of hearts, that they would be forsaking

²³ *Brekus* (note 4), 190. Material in brackets added.

²⁴ *Woosley* (note 22), 98–99.

²⁵ *Brekus* (note 4), 189.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁸ *Dennis Dickerson*, Foreward, in: Jarena Lee, *Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*, “A Preaching Woman”, Nashville, TN, 1991, x.

God's calling upon their lives if they did not, seizing the openings available to them (and often pressuring for more), and trusting the Spirit to empower them and give them the words to proclaim.

Some Concluding Reflections

What might we in the church today learn from this history of early women preachers in the U.S.A.? For starters, we are reminded that God's Spirit not only rests upon those whom our denominations deem to ordain through official channels, but also upon countless others who may not seem smart enough, educated enough, doctrinaire enough, or the right gender, race, class, or sexual orientation to meet our human standards. It was through the ministry of Spirit-anointed lay people, women and men, that the church of Christ was first given birth, and as this history reminds us, it is often through the preaching of Spirit-anointed lay people of all varieties that the church today continues to be reborn and renewed. Perhaps, rather than bemoaning the increasing number of "uneducated" lay people who are serving pulpits in geographical areas underserved by ordained clergy, we seminary-trained clergy should be celebrating and encouraging them. Perhaps rather than jealously guarding our local parish pulpits we should be opening them to lay people both within and without our congregations, who have received a Word from God that they are led to bring to us. And perhaps rather than viewing preaching primarily as a clerical calling, we – who believe the Spirit has indeed been poured out on *all flesh* – should reclaim it as a calling of the whole people of God.

Second, this history reminds us of the deep harm that is done to those in our midst who are called by God's Spirit to preach, but who, on the basis of gender (or race, sexual orientation, class, etc.) are denied the right to preach. The history of these early preaching women gives testimony that such denials have, in the past, led to serious illnesses of the body, mind, and spirit. Women have suffered – and suffered mightily – by the refusal of churches to allow them to do what they believe in their hearts God has called them to do. Perhaps it is time for mainline denominations who have in recent years celebrated the anniversaries of the ordination women, also to repent of their past histories of discrimination against women and suppression of their voices in the pulpit. And perhaps it is time for denominations who still deny ordination to women and others to do some serious soul-searching about the harm they are causing in the process.

Finally, this history calls us to become as savvy as serpents in our readings of the times and our identification of those moments of transition that can be openings for people on the margins to preach. I think, for example, of that Roman Catholic Latina seminarian I taught several years ago who had a burning in her bones to preach, but loved her church too much to leave it. She seized upon the internet as a place where she could do so freely and publicly, and developed a blog

site where she could preach and enter into dialog with people the world over about her sermons. I also think of that Ph.D. student I know who has a special passion for African American women's preaching, and has developed a website that celebrates and encourages it, along with providing a forum for posting Black women's sermons. These women, it seems to me, are following in the footsteps of their female preaching ancestors of earlier centuries – taking those openings that are available to them in this time of technological transition in our world – and using those openings to foster women's preaching of the gospel.

A Personal Postscript

In a book he wrote about one branch of our family's history, my (now deceased) maternal grandfather recounts that two Quaker preachers from Ireland, Mary Peisley and Catherine Payton, visited a colony of Quakers living in the area now known as Camden S.C. in December of 1753, and preached there for 12 days. Among the settlers were a family of Englishes, my ancestors, who had immigrated to the new world from Ireland only five months prior. My grandfather, a very conservative Presbyterian minister who opposed women's ordination (including my own), comments on the courage of these women and the hardships they must have endured as they traveled the 125 miles from Charleston to Camden, covering territory that had no road going through it until that very year. He also surmises that several of the youth in the English family were probably among those converted by these women and their preaching. Yet when it comes to giving reasons for the decline of Quakerism in SC later in that same century, he also comments, "Such itineration as was undertaken by Mary Peisley and Catherine Payton, *besides laboring under the prohibition expressly laid down in Scripture (1Tim 2:12–14)*, was not suited to the pioneer life of South Carolina at that period."²⁹ I can't help but wonder, however: would I be doing what I am doing today had it not been for the courageous witness of these early Quaker preaching woman?

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²⁹ *James English Cousar, Jr.*, *Quaker Turned Presbyterian The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Robert ("Robin") English*, self published; copyright 1956, 12. Italics added for emphasis.

Topical Preaching and Otherness

A Conversational Topical Preaching Proposal

Bryan Nash

Abstract

This article suggests that topical preaching can be revisited with integrity in postmodernity. The topical sermon in postmodernity should seek to place texts in conversation with one another in such a way that each text is valued and respected. Instead of allowing only one text to be heard at the exclusion of all others, appropriate topical preaching should model the embrace of otherness and conversation.

Within the field of homiletics, topical preaching is generally regarded with disdain. To say that one preaches topically is practically to say that one does not preach at all. It is not difficult to see why topical preaching has such a negative reputation. The topical preaching of the past was often lacking in theological roots and hermeneutical method. Sermons consisted of unrelated texts used to support the preconceived position of the preacher. However, as Ronald Allen observes, “malpractice does not mean that topical preaching itself is malefaction.”¹ In this article I wish to suggest that preachers are in a unique time in which topical preaching can be revisited with integrity in the homiletical landscape.

1. Topical Preaching in the Homiletics Literature

Over the last several decades, few major homiletics texts have addressed topical preaching.² David Buttrick’s *Homiletic* is an exception.³ Buttrick avoids referring to sermons as topical. Instead, he refers to situational preaching in the praxis mode. This approach to preaching does not begin with a text but rather “starts with a hermeneutic of lived experience.”⁴ Preaching in the mode of praxis requires a reverse sequence from that of preaching from Scripture. Buttrick contends that in the case of the latter, the preacher moves “from text to a contemporary field of meaning in consciousness (shaped by theological understanding and analogies of experience) to a

¹ Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching the Topical Sermon*, Louisville 1992, x.

² For a bibliography of works that do address the topical sermon, see *ibid.*, 145, 153.

³ David Buttrick, *Homiletic, Moves and Structures*, Philadelphia 1987, 405–448.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 405.

congregational situation.”⁵ In the case of preaching a situation, the preacher begins with a situation then shifts “to a theological review of the situation in Christian consciousness, and then, possibly, to particular passages *if* they have been connected to theological understanding in consciousness and are, therefore, at hand.”⁶

Buttrick suggests that the sermon should not turn immediately to Scripture because people do not turn immediately to Scripture when interpreting situations. Instead, Christian consciousness understands a situation in light of theological understandings and then one finds Scriptures that one believes are pertinent. Furthermore, Buttrick does not believe that the move to Scripture is necessary in order for the sermon to be considered a sermon. Situational sermons may use Scripture, but care must be exercised so that Scripture is not misused and abused.⁷

For Buttrick, not just any topic is appropriate for a sermon. Three criteria are given. First, “a situation *ought* to connect with profound ontological or historical questions.”⁸ Second, “a situation ought to relate to the store of unanswered questions [...] of meaning and morality.”⁹ Third, “a situation ought to fit into structures of Christian consciousness.”¹⁰

Buttrick notes that arranging the sermon is necessary yet hesitates to offer a fixed form. Instead of offering a series of moves, he opts instead to offer an overall strategy. The sermon in the mode of praxis should offer a description of the situation, offer a rereading of the situation, the situation must be reinterpreted, and a new understanding or course of action should be portrayed.¹¹

The next serious treatment of topical preaching is Allen’s *Preaching the Topical Sermon*. Allen defines a topic as “a need, an issue, or a situation which is important to the congregation.”¹² For Allen, the topic should be interpreted in light of God’s unconditional love of creation and God’s desire for justice.¹³ The preacher should attempt to develop a thorough understanding of the topic so that the topic will not be misrepresented.

Similar to Buttrick, Allen holds that Scripture may be used, but Scripture does not have to be referenced in the topical sermon. However, if Scripture is referenced, it should be interpreted within the literary, historical, and theological context.¹⁴ It would be better not to use Scripture than

⁵ Ibid., 419.

⁶ Ibid., 419.

⁷ Ibid., 420.

⁸ Ibid., 425.

⁹ Ibid., 425.

¹⁰ Ibid., 425.

¹¹ Ibid., 430.

¹² *Allen* (note 1), 3.

¹³ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

to misuse Scripture.¹⁵ The topical sermon does not begin with Scripture, but rather begins with a situation and interprets the situation theologically. That is, in light of the gospel. One of the main benefits of the topical sermon for Allen is that topical preaching “teaches the congregation how to interpret life in light of the gospel.”¹⁶

Allen suggests several situations in which the topical sermon is appropriate.¹⁷ The topical sermon is appropriate when time is short or there is an urgent need. For example, tragedy may strike the congregation on Saturday, and the expository sermon prepared during the week is no longer appropriate. The topical sermon is appropriate when Scripture is silent on an issue – the existence of God is such an issue. Scripture presupposes the existence of God. The topical sermon can be appropriate when there is no single text that offers a definitive statement on an issue. The topical sermon can be appropriate in dealing with harmful texts, such as those that contain anti-Semitic overtones. Finally, the topical sermon can be helpful when there is no decisive Christian viewpoint of the issue. In such a situation the preacher may offer a tentative preference, but note that there is not a correct, Christian understanding of the issue. Such a topical sermon may help the congregation appreciate the complexity of situations.

In terms of form, Allen offers six suggestions.¹⁸ First, for topics that are straightforward and not controversial, a deductive form may be appropriate. The sermon can state the preacher’s position, describe the situation, interpret the situation theologically, and make applications. Second, the Methodist quadrilateral may be appropriate for some topics. In this form, the topic is evaluated in light of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Third, although not advocating for viewing the sermon as group counseling, Allen finds that a pattern of moral reasoning can be appropriate for the topical sermon. Such a sermon would begin with experience, move to analysis, and finally to decision and strategy. There may be times when an inductive model is useful for topical preaching. An inductive approach may be especially helpful when dealing with controversial issues. Fifth, Allen follows Buttrick in suggesting a sermon which moves from the situation to a re-reading of the situation, to a reinterpretation of the situation, to a new course of action. Finally, Allen revisits an older homiletical form which divides the sermon into mind, heart, and will. The preacher explains the topic, stirs emotions about the topic, and then helps the congregation make a decision regarding the topic.

In addition to Buttrick and Allen, Lance Pape has made a significant contribution to the discussion on topical preaching. Pape wrestles with the question of how a preacher might approach

¹⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁷ Ibid., 19–35.

¹⁸ Ibid., 75–92.

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the task of being asked to preach on a particular topic.¹⁹ In order to develop his proposal, Pape dialogues with Paul Ricoeur.²⁰ For Ricoeur, the sense of a text is not behind it but rather the possible world that is in front of it.²¹ The world that is in front of the text is not a window through which one might be able to look at other times and places. Instead, texts provide the reader with alternative ways of being in the present world. Texts shape the reader's consciousness.

Pape uses this phenomenology of reading to state the problem of topical preaching. That is, this process is interrupted when one approaches a text looking for a topic. "A seriously imaginable way of being that is commensurate with that strange new world is always the 'topic.'"²²

Having connected Ricoeur with topical preaching, Pape brings Hans Frei into the discussion.²³ Drawing upon Frei, Pape observes that the Gospels are not about any particular topic. The Gospels are about a person. Thus, Jesus is the exemplar of any particular way of living. It is incorrect to say that Jesus was loving based upon a predetermined understanding of love. In actuality, we know love because we know the main character of the Gospels – Jesus.

Applying this insight to topical preaching, Pape proposes that it would be incorrect to ask what Jesus said about a particular topic, as if the Gospels are collections of sayings about various topics. The question that can be asked is, "What would it mean to ponder X in the presence of Jesus?"²⁴ Within this approach, the topic will appear in a new light in the presence of Jesus. Therefore, a new world can be imagined in the Ricoeurian sense.

2. Preaching and Otherness

I wish to draw upon the insights of Buttrick, Allen, and Pape in order to suggest a way of preaching topically which is appropriate to the church in postmodernity. Specifically, I am interested in the recognition of otherness. According to Emmanuel Levinas, the way toward becoming conscious of the other is through exposure to the other.²⁵ Homiletics has made great

¹⁹ Lance B. Pape, Preaching about Stewardship. An Encounter with Jesus in the World "in front of" the Synoptics, in: Practical Matters 8 (2015), 63–74.

²⁰ Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory. Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, Fort Worth 1976.

²¹ See also Lance B. Pape, The Scandal of Having Something to Say. Ricoeur and the Possibility of Postliberal Preaching, Waco, 2013.

²² Pape (note 19), 67.

²³ Hans W. Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics, New Haven 1974.

²⁴ Ibid., 71.

²⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, 1961; Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, trans. Alphonso Lingis, The Hague 1981.

strides in becoming aware of otherness. In particular, the works of John McClure and Ronald Allen have sought to appropriate the insights of Levinas to homiletical theory.²⁶

John McClure argues in *Other-wise Preaching* that deconstruction does not necessarily yield negative results for preaching. In actuality, it creates possibilities. McClure makes the astute observation that “Sacred speech, which is fundamentally position-losing, or dis-positioned, testimonial speech mirrors in some ways our current cultural situation, in which all authorities are weakening and in which everything is interpretation, even the statement that everything is interpretation.”²⁷

Within such a situation, preaching must become reoriented toward the other. This is not only a philosophical concern, but also an ethical concern. The preacher can no longer be forced into binary modes of thinking, and the sermon must eschew attempts to create sameness. Preaching that takes into account the other is not only timely but necessary. Allen suggests that preachers can help congregations critique their tendencies toward sameness. This may apply toward the congregations understanding of God, the Bible and Christian tradition, as well as in regard to the congregation overall.²⁸

The shift toward the awareness of the other has created the realization that the sermon must find ways to be hospitable toward the other. Although the New Homiletic was an attempt to include the other in preaching, it has been found guilty of elevating the experience of the preacher above the experience of others.²⁹ Today’s sermon should look for ways of honoring otherness. Such a sermon seeks to raise the congregation’s awareness of an issue while respecting varying viewpoints. While the sermon does want the congregation to make a decision, the preacher realizes that the choice is up to the congregants. The sermon does not seek to be the final word but rather seeks to make a contribution to a conversation. “In this approach the pulpit is not a lectern at center stage but a chair placed at the edge of the conversation table.”³⁰ The aim of the sermon is to help the listeners participate in the ongoing conversation about what is at stake.

²⁶ John S. McClure, *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*, St. Louis 2001; Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching and the Other: Studies of Postmodern Insights*, St. Louis 2014.

²⁷ John S. McClure (note 26), 7.

²⁸ Allen (note 26), 34–37.

²⁹ John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*, Nashville 1995, 42–45; Lucy A. Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, Louisville 1997, 78–81; Ronald J. Allen/O. Wesley Allen, Jr., *The Sermon without End: A Conversational Approach to Preaching*, Nashville 2015, 40.

³⁰ O. Wesley Allen Jr., *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach*, Louisville 2005, 58.

3. Otherness and Sermon Form

Perhaps as a result of the New Homiletic's obsession with form, comparatively little attention has been given to sermon form in the aforementioned texts. This is understandable and even commendable. Allen and Allen suggest that preachers need "a variety of forms that will allow them to participate in the church's and culture's ongoing conversations in different ways."³¹ If the sermon is viewed as conversation, then it must be said that "In conversation, no one form of speech is appropriate at all times."³²

Of the several potential forms proposed by Allen and Allen, I wish to investigate further the "panel discussion." Within this sermon form, "a preacher could structure a sermon by naming the issue and resources, and then looking at one interpretative option after another according to some logical sequence, such as the order in which the options appeared in history or different dimensions of the topic."³³ I wish to contend that the topical sermon is one way that this can be achieved.

A potential danger of referencing only one text during the sermon is that the voice of the other may not be heard. If one acknowledges that the biblical testimony is filled with a variety of voices and viewpoints, then it is to the congregation's benefit that such viewpoints receive a fair hearing. Doing so can potentially lead to a deeper awareness of the other.

4. Toward a Proposal

At this point it might be helpful to return to Buttrick, Allen, and Pape and attempt to find points of intersection which can contribute to the development of a conversational approach to topical preaching. Two themes in particular are noteworthy. First, the topical sermon should attempt to shape the awareness and consciousness of the congregation.³⁴ Second, Scripture can be used in the topical sermon as long as one understands that there is a working theology in place through which one decides upon appropriate Scriptures.³⁵

The topical preaching for which I am advocating will allow multiple voices from the biblical canon a fair and gracious hearing. This type of preaching does not take the place of the sermon that is rooted in a particular text. However, it may be that a steady diet of sermons that begin with the text can be viewed as laying the groundwork for the topical sermon. Within this paradigm, the expository sermon allows the congregation to become acquainted with a variety of voices. The

³¹ *Allen/Allen* (note 29), 132.

³² *Allen* (note 30), 71.

³³ *Allen/Allen* (note 29), 133.

³⁴ *Buttrick* (note 3), 430; *Allen* (note 1), 10; *Pape* (note 19), 71.

³⁵ *Buttrick*, (note 3), 420; *Allen*, (note 1), 6; *Pape* (note 19), 64.

topical sermon then allows these voices to talk to one another.³⁶ The sermon does not condemn some voices and elevate others (one is reminded of Luther's denigrating comments about James), but rather allows all to be heard at their best. The listening community may be relieved to know that there is not a clear "Christian position" on a variety of issues.³⁷

A responsible conversational topical sermon might begin with an investigation of a current topic. Next, the sermon can move to a theological understanding of a topic, noting one's biases and presuppositions. Finally, the sermon can consult voices within the biblical canon and larger tradition, allowing them to speak to one another graciously. It should be acknowledged that other traditions might choose different texts.

Such a sermon is an attempt to model healthy conversation. It could be beneficial to allow some voices to speak which rarely get heard (Jude, for instance). Or, it could be helpful to allow voices which are sometimes viewed as competing voices to talk to each other (Paul and James). Still yet, the listeners might benefit from knowing that even Jesus is portrayed in differing ways. A creative sermon could potentially place the Markan Jesus in conversation with the Johannine Jesus. How might Jesus speak with Jesus in a panel discussion?

4.1 A Sample Sermon

For the benefit of the reader, I will conclude by providing a sample conversational topical sermon. The following sermon is intended for a community that is on the brink of a major decision and wrestling with understandings of discernment. The question has been raised, "How can we sense God's presence in this?" The sermon is an attempt to allow multiple voices to be heard, thus avoiding the violence of one person who claims to have received *the* word from God. The desired response to the sermon is not *yes* or *no*, but rather the desire to enter into deeper conversation with the other. The sermon sketch is divided into three parts: the sermon begins with an exploration of the topic, moves to a theological understanding of the topic, and then allows several voices to contribute to the conversation.³⁸ A few footnotes will be provided along the way to explain why various moves have been made.

³⁶ I am here attempting to follow Pape's suggestion that a topic be placed in the presence of another. In other words, I am suggesting that the topical sermon can result when the topic is placed in front of multiple voices and each is allowed to contribute to the conversation. I realize the limitations of such an approach. Namely, a narrative critical approach may potentially be applied to texts of other genres. Additionally, this approach assumes that one can come to know something about the author of a text through the reading of the text.

³⁷ *Allen*, (note 1), 34.

³⁸ Ideally, the sermon should also dialogue with voices throughout the history of the church. However, for the sake of space and simplicity, only Scripture is consulted.

Move 1: The Topic

“God said to me.” Let’s be honest. Those four words scare people. A Jewish rabbi friend of mine once commented that few things scare a Jewish community more than when a Christian speaks the words, “God said to me.”³⁹

Much violence has been done in the name of God. Nations have gone to war and creation has been exploited all because of “the word of the Lord.” When we hear people talk about what God is doing in our midst, the responsible thing to do is to listen critically.

However, sometimes our critical listening skills can spiral downward into complete rejection. It is as if we think that the notion of discerning God’s voice must be rejected entirely. May I suggest that doing so might actually result in violence? If we stop listening for the still, small voice of God, there are inevitably louder voices that we may heed. When a charismatic leader marches into a community where God is seen as the distant clockmaker, trouble can follow.

Move 2: Theology

The Scriptures give us a testimony to the various ways that people of faith through the ages have sensed the activity of God. As this church is contemplating some major decisions, the Scriptures can remind us of the importance of consulting everyone. The Scriptures also remind us that God loves everyone. And because God loves everyone, God wants to be involved with everyone.

So, how is God moving among us? I want to suggest that there is not one correct answer to that question. Different people experience God in different ways. We must accept this diversity while still moving toward the common good of all.

Move 3: Inviting Voices from Scripture into the Conversation

Some people have experiences of God in dreams. Have you ever awoken from a good night’s sleep and felt like you had great clarity on a decision that was to be made? If we placed Joseph at our conversation table⁴⁰ this morning, we might find that Joseph discerned the next move through a

³⁹ The mention of someone from the Jewish community places Jews and Christians in conversation. This is an attempt at raising awareness to the fact that the conversations of the local church impacts other conversation circles. It is also an attempt to make the listener aware that the preacher is open to interfaith dialogue.

⁴⁰ Throughout the sermon I refer to the “conversation.” This sets a different tone than referring to it as a “difficult decision” or “debate.”

restful evening. Of course, there are usually those who don't think this is a very legitimate way of coming to a conclusion. Joseph's brothers sure weren't very congenial toward him.

Some people sense God's presence in nature. If Moses was here with us this morning, I wonder what he might say.⁴¹ I wonder how he might contribute to this conversation. He might tell us of how he noticed God in a bush. He might recount the story of how God used water to deliver the people. He might tell us about how God was in a cloud by day and a fire by night. There might be some people here like Moses – people who have a sense of God's presence through nature.

But nature is not the only way that our ancestors in faith discerned the will of God.⁴² Some folks took a roll of the dice. Moses' brother Aaron was quite confident in the Urim and the Thummim. And Moses was ok with the idea that not everyone was going to experience God through a bush. The Apostles also seem to have been part of the gambling crowd. When they were trying to replace Judas they cast lots. Some people in the church might be a bit more risky or bold than others when it comes to discerning God's will. But that's what community is for. Together, we can arrive at decisions.

There are some who are blessed to be able to see how circumstances work together. We can pull up a chair for Esther and Mordecai at our table. Esther and Mordecai can represent this approach in our conversation. Esther was the one who had been called for "such a time as this" (Esth 4:14). God has given some people the gift of being able to see how events in life are interrelated.

Then there are always the folks who feel like they just need to take some time alone – maybe go on a retreat. Jesus spent much time in prayer and fasting during his ministry. And the disciples seemed to have difficulty grasping that this was one way that Jesus encountered God. One time when Jesus was off praying, his disciples wanted to know why he wasn't with the people. "Everyone is searching for you" they said to him (Mark 1:37). We may need to give some people space, trusting that they will return with more clarity.

One thing we do know is that discerning God's will is not always comfortable. While God is the one who brings peace, there are times when the nearness of God doesn't make us feel good. Remember that the nearness of God resulted in the people placing Jesus on a cross.

⁴¹ I have not attempted to make an exact claim on the other (in this case Moses), but instead used tentative language as a way of respecting otherness. "I wonder what he might say."

⁴² This is also a move toward encouraging appreciation of others and interfaith dialogue. I refer to those within the Jewish story as "our ancestors in faith."

It could be that God is calling us to something new.⁴³ It may be that God is calling us to be something different in the world than we have been in the past.⁴⁴ Change is rarely comfortable. But whatever discomfort we experience in the process of discerning God's will, may it be from the call to become something new – and not from how my brothers and sisters uniquely experience God.

Conclusion

Preaching in postmodernity demands that preachers formulate an understanding of otherness. It is possible that by only consulting one text in the sermon, the sermon is silencing the other, and thus not modeling healthy communal conversation. This article has suggested that topical preaching needs to be revisited. A conversational topical approach to preaching will seek to allow the other to be heard. It does not seek to harmonize the texts but rather places the texts in conversation with one another, respecting the otherness of each witness.

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⁴³ I have again used tentative language purposefully. The sermon does not attempt to provide a definitive answer.

⁴⁴ In this case, the new way of being in the world is the openness to diverse experiences of God. The sermon is thus intended to function as a text in the Ricoeurian sense.

Homiletic Transitions in The Netherlands

The Spirit, Human Language and Real Preaching

Theo Pleizier

Abstract

Preaching is in transition, so is homiletics as the theory of preaching. In this article the development of homiletics in the Low Countries is explored as a case-study within the dynamics of international homiletical thought. The material for this case-study consists of the doctoral theses that have been published since the turn of the century. The amount of doctoral work in homiletics, the variety of methodological approaches and theological perspectives, provide a viable entrance to homiletics as academic discipline. It will be concluded that homiletics has developed into an international, empirically oriented, culturally sensitive, and theological diverse field. Preaching is in transition, so is homiletics. The transition, as seen through the lens of recent Dutch contributions to scholarly discourse in preaching, has three focal points: pneumatology, language, and empirical research.

1. Introduction: Transitions in Preaching and Homiletics

The very act of preaching is a transitory act. Sermons negotiate between the biblical texts, its reception in the Christian tradition – as objectified in historical confessional texts, reworked theological treatises, and existentially appropriated through spiritual disciplines – and contemporary contexts and experiences. Sermons reflect exegetical and hermeneutic insights in the Scriptures, they express the dynamics and diversity in Christian traditions, and they embody a complex interaction with contemporary cultures and plural societies. Since every sermon is a specific combination of Bible, Christian traditions, and contemporary lived faith, the content of preaching is part of various transitions. Tracing the way preaching reflects these transitions, however, is rather complex. Rapid and deep changes in theology and society will somehow lead to changes in preaching. The way this works, however, is not very clear. In the process of understanding these transitions, homiletics plays a double role. First, homiletics – especially after the empirical turn – has changed into the art of detecting changes and developments in actual preaching. Sermon analysis and reception research are widely used as methods to find out what is going on in the preaching event. The empirical turn added descriptive science to the discipline of homiletics. Second, homiletics has also taken a lead in suggesting changes in preaching. New homiletical models, such as aesthetic, performative, and narrative homiletics, have stimulated teachers of

preaching to explore new pedagogical models and provided new pathways for preachers to start thinking differently about the relationship between form and content in preaching or about the importance of movement and structure of the sermon. So though the transitions of preaching specifically concern biblical hermeneutics, christian theology and cultural context, they are also homiletical-methodical. Homiletics thus both describes and determines transitions in preaching.

This article charts the territory between preaching as religious practice and homiletics as academic practice and highlights some of the transitions that have taken place in these areas. Both practices, preaching and homiletics, are contextual despite the fact that homiletics has developed into an international discipline. In this article I put the transitions in preaching and homiletics in the wider field of international and contextual developments, and as a Dutch theologian I focus on preaching and homiletics in the Low Countries. The case of this article is thus a regional case. The methodical assumption implied in this approach is the idea that international discourse within a discipline such as homiletics might be served best by developing cases of "regional homiletics": academic theory on contextual practices itself is contextual and by describing developments within regions international discourse might benefit for the sake stimulating a diverse scholarly conversation.

Two additional methodical reflections are in place. First, the material in this article is mainly taken from doctoral theses, defended between the years 2000–2016. Doctoral theses are academical products and thus reflect a stage in the development of homiletics as an academic discipline. Further, in the last 15 years, a doctoral thesis in the field of homiletics has been defended almost every year – a production that is quantitatively significant given the small range of Dutch theological productions. Finally, doctoral theses are especially relevant for exploring the interaction between local and international developments. The interest in practical-theological theses is usually fueled by local developments and the background of the research questions is mostly contextual, while the discourse in theses, given the academic genre, connects to international research and theory. So, doctoral theses – especially in The Netherlands as it is located between the German-speaking and English-speaking (scholarly) world - provide a special entrance to the developing field of homiletical thought.

Secondly, from the Dutch doctoral theses in homiletics, a threefold analytical interest emerges: empirical materiality, theological intentionality, and religious practice. First, increasingly, homiletical doctoral theses contain *empirical material*. Since Rudolf Bohren and Klaus-Peter Jörns in 1989 published a first, international, attempt to address the method of sermon analysis into the discipline of homiletics,¹ the empirical turn stimulated researchers to generate new empirical

¹ Die Predigtanalyse als Weg zur Predigt, Tübingen 1989.

material and to develop analytical strategies. Secondly, at the bottom of many research questions in homiletics the question of the relationship between God's word and human discourse in preaching either lies dormant or is very much awake. This central question in homiletics, prominently addressed in Barth's double definition of preaching,² not only seems unresolvable, it also fuels homiletical research with a permanent theological intentionality: how is God named in preaching, in what sense is preaching an instance of Divine-human communication, and what does it imply when we talk about preaching as "God's Word." Thirdly, in combining the empirical and the theological, homiletical research deals with preaching as *religious practice*. As Gerrit Immink observes, practices "depend for a great deal on the people who perform them [...] with their beliefs and convictions, with their desires and ideas, with their spirituality and faith;" practices "have social and communicative dimensions;" and "religious practices are motivated by, and express traces of, spirituality and lived faith."³ Hence, when studying preaching, the two aspects of human action on the one hand, and the expression of religious motivations and theological references on the other hand, come together.

So after positioning Dutch homiletics as a case for "regional homiletics" within in the wider field of international homiletics (section 2), I present the transitions in Dutch homiletics from three points of view: the theological is dealt with from the perspective of pneumatology (section 3), the practice is dealt with from the perspective of language (section 4), and the empirical is dealt with from the perspective of "real preaching" (section 5).

2. International and Regional Homiletics: The Case of The Netherlands

Homiletics as the theological reflection upon the practice of preaching started as a rather contextually bound field. Nineteenth century homiletics in the German (Friedrich Schleiermacher, 1768–1834), English (Phillip Brooks, 1835–1893), French (Alexandre Vinet, 1797–1847) or Dutch (Jan Jacob van Oosterzee, 1817–1882) language, seemed rather isolated enterprises, sharing the history of preaching as their common frame of reference. Obviously, there were still remnants of the shared academic language in Latin and scholarly interaction across linguistic and contextual borders. Both Vinet and Van Oosterzee were translated into English and found their way into American practical theology.⁴ J.J. van Oosterzee's textbook "Praktische theologie" [*Practical Theology*] is considered to be the first Dutch handbook of practical theology and includes sections on pastoral theology, liturgics, and homiletics. His work was translated into Danish, German, and

² Cf. *Karl Barth*, *Homiletik. Wesen und Vorbereitung der Predigt*, Zürich 1966.

³ *Gerrit Immink*, *Theological Analysis of Religious Practices*, in: *IJPT* 18.1 (2014), 127–138, 127f.

⁴ Cf. *Friedrich Schweitzer*, *Praktische Theologie in Nordamerika*, in: Christian Grethlein/Michael Meyer-Blanck (eds.) *Geschichte der Praktischen Theologie. Dargestellt anhand ihrer Klassiker*, Leipzig 2000, 565–596, 568.

English.⁵ Van Oosterzee interacted with ideas from his contemporaries, such as C.I. Nitzsch, C.H. Spurgeon, and H. Ward Beecher. Despite the fact that the reflection of preaching was internationally shared, we have to bear in mind that: (1) homiletics had not developed into a specialized academic discipline, and (2) the reflection of preaching very much took place within the frames of particular theological traditions, such as presbyterian, liberal, or neo-orthodox. This changed, however, during the second half of the 20th Century.

As a practical-theological sub-discipline, homiletics started to interact more closely with other academic fields and methods. In the early 20th Century, a Dutch theologian such as T. Hoekstra already wrote extensively about how preaching related to explicitly non-theological fields such as psychology and rhetoric. As *sacred rhetoric*, rhetoric had been an important conversation partner in homiletical reflection witnessing classical texts such as by Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617–1666), who wrote the first Dutch homiletic in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands.⁶ Yet by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth Century the field had become very dispersed. On the one hand, modern preaching tried to incorporate many insights from the human sciences. On the other hand, dialectical theology stressed the need for a theological articulation against the emphasis upon human consciousness and experience at the expense of divine revelation. Against this twofold theological background the Dutch practical theologian, T. Hoekstra, wrote about the relation between preaching and psychology or preaching and rhetoric. His approach was modern (the stress upon psychology), classic (the importance of rhetoric, even *rhetorica sacra*) and Reformed (the focus upon preaching as ministry of the Word). Inter- or intradisciplinary approaches in homiletics quickly became international. Interaction with C.G. Jung, with structuralist approaches to language and meaning, and with Clinical Psychological Education, such as in the work of H.-C. Piper and H. van der Geest⁷, entailed interaction with ideas that were developed in a variety of contexts, both academically as well as geographically. In the third part of the 20th Century this resulted in the first international meetings of homileticians, starting in 1986 with a colloquium about sermon-analysis instigated by Rudolf Bohren and attended by homileticians from Europe (Germany, Scandinavia and The Netherlands), Australia, North America and Japan. *Societas Homiletica* was founded.⁸ It may be appropriate to speak about an “international turn” in homiletics, during the second half of the 20th Century.

⁵ Cf. *David J. Bos*, A good enough parson. Early nineteenth-century Dutch discourse on requirements for the pastoral ministry in the Reformed Church, in: *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 83.1 (2003), 333–370, 334.

⁶ Cf. *T. Brien*, De eerste Nederlandse homiletiek, Johannes Hoornbeeck, vertaald en ingeleid, Goudriaan 2009.

⁷ Cf. *Hans Christoph Piper*, Predigtanalysen. Kommunikation und Kommunikationsstörungen in der Predigt, Göttingen 1976; *Hans van der Geest*, Presence in the Pulpit. The impact of personality in preaching, Louisville (KY) 1982.

⁸ In 2016, Societas Homiletica had its 12th international conference in Stellenbosch, South Africa (<http://www.societas-homiletica.org/>, visited December 2016).

What has been observed for Dutch theology in general also seems to apply to homiletics: because of its geographical location, having both the United Kingdom and Germany as its western and eastern neighbors, the Dutch have become accustomed to interacting with both German and English-speaking theology. Hermeneutic, analytic, empirical, and kerygmatic approaches in theology were usually connected to conversations with continental (hermeneutic and kerygmatic) or English-speaking (analytic and empirical) literature. As international as Christian preaching has been from its earliest beginnings – and as international as homiletics has become in the course of the emancipation of practical theology as a distinct academic discipline, including its different fields such as pastoral care, religious education, and homiletics – preaching and the reflection of preaching also remains “regional.” The larger story of preaching and theories of preaching cannot exist without the smaller stories of what preaching looks like in various theological traditions and local contexts. This reflects the nature of preaching itself. Each sermon participates in the ongoing practice of proclaiming the gospel of Christ and teaching the Scriptures of Old and New Testament. Yet each sermon does it contextually and locally. Homiletical reflection therefore can never become international in the same way that preaching can never become abstracted from time and place.

So what does a regional (Dutch, protestant) homiletics and its contribution to international homiletics⁹ look like at the beginning of the 21st Century? In order to answer this question I turn to the doctoral theses in homiletics that have been published in The Netherlands from the year 2000 onwards. First some statistics. It seems that the first decade has been very fruitful when it comes to publications in homiletics on a PhD level, having a dissertation published almost annually. In 15 year’s time, a homiletical dissertation was defended and contributed to the development of the field almost every year. This is remarkable when we compare it to the development of theological institutions in the Netherlands: out of 7 places where ministers were trained academically in the Dutch Reformed, Reformed, and Evangelical Lutheran churches in the Netherlands (since 2004 united into the Protestant Church of the Netherlands) by the end of the 20th Century, only 2 survived. Paradoxically, while the landscape of theology has changed drastically, the production of homiletical publications has increased steady. In Dutch homiletics this transition can be traced from three angles: the transition from studying preaching as source for dogmatics, to studying historical homiletic examples, to studying preaching as a religious practice. This transition reflects the broader empirical turn in practical theology. This does not imply that homiletics necessarily turned to empirical methodology, but the approach became increasingly focussed upon “real preaching.”

⁹ The notion of “regional homiletics” is borrowed from the contemporary field of ontology. *Martin Heidegger* distinguishes between fundamental and regional ontologies, since every domain (such as banking or biology) in reality has its own “science of being.”

Three dissertations before the turn of the century may serve as illustrations of this interest in real preaching. The study of sermons no longer served the reconstruction of systematic theological ideas. Sermons increasingly were studied according to their genre: how does this actual sermon embody the act of preaching? In his dissertation Van der Velden wrote about the Dutch theologian K.H. Miskotte and analyzed the transcriptions of tape-recorded sermons.¹⁰ The research questions were homiletical: how does a method of preaching emerge from studying these sermons? Similar homiletical questions were asked in subsequent doctoral theses. Arjen Velema compared Karl Barth's christological homiletical thinking with H.J. Iwand, Ernst Lange, and Rudolf Bohren.¹¹ Despite the difficulty of relating homiletic theory and actual preaching, Velema approaches the sermons from three homiletical angles: how preaching embodies spirituality, how reality is represented in sermons and the theological relevance of a sermon's structure. Wim Moehn analyzed sermons from John Calvin from the perspective of the implied hearer.¹² He applied the Heidelberger method of sermon analysis to Calvin's preaching. The goal was not to reconstruct Calvin's theology, but to understand his homiletical strategy: how do Calvin's sermons embody the relationship between God and human beings, and how do they exemplify the context of 16th century Geneva and its citizens. These three dissertations together give an overview of the interests of Dutch homiletics at the end of the 20th Century: the Reformed tradition with John Calvin as its prime point of reference, the reception of German preaching as it was influenced by dialectical theology, and an interest in major Dutch preachers such as Miskotte. Hence, Dutch homiletics moved within the area defined by three parameters: its theological (Reformed) heritage, the major international influences on Dutch theology (notably German dialectical theology), and examples of contemporary preaching (such as Miskotte).

In the meantime two features become prevalent: the empirical turn and the special interest in theological (research) questions. In 2004 Gerrit Immink wrote about the diversity of homiletics as a discipline.¹³ He also made a strong case for empirical research and theological analysis in homiletics. He stressed the fact that preaching as religious practice needs to be studied from a performative perspective. Not just communicative performance, but embedded in the interhuman communication, religious performance takes place. We cannot capture the preaching event well enough, when the empirical dimension is taken seriously without taking into account that within

¹⁰ Cf. *Marinus Jacobus Gerard van der Velden*, K.H. Miskotte als prediker. Een homiletisch onderzoek, 's-Gravenhage 1984.

¹¹ Cf. *Ariën Willem Velema*, God ter sprake. Een homiletisch onderzoek naar de vooronderstellingen van de prediking bij Karl Barth in vergelijking met Hans Joachim Iwand, Ernst Lange en Rudolf Bohren, 's-Gravenhage 1991.

¹² Cf. *Wilhelmus Hendricus Theodorus Moehn*, God roept ons tot zijn dienst. Een homiletisch onderzoek naar de verhouding tussen God en hoorder in Calvijns preken over Hand, Kampen 1994, 4:1–6:7. Abbreviated into English as *Wilhelmus Hendricus Theodorus Moehn*, God Calls Us to His Service, in: *The Relation between God and His Audience in Calvin's Sermons on Acts*, Geneve 2001.

¹³ F. *Gerrit Immink*, Homiletics. The Current Debate, in: *IJPT* 8.1 (2004), 89–121.

the preaching event God is the acting subject. The presence of God, according to Immink, “is not only a proclaimed presence, a presence of the proclaimed Christ, but also a presence on the part of the listener, an inward presence, a presence in faith and trust, a *communio cum Christo*.”¹⁴ Immink relates this insight to the typical Calvinist pneumatological emphasis that the Holy Spirit is present in the believer, preacher and listener alike. This has two consequences for homiletical theory and research. First the communicative framework of preaching is not as linear as some approaches have been emphasizing. Preaching is not about the transportation of a message from a Spirit-filled human being, the preacher, to an assembly that needs to hear this message. Rather, preaching is a communicative, religious event, in which the presence of God in his promise is mediated, not by the preacher in person but by preaching as an event of speaking and listening. Secondly, sermon reception becomes the center of homiletical reflection, not from a rhetorical interest only, but foremost as a religious category. Helpful in this respect are reflections that draw from speech-act theory, both regarding its performative and its interactive aspects.¹⁵ In the second part of this article I explore these issues as they interconnect in Dutch homiletics at the beginning of the 21st Century: pneumatology, language, and empirical research.

3. Pneumatology: The Word of God and Human Existence

What theological argument helps to understand how in preaching Divine discourse and human existence are related? This may be the perennial question in homiletics, especially after the nineteenth Century with its emphasis upon the human consciousness in matters of faith. More than in the centuries before, the insight that preaching as an instance of human communication seemed at odds with the theological conviction that in preaching salvation is mediated, since the communication of salvation is, indeed, theologically seen as a divine action. Is there a theological argument that helps to connect the two spheres of the human and the divine, when it comes to preaching, or should we leave them separated as Karl Barth suggests with its famous double definition of preaching in which a blank line is put between preaching as “God’s word spoken by himself” and preaching as “the attempt of the church to serve God’s Word.”¹⁶ Barth’s argument rests upon Divine sovereignty: it’s God’s freedom to act, while in preaching the church shows its obedience to a divine command. Barth also employs a christological model to show the relationship

¹⁴ Ibid., 106.

¹⁵ Cf. F. Gerrit Immink, *Human Discourse and the Act of Preaching*, in: Chris A.M. Hermans/Gerrit Immink/A. de Jong/J. van der Lans (eds.), *Social Construction and Theology*, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2002, 147–170; idem, *The Touch of the Sacred. The Practice, Theology, and Tradition of Christian Worship*, Grand Rapids (MI) 2014.

¹⁶ *Karl Barth*, *Homiletik. Wesen und Vorbereitung der Predigt*. Zürich, 1966, 30. (Karl Barth, *Homiletics*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels, Louisville (KY) 1991.

between Divine action and human discourse in preaching: it is like the unity of the two natures of Christ.

Drawing from different sources, Dutch theology, however, has usually been more influenced by a pneumatological argument to relate the divine and the human in the preaching event. Pneumatology is used as starting point for homiletical reflection by Jos Douma (2000) in his study of the role of meditation in the process of sermon preparation; by Ciska Stark (2005) in her typology of sermons in which she explicitly addresses the pneumatological dimension in order to solve the problem that comes with an emphasis on christology; by Jantine Nierop (2007) in her work on Rudolf Bohren's Predigtlehre; and by Marinus Beute (2016) in his study of the role of the preacher's self-image in the preaching event.¹⁷ These four studies show that the emphasis on the Holy Spirit is important to reconstruct how in preaching divine and human discourse may be related. In various ways they challenge Barth's "blank line" between God and human action in preaching, and they bring empirical ideas to understand the divine-human subjectivity in preaching. Starting with the premise that preaching is a real practice, we can distinguish between various parts that constitute the "whole" of preaching. The most basic parts are speaking and hearing, as two interacting realities that constitute the practice of preaching.¹⁸ The part of "speaking," itself, however, also consists of various parts, such as the process of sermon preparation, the interaction between content and form in the text of the sermon, and the role of the preacher in the performance of preaching. In each of these three directions, pneumatological reflection appears fundamental in Dutch theological-homiletical reasoning during the last two decades.

Douma focuses upon the practice of meditation in the process of sermon preparation. Meditation, he argues, is conceptually related to spirituality and creativity. Meditation is a contemplative discipline that fosters the attitudes of emptiness, attentiveness and receptiveness. Douma illustrates this with an analysis of Martin Luther's practice of meditation that he summarizes as "methodically shaped interaction with the Holy Scriptures, a deep listening to God's Word in order to be [...] moved, transformed, and guided by God."¹⁹ The contemplative discipline of deep listening is a practice where the Spirit of God moves the human spirit and shapes new insights in the Scriptures. Meditation and creativity are in some sense empirical realities: they exist in real life. These realities are fit for pneumatological reflection in Christian theology because they assume the

¹⁷ Cf. *Jos R. Douma*, *Veni Creator Spiritus. De meditatie en het preekproces*. Kampen 2000; *Ciska Stark*, *Proeven van de preek. Een praktisch-theologisch onderzoek naar de preek als Woord van God*. Zoetermeer 2005; *Jantine Nierop*, *Die Gestalt der Predigt im Kraftfeld des Geistes. Eine Studie zu Form und Sprache der Predigt nach Rudolf Bohrens Predigtlehre*, Wien/Berlin 2008; *Johannes Marinus Beute*, *Wie ben ik als ik preek? Bronnen en herbronning van het homiletisch zelfbeeld*, Zoetermeer 2016.

¹⁸ Cf. *T. Theo J. Pleizier*, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons. A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics*, Delft 2010, Chapter 2.

¹⁹ *Douma* (note 17), 119.

subjectivity of the Spirit of God that is stressed by the notions of gift and grace and the prayer *Veni Creator Spiritus*. Simultaneously, though, the Spirit of God cooperates with the human spirit: meditation being the space or environment and new insights (creative ideas) being the products of this divine-human cooperation.

The cooperation of the human spirit and God's Spirit has been theologically articulated by the Dutch theologian Arnold van Ruler, an important source for the German homiletician Rudolf Bohren and his pneumatological approach to preaching. Van Ruler coined the notion of "theonomic reciprocity" to understand the partnership between God and humans.²⁰ In her dissertation on the form of the sermon, Jantine Nierop uses Bohren's application of Van Ruler's concept in order to clarify how "miracle and technique [in preaching] are not opposites to each other, but different aspects of theonomic reciprocity."²¹ Again, the empirical, namely the linguistic shape of the sermon and the theological, the interaction between God's Spirit and the human mind, come together in homiletical reasoning. This also bears upon the discussion in homiletics of how preaching relates to rhetoric. Nierop shows how Bohren's understanding of *rhetorica sacra* combines the elements of the promise and the gifts of the Spirit. On the one hand, the promise of God's Spirit (*Verheissung des Geistes*) turns trust in human power into prayer. On the other hand, good preaching does not coincide with good rhetoric but includes joy, engagement, boldness, and hope in the preacher – all gifts of the Spirit.²² Finally, the role of rhetoric in shaping the sermon (notions such as intention of the sermon, persuasive techniques, etc.) must be qualified by the freedom of the listener. The awareness of the power of the pulpit and the danger of manipulating the listener creates responsibility on the part of the preacher, because the Spirit of God is not a spirit of manipulation or power.²³

While Nierop brings pneumatological reflections into play when it comes to the rhetorical aspect of preaching, Ciska Stark provides a different perspective. In the theoretical framework for an empirical study in sermons and listeners, she uses ideas taken from pneumatology in creating a typology of sermons. In her analysis of the relationship between preaching and Word of God in the history of (protestant) homiletics, she distinguishes between three different dimensions: sacramentality (the sermon realizes the Word of God), actuality (the sermon actualizes the Word of God), and referentiality (the sermon refers to the Word of God). These three ways of approaching the relationship between sermon and Word of God, Stark argues, cannot be seen exclusively from a christological perspective. "Word" should be understood as a pair with "Spirit,"

²⁰ *Arnold Albert van Ruler*, *Structuurverschillen tussen het christologische en het pneumatologische gezichtspunt*, in: idem, *Theologisch werk. Deel I*, Nijkerk 1969, 175–190.

²¹ *Nierop* (note 17), 87.

²² Cf. *ibid.*, 209f.

²³ *Ibid.*, 237.

an insight that she derives from the turn to the listener.²⁴ She applies this to the analysis of sermons by constructing a sixfold typology, based upon the two aspects of text - hearer or Word-Spirit, operationalized as "text-centred" or "application-centred" preaching. In order to understand how sermons testify to God's redemptive action, how preaching anticipates God's promises and how listeners are spiritually nourished or empowered, she uses the concepts of kerygmatic, didactic, and paracletic preaching. Hence six types of preaching emerge: text centered-kerygmatic, application centered-kerygmatic etc. Next, specific sermons are studied as representatives of these types. In her approach to sermon analysis Stark demonstrates how the pneumatological perspective could be operationalized to understand how in sermons the presence of God is articulated. "In relation to the Holy Spirit we could ask: does it concern primarily the reception of the Spirit, the continuing work of the Spirit or the exemplifying work of the Spirit?"²⁵ Despite the fact that Stark's typology is deductively applied to sermons, it is important to see how pneumatology functions as a theoretical framework to study the content of preaching. The concluding remark that "the equation between Word of God and preaching in the protestant tradition always reckons with the activity of the Holy Spirit,"²⁶ stresses the liturgical *Sitz-im-Leben* of the sermon, since the epiclesis is the undercurrent of preaching or as Stark puts it: "the Holy Spirit guides the Word and facilitates faith."²⁷

In his recent doctoral thesis, Marinus Beute also stresses the pneumatological dimension of preaching, now from the perspective of the theological self-image of the preacher in preaching. Who am I when I preach, Beute asks. His answer has two levels: from an analysis of the role of personality in preaching in 20th Century homiletical theology, he moves to a biblically informed self-image of the preacher by a biblical-theological reconstruction of St. Paul's self-image as a preacher. The comparative approach leads to the insight, according to Beute, that the preacher participates in the mission of Christ, which in the end should be articulated pneumatologically. Namely, within the reality that is larger than the person and activity of the preacher, the preacher's self-image is determined by being absorbed in the field of influence of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the preacher depends upon the Spirit, is equipped by the Spirit, serves freely a cruciform existence, acts as the ambassador of the resurrected Christ, is focussed upon the glory of God, and is not able to organize the desired effect of preaching.²⁸ This self-image, determined by the preacher's self-awareness of participating in the "field of the Spirit," has consequences for how the preacher acts

²⁴ Stark (note 17), 195–206.

²⁵ Ibid., 242.

²⁶ Ibid., 464, emphasis mine.

²⁷ Ibid., 466.

²⁸ Cf. Beute (note 17), 158–163.

in relation with the text and in communicating with the listeners, thus influencing the entire homiletical process.

4. Language: The Question of Religious Reference

The concept of participation as used by Beute to explain the role of the preacher is part of a larger homiletical approach inaugurated by Kees de Ruyter in Kampen, The Netherlands.²⁹ The dissertation of Eric Watkins, *The Drama of Preaching*,³⁰ understands preaching as “participating in God’s drama of redemption,” a phrase that is used to update the classic Reformed idea of redemptive-historical preaching. Based upon the work of Tom Wright and Kevin Vanhoozer, Watkins approaches Scripture in terms of a drama in five acts. The notion of “drama,” according to Watkins, helps to overcome some difficulties with the traditional redemptive-historical approach to Scripture:

“the peculiar contribution to this approach is that it does not presume an exaggerated distance between Scripture and the church or between doctrine and application. Rather, it starts with the presupposition of an inclusive script (Scripture) that intends to justify the proper role of every person in God’s drama of redemption – beginning with God, yet also including his covenant partners.”³¹

Though the notion of script also functions in a performative approach, such as presented by Gerrit Immink,³² Watkins relates it to a narrative approach to preaching and to the reworking of the Reformed emphasis on redemption-history in postmodern hermeneutics while retaining the original intention of God as prime actor. Earlier, Kees van Dusseldorp developed his narrative approach within the same homiletical school in which preaching is reconstructed within the postmodern challenge of reading Scripture and the renewals of the form of preaching, so-called “new homiletics,” with its emphasis on plot and experience.³³ In these reconstructions notions like plot, drama, roles, and story permeate homiletical discourse. Van Dusseldorp assesses the narrative approach in homiletics in the light of Reformed theology. The main theological tension is related to the idea of revelation: how should a narrative hermeneutic be related to a robust approach to

²⁹ Cf. *Kees de Ruyter*, *Horen naar de stem van God. Theologie en methode van de preek*, Zoetermeer 2013.

³⁰ *Eric Brian Watkins*, *The Drama of Preaching. Participating With God in the History of Redemption*, Eugene 2017. First edition published by Theologische Universiteit van de gereformeerde kerken (vrijgemaakt). Citations refer to this first edition.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

³² Cf. F. *Gerrit Immink* et. al. (eds.) (note 15).

³³ Cf. *Kees van Dusseldorp*, *Preken tussen de verhalen een homiletische doordenking van narrativiteit*, Utrecht 2012.

revelation and Scripture. Preaching participates in the larger story of God in such a way that it adds a new, current chapter to God's story.³⁴

Narrativity, both in its theological significance as it functions to rework the redemption-historical approach to preaching (according to Watkins), as well as in its significance for the form of the sermon (as Van Dusseldorp points out), is complemented by a more poetic or lyrical approach to the shape of the sermon. Taking his cue from the Dutch poet Martinus Nijhoff, Kees Bregman developed a formal-theological approach to the language of preaching. He takes the lyrical form of the "blank line" that separates the verses of a poem and turns it into a homiletical idea: the sermon needs silence.³⁵ The "blank line" creates space for breathing. When language stops, moments of intentional silence are created.³⁶ This formal characteristic of poetry, Bregman, argues, needs to be reworked in the syntax of sermons. The transcending and transforming moment in poetry is precisely the syntactical feature of the silence between the verses. The formal lyrical syntax, thus has theological quality, according to Bregman, since silence in the Scriptures has a dual meaning: there is silence on the part of both covenant partners. For preaching this entails that the preacher is aware of the fact that God is able to speak in the silence; and that the preacher learns to keep silent because he needs to wait for the word.³⁷ At this point, Bregman recalls the double definition of Karl Barth. Indeed, even the formal-theological poetic approach, leads back to the question of how divine discourse and human speech are connected. Barth's twofold definition underscores that theology needs a "blank line to verbalize what actually happens in preaching: God's word in human language."³⁸

Bregman's approach fits the agenda that has been put forward by postmodern homiletical approaches that speak of the sermon as "open piece of art" (Engemann; Martin). With Albrecht Grözinger's statement that the content of a sermon is always "structured language" (*gestaltete Sprache*),³⁹ the issue of language is put on the table. The pragmatic approach to language, as developed by the German homiletician Henning Luther with his emphasis upon language-use, took its lead from English philosophy of language put forward by J.L. Austin and J.R. Searle. Henning Luther stresses that in preaching, intentional interaction with listeners takes place.⁴⁰ The language of the sermon embodies both content and form: what is said is closely connected to how it is said,

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 167–169.

³⁵ Cf. *Kees Bregman*, *De stem uit de oneindigheid. Over de talige vormgeving van preken in het licht van poëzie en poëtica van Martinus Nijhoff* [A Voice of Infinity. Sculpturing Sermons in Light of the Poetry and Poetics of Martinus Nijhoff], Zoetermeer 2007.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 229.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 258.

³⁹ *Albrecht Grözinger*, *Homiletik. Lehrbuch Praktische Theologie*, Gütersloh 2008, 177.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Henning Luther*, *Predigt als Handlung*, in: *ZThK* 80 (1983), 223–243.

the objective referential and the subjective appropriation come together in the intention of the speaker and the uptake of the listener. The pragmatic approach, such as adopted by Luther, was a way of dealing with the interaction between speaker and listener and the functioning of preaching as discourse. In homiletical thinking in the Low Countries, however, the pragmatics of language-use in relation to preaching became two-pronged: a postmodern approach drawing from mainly French philosophical hermeneutics on the one hand, and a realist approach in which preaching as religious discourse is put into the framework of the divine-human relationship on the other hand.

Two dissertations explicitly address postmodern hermeneutics as context for preaching and homiletics respectively. Bert Altena studied the conditions for the sermon in a postmodern climate.⁴¹ From an analysis of postmodernism represented by Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida, Altena enumerates six postmodern motifs that need to be assessed in homiletics: (i) terror free space; (ii) openness; (iii) margin; (iv) mystery; (v) imagination; and (vi) interruption. These six motifs stimulate the rethinking of an artistic image of the preacher, and borrow from the contexts of theater and poetics: the art of staging and the art of language. The metaphor of “staging” concerns the open structure of the language of preaching, the power of interpretation, and the space for production of meaning on the part of the listeners. The metaphor of the “poet” focuses on other aspects of language, the mysterious and the imaginative, and the de-regulative potential of language. Based upon a study of Derrida’s deconstructivist hermeneutics, Van der Rijst takes these ideas a few steps further.⁴² This leads to the view that language is unstable, meaning consists of an intertextual network, and referentiality is inherently problematic. Preaching is an example of dominating discourse, and preachers should be aware of the fact that we cannot articulate anything positively about God. Van der Rijst’s study shows that a conversation with postmodern hermeneutics, may lead to the end of preaching. Both structuralist as well as social constructionist approaches to religious language stress the effect of the linguistic structures and constructions upon the meaning making activity of hearers. It may be that the paradox that is given with the denial of referentiality on the one hand and the subtextual effects due to structures and meaning constructions in texts on the other hand are best addressed empirically. How do these mechanisms in language work in real preaching and listening? Do we need a more robust and realist approach to preaching? Sermons draw from positive theology: they shape the language of faith, mediate sacred texts, and refer to the redemptive realities of God and Christ. Equally, sermons address real people with real worries, spiritualities, and lives. Here we enter another domain in homiletics that

⁴¹ Bert Altena, *Wolken gaan voorbij... Een homiletisch onderzoek naar mogelijkheden... voor de preek in een postmodern klimaat* [When clouds pass...], Zoetermeer 2003.

⁴² Cf. René van der Rijst, *De uitzaaing van het Woord. Homiletiek in het spoor van Derrida* [The Dissemination of the Word. Homiletics following Derrida], Zoetermeer 2015.

deals with preaching as discourse. In several dissertations in the Low Countries the empirical turn fundamentally shaped homiletical thinking and research.

5. Empirical Approach: The Act of Listening & The Text of the Sermon

Do sermons have effect, and if so, what kind of effects can be accounted for? Empirical studies in preaching tend to answer this question differently, depending upon the theoretical framework. In 2008 and 2010 two Dutch PhD-studies on sermon listening were published. Hanneke Schaap-Jonker and Theo Pleizier took two different approaches to the field of sermon listening, framed within a psychological and a religious research design respectively. Despite these different perspectives, our approaches share at least two characteristics. First, we approach listening as a practice. The act of listening is embedded in a larger framework of communicative interactions, religious experiences, and repeated instances of worship and preaching during time. These aspects of intersubjective action, experience, and repetitive behavior within an ongoing performed tradition, distinguish a practice from a single act.⁴³ Next, our studies show that the effect of sermons, albeit put within different theoretical frameworks, entails “real” interactions, such as the formation of meaning in relation to personality traits as Schaap-Jonker in her research demonstrates or the shaping of religious involvement as my own project illustrates. Finally, our empirical approach to the practice of sermon-listening also brings to the fore the impact of language in the reception of preaching. Metaphors and concepts may trigger certain images of God connected with certain personality traits of listeners, witnessing the statistical correlations between personality and sermon reception; sermon content generates various kinds of attentive involvement of hearers, since listeners connect to religious realities that are offered within the sermonic discourse.

Two examples may illustrate the importance for an empirical grounding of homiletical concepts. Reception aesthetics renewed homiletical theory in two respects: new concepts on the hearer (co-creator) and the sermon (spatial). Yet the relationship between hearer and sermon remained rather under conceptualized. The concept of “religious identification,” however, sheds more light how the interaction between the listener and the open world of the sermon takes place.

The second example takes its cue from the protestant idea that in hearing the Word, faith is shaped. The concept “actualizing faith” helps to articulate this more in depth.

⁴³James Nieman notes the following features of a practice: action, common, meaningful, purposive, strategic, cf. *James R. Nieman, Why the Idea of Practice Matters*, in: Thomas G. Long/Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (eds.), *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice. A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy*, 18–40, Louisville (KY), 2008.

The empirical turn not only stimulated reception analysis in homiletics, it also created a renewed interest in the actual the sermon. The second empirical interest in recent Dutch homiletics has been the area of sermon analysis. In his study on positioning Jesus' suffering in preaching, André Verweij analyzes sermons preached in the period of Lent. His focus was on the question of how in sermons during Lent the suffering and death of Christ was portrayed by preachers and how the theological theme of atonement is addressed. In the sermons four different redemptive arrangements emerged: standing close to the hearers (proximity); reaching out to the hearers (self-giving); showing listeners the way (guidance); standing in for humanity (exclusivity). It appears that all arrangements somehow connect the suffering of Jesus with today's hearers. The redemptive meaning of his life and death is arranged as proximity: Jesus comes close to today's listeners as they struggle towards redemption; as self-giving: Jesus' love carries the hearers through life's hardship; as guidance: Jesus' suffering has exemplary qualities and the listeners are guided to practice Jesus's life of faith in their own lives; and as exclusivity: Jesus stands in for humanity in a way that takes place without us and yet for us.⁴⁴ The study also highlights how preachers use four different sources in preaching in order to create these redemptive arrangements. They use the liturgical year, the Scriptural text, images of present-day suffering, and examples of self-disclosure. It becomes clear from Verweij's study how theological points of view take shape in a sermon in a broad variety. A homiletical theory of atonement does not coincide with the dogmatic models, so it seems.

With his study, Verweij confirms an idea that had been put forward by Gerrit Immink in a seminal article in which he argues that the theory of preaching should not be framed in terms of hermeneutics only, since the rhetorical dimension of the sermon sensitizes religious content that cannot be captured satisfactorily as "interpretations."⁴⁵ This becomes even more clear, in Pieter Boonstra's empirical study about the way preachers deal with the biblical text in their sermons.⁴⁶

In his dissertation, Boonstra, attends to the complex relationship between the biblical text and the actual sermon, which cannot be captured satisfactorily with either the concepts of "explanation and application," nor "interpretation." Surely, preachers are involved in interpreting, explaining, and applying when it comes to the biblical text. Yet, as Boonstra argues, we need more refined conceptual language for a proper description of what goes on in actual preaching when it comes to ways that preachers deal with the Scriptural text in the sermon. The complex whole of preaching from a biblical text for a contemporary congregation can be analyzed into four different categories: putting-in-perspective in faith; characterizing the contemporary context of the listeners;

⁴⁴ Cf. *André Verweij*, *Position Jesus' Suffering. A Grounded Theory of Lenten Preaching in Local Parishes*, Delft 2014, 85–122.

⁴⁵ *Immink* (note 13).

⁴⁶ Cf. *Pieter Boonstra*, *Omgang met de bijbeltekst in de preek. Een empirisch homiletisch onderzoek* [Dealing with the Biblical Text in the Sermon. An empirical homiletical research], Zoetermeer 2016.

contemporizing the biblical text in the current situation of the listeners; and focussed address from the biblical text in the contemporary context. These concepts take seriously the hermeneutical divide between biblical text on the one hand and the contemporary context of reading and hearing on the other hand. Sermon analysis, however, also singles out particular actions in relating text and context that preachers engage in. The common metaphor for understanding and communicating the Scriptural text for contemporary audiences – that it is like building a bridge – needs further refinement. Boonstra shows how notions like putting-in-perspective in faith; characterizing the contemporary context; contemporizing the biblical text; and focussed addressing of the congregation help to understand on a more detailed level the complexity of dealing with the Scriptural text in preaching.

Empirical research attends to grassroots “facts,” the actual practices of hearing or composing a sermon. We have only begun to enrich homiletics with field-related concepts. Much has to be done in this field. Take, for instance, the complexity of the process of sermon preparation or the difficulties of studying the performance of preaching. Both sermon-preparation as performance have been written about extensively in homiletical literature. Yet little theory has been generated based upon the study of actual sermon preparation or preaching performance. Though these domains are rather neglected in empirical homiletics, partly because of the methodical and theological complexities involved, the specific contribution of empirical theology, however, seems very promising. It both helps to move from larger concepts such as “interpreting” towards more nuanced and complex actions such as “identifying” in hearing a sermon or “contemporizing” in composing a sermon. PhD researchers in the Low Countries developed viable methods and techniques to add the tradition of qualitative research to the growing international body of homiletical literature.

6. Conclusion: Studying Transitions and the Current Agenda

Revisiting 15 years of homiletical thought in the Low Countries gives a fair overview of the academic emphases. In view of the size of the country and the marginal position theology got into during this decade and a half, the fact that 13 PhD theses in the field of homiletics were written is quite remarkable. These studies have been supervised in protestant universities. Three chairs have contributed to the academic production. Kees de Ruyter was professor of Practical Theology at the Reformed University in Kampen with a special interest in homiletics.⁴⁷ Henk de Roest holds the chair of Practical Theology at the Protestant Theological University in Groningen and

⁴⁷ De Ruyter supervised the thesis by Douma (2000) on meditation; Van Dusseldorp (2012) on narrative preaching; Watkins (2016) on the redemptive historical preaching; and Beute (2016) on the self-image of the preacher.

developed a broad range of PhD projects, including homiletics.⁴⁸ Until September 2016 Gerrit Immink held a chair in Homiletics, also at the Protestant Theological University in Groningen.⁴⁹

Immink's empirical-theological approach to the study of religious practices especially has generated some important insights. In his *The Touch of the Sacred*, Immink proposes a framework for understanding worship and preaching that focusses upon religious praxis, sharing in salvation, and the participatory act.⁵⁰ As religious praxis, preaching is both a participatory act in which faith and everyday life are not opposed realities, but come together in the act of speaking and hearing. Immink argues that both the 19th Century liberal tradition with its anthropological emphasis as well as the early 20th Century dialectical tradition with its kerygmatic emphasis fall short on the relation to actual life and actual preaching. Faith is both an anthropological as well as a theological category. It is shaped in religious practices such as preaching while it also remains connected to the truths of the Christian kerygma. Immink's approach is important in that it combines the emphases of the previous sections. The theological emphasis on the Spirit, the anthropological perspective upon the performativity of language, and the empirical reality of enacted faith or practiced religion, provide a helpful framework for homiletics. It combines the complexity of preaching and hearing in all its facets without giving in to non-empirical theological preconception or naturalistic social inquiry. With these emphases, Immink has theoretically guided the transition to a more empirical-theological approach to homiletics.

One observation, however, must be added. What about the political dimension of preaching? The fact that preaching also is public speech, has not been at the front of Dutch homiletical thinking. An explanation cannot be easily given. It may have to do with a strict separation of church and state, with the plurality of political views within congregations, and with the fact that due to the secular context the church sees itself as a minor player in the political arena. Two final remarks are in place. First, it may be typical for Dutch preaching that the first interest in preaching is in the faith-stories of the individual believer and the community of faith. Preaching is supposed to express our common faith and relates to my life. Especially the studies in sermon reception make this clear. This individual bias, however, does not lead to a view of preaching that is detached from everyday life but demonstrates how preaching relates to how listeners experience life and how their lives are at stake in hearing a sermon. Secondly, the fact that the political and public dimensions of preaching have not been at the front of academic homiletical reasoning does not imply, however, that the

⁴⁸ De Roest supervised the thesis by Nierop (2007) on Rudolf Bohren's pneumatological homiletics; Bregman (2007) on the relation between preaching and poetics; and Van der Rijst (2015) on the consequences of Derrida's hermeneutics for homiletics. The first supervisor of Van der Rijst's thesis was Eric Borgman, Tilburg School of Humanities at Tilburg University.

⁴⁹ Immink has been supervisor of the thesis by Pleizier (2010) on sermon reception; Verweij (2014) on preaching the suffering of Jesus; and Boonstra (2016) on dealing with the biblical text in preaching.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Immink* (note 15).

cultural dimension is missing at all. On the one hand, the dissertations that study homiletics from a hermeneutical or literary point of view do so because their perspectives depart from cultural developments such as postmodern aesthetics and theories of truth. Increasingly, however, it seems that preachers feel the need to address political realities. It opens up a wider field of research: preaching is not “just” an instance of religious discourse. It has a public dimension too. When preachers address congregations and when hearers connect their own lived faith to what they hear in sermons, this is not done on an island but as part of a wider society in which politicians address citizens and media address media consumers. As religious discourse, preaching is simultaneously public discourse. New transitions may emerge as the field of homiletics continues to develop.

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Preaching in Times of the European 'Refugee Crisis'

A Symposium in Leipzig (October 2016) and the starting point of a European Research Project on the Relevance of 'Pulpit Speech' in Society and Politics

Alexander Deeg

Abstract

In October 2016 homileticsians from seven European countries met in Leipzig in order to reflect on political preaching in the context of the so called European 'refugee crisis'. This article shows the background of this conference, gives a very brief overview of the perspectives from different countries, and suggests ways to continue European homiletical research on this theme.

1. Political Preaching in Europe today – questions at the outset of a joint European research project

The so called "European Refugee Crisis" was *the* big European theme in the second half of 2015 and at least in the first months of 2016. Of course it is important to note that it has been *the* theme for the Southern European countries (esp. Greece and Italy) much longer. But it only arrived in the public awareness in North and Central Europe in August/September 2015 – together with thousands of refugees arriving especially in Hungary, Austria, Germany, but also in the Northern European countries.¹

Christian preaching does many things. Among others it always articulates Christian self-understanding in a *local public context*. In this case *every sermon is political* as it is shaped by the political discourse of its time and itself shapes this discourse.

It is evident that Christian self-understanding is challenged as soon as the *public discourse* changes and is affected by one major theme – as was the case in 2015/2016: the "European Refugee Crisis."

¹ It would be worth another study in media analysis and public discourse analysis to find out, *how exactly* the so called "refugee crisis" made its way into the awareness of people in Central and Northern Europe. It is interesting to note that at least in the German discussion *photos* were very important for the public course – esp. the photo of Alan/Aylan Kurdi (2012–2015) showing his dead corpse on the beach near Bodrum/Turkey.

This is why a group of homileticians from seven European countries started a work of homiletical cooperation and homiletical analysis to find out how *public discourse* and *local preaching* (as a part of this discourse on the local level²) are interrelated and how Biblical texts and *Christian* attitudes, world-views, and traditions shape the perception of themes discussed in politics/in the media. The questions we asked during a symposium which took place in Leipzig on October 14th and 15th 2016, focused on this interrelation from two different sides:

(1) *The influence of public discourse on Christian preaching*: The question is, to what extent public discourse, public opinions, and public moods shape the way Christianity expresses itself in its sermons. Very simply put: Are Christian sermons a mirror of public opinions, do they remain in distance or opposition to them, or is there a much more complex relationship between both? It was Karl Barth's critique on the sermons of German pastors he read and heard in World War I that most of them were merely reflecting the general mood of people and politicians in Germany; they were arming the German military with spiritual support.³ And it was Karl Barth who tried to deliver sermons in the time of the Nazi regime opposing the regime's ideology by constantly deconstructing the power of the political leaders and proclaiming the power of God alone.

(2) *The influence of Christian preaching (and Christian discourses) on public discourse*: The question in this direction is, to what extent sermons influence public discourse – e.g. by shaping the language of public discourses in a certain way. Of course, it is quite difficult to find a method to describe these influences. This is also true for the influence of Christian preaching on the church itself. In Protestant churches 'leadership' should be exercised by 'the word alone', and sermons should play an important role for church leadership. But, there is very little research which could prove if this is just a Protestant slogan or if sermons are indeed an effective 'tool' for church leadership.⁴

The European research group focused (in the first period of preliminary research) on the first aspect. The basic question was: Public discourse speaks about a "European refugee crisis" – how do Christian preachers react to this in their sermons?

² Of course preaching in times of the digital revolution reaches far beyond the 'local' level and is distributed in many ways on the internet. And of course as there is local preaching in different congregations, there is always also preaching on TV or on radio as part of mass-media communication. For our project, we mainly concentrated on the local level.

³ Cf. also *Wilhelm Preszel*, *Die Kriegspredigt in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands 1914–1918*, *Arbeiten zur Pastoraltheologie* 5, Göttingen 1967.

⁴ Cf. Jochen Cornelius-Bundschuh/Jan Hermelink (ed.), *Nicht durch Gewalt, sondern durch das Wort. Die Predigt und die Gestalt der Kirche*, Leipzig 2011.

The question of *Political Preaching* was discussed in Central and Northern Europe very intensively in the late 1960s and 1970s, and also in the context of the political revolutions of the late 1980s. However, it has not been discussed intensively in the last two decades. It is the time now to reflect on political preaching again – this was the basis of our joint research project.

With the theme, *Political Preaching*, at least two imminent theological questions are touched:

(1) The God-question: Put roughly: In the development of the last centuries, of the Neuzeit, God more and more found his place and home in the inner lives of the religious people – as a way of individual self-understanding or feeling. In other words: God lost the world as the world lost God. God seemed to be no longer active *in the world*, but only in the hearts and souls of the pious folks. Of course, this is a rough description, but we can see its effects quite clearly e.g. in the way intercessory prayers are usually formulated. Prayers to God are quite often imperatives to those who listen to the prayers, because (and this is a very famous quotation at least in Germany) 'God has no other hands than our hands.'

But of course: Just to claim that God *is* active outside, in this world, in politics does not only raise the theodicy-question, but can also lead to terrible misunderstandings, which are prominent not only in German history, but which can be discerned there very clearly: 'God with us, the Germans' – as a slogan in the wake of World War I; 'God with us, the Nazi-Regime' – around 20 years later.

(2) The ecclesiological question: The second question is the question of the self-understanding of the 'church': What is the role of church in a western democratic society? Is it the institution for the 'spiritual maintenance' of those people who still belong to it and may from time to time need it? Or does it have a role in public discourse – an aspect often discussed as talking about societal values on the one hand, and reflecting on "Public Theology" on the other hand.

The so called Refugee Crisis seems to be crucial for religious self-understanding, because from the very beginning this 'crisis' was in its public discussion in the media connected with the appearance and growing influence of Islam in Europe.⁵ This is why it is a societal, but also a religious 'crisis'

⁵ There are many titles showing this connection – many of them are very problematic; cf. e.g. the discussion between Thomas Sternberg, a German politician (Christian Democratic Union) and the President of the Central Committee of Catholic Christians in Germany, and Alexander Gauland, one of the leading figures of right-wing nationalist party "AfD" ("Alternative für Deutschland"): *Thomas Sternberg/ Alexander Gauland, Sorge ums Abendland? Ein Streitgespräch*, Leipzig 2017.

and challenges the self-understanding of 'Christian' countries or societies (whatever this may still mean in highly secularized in post- or at least late-modern times!).

As a first step, I collected sermons from September 2015, preached in Leipzig, and analyzed them asking the following questions:

- *Homiletical hermeneutics*: How do preachers connect the Biblical texts with the political situation? Which hermeneutical 'moves' do they make use of in order to bridge between 'Jesus and Assad', the letters of Paul and the European crisis?

- *Ethical orientation of the sermon*: In the German discussion already in autumn 2015 theologians asked which ethics seems to be most fruitful in the current context of crisis: an ethics of ultimate ends (which maybe prevailed in September 2015) or an ethics of responsibility (which does not just do what has to be done according to ultimate ends, but reflects the consequences more clearly)? What kind of ethics do the sermons show? And how do they perceive the role of the individual, the congregations, and the churches?

- *Political awareness*: What do the sermons say about the refugee crisis? Does the sermon just reflect the mainstream public discourse – or is there something new and different in the pulpit? Does preaching just reflect the mainstream societal mood – or does it somehow make a difference and bring something into the public discourse which wasn't there before?

- *Role of the preacher*: Who are the preachers in these sermons? Do they behave as political experts? Or as prophets? Or as social-workers? How do they use "I" in their sermons? Do they dare to show their feelings and emotions? Or do they rely more on rational argumentation?

- *Language in the sermons*: How do they describe the situation? Do they speak about a *refugee crisis* in order to speak about the situation of citizens of Central or Northern European countries? Or do they see that the refugee crisis is first and foremost the crisis of the refugees – the crisis *they* live in? In 2016 German sociologist Elisabeth Wehling published a book about "political framing."⁶ Her main insight is that there is a 'frame' in every speech-act we use. In German discourse e.g. a lot of people were talking about the 'flood of refugees' thus depersonalizing the 'refugees' and bringing them into the frame of a natural catastrophe from which we have to protect ourselves. Do preachers try to oppose

⁶ Cf. Elisabeth Wehling, *Politisches Framing. Wie eine Nation sich ihr Denken einredet – und daraus Politik macht*, Köln 2016.

such framing and find a more precise way to talk about the situation? Do they speak in an abstract way about the situation and political alternatives – or do they tell concrete stories?

- *Interreligious sensitivity*: Do sermons deal with the question of Islam and the Christian-Muslim relationship? Do they mention that most of the migrants/refugees are Muslims? How do they construct Christian identity in the context of an increasingly multi-religious society (taking into account that *social identity* is always connected with the awareness of differences between social groups)?

First results of this preliminary research were presented at the 2016 meeting of Societas Homiletica in Stellenbosch, South Africa – and it became clear that many questions were left open, which proved to be relevant for colleagues from all over Europe. This is why we decided to meet in an European symposium connecting our different perspectives and asking the following questions:

What exactly should homiletics do and try to find out?

What methods should and could be used in order to do this?

What project or projects do we need?

Is all this the starting point of a new union of European homiletical research?

And can thus the political crisis become a chance for European homiletics – and for a renewed preaching in our different contexts and our united Europe?

2. Perspectives from different European countries

2.1 Danish perspectives

The Danish research team, Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen and Pia Nordin Christensen, presented the results of the analyses of fifty-two sermons held by thirteen different preachers in September 2015, January 2016 and Easter 2016 in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. One of the research questions was the use of Biblical texts in the sermon (homiletical hermeneutics) showing that the same lectionary text can be used for opposing ethical perspectives.

The Danish survey also showed a clearly discernible *change* of the content and intention of the sermons dealing with the refugee crisis in the different periods of the survey. Whereas the refugee crisis was seen as a “game changer” in all of the sermons in September 2015 and an ethics of

ultimate ends was predominant in many sermons, an ethics of responsibility and a growing awareness of worry and fear coined the sermons in the later periods.

In addition, the difference between congregations having a huge number of refugees in their midst and those in which refugees were not present, was noted.

2.2 German perspectives

The German research was carried out in two different perspectives: first in the above mentioned preliminary analysis of sermons from Leipzig (September/October 2015), presented by Alexander Deeg.

A second research perspective, presented by Jula Elene Well, focused on sermons in “hotspots” of the current German discussion about ‘refugees’ – e.g. on sermons delivered immediately after a refugees’ home was burned or attacked. The analysis used a critical-ideological paradigm of research discerning the *theology* and *ideology* of the sermons: How is the ‘world’ seen and how is ‘God’s action’ portrayed?

2.3 Greek perspectives

Dimitra Koukoura (Thessaloniki) presented aspects of the perception of the refugee crisis by the Greek Orthodox Church and by the “Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, which met in its Holy Synod in Cyprus, June 2016. The contribution showed the special awareness of the Greek Orthodox Church of the current situation in Greece (affected by the financial crisis *and* by the refugee crisis) and in Near-Eastern countries like Syria or Iraq which used to have a high percentage of Christian population.

Many examples also revealed, how churches on a local level (and the church on a national level) try to support all those who give practical help to the refugees and to exercise influence on political decisions.

The refugee crisis also opened up ways for a new ecumenical collaboration – as e.g. the Joint Declaration of Bartholomew (Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople), Ieronymos (Archbishop of Athens and Greece), and Pope Francis (Lesbos, 16.4.2016) shows.

2.4 Hungarian perspectives

Zóltan Literaty (Budapest) presented insights into the situation of the churches (Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran) in Hungary today – showing especially the difficult role of the Reformed Church as the biggest Protestant church in Hungary. Solidarity with the refugees *and* loyalty to the mainstream public discourse come together in the practice of the congregations and in the sermons of many of its pastors.

In addition, Zóltan Literaty claimed that the role of the Hungarian history should not be underestimated – being a country which still remembers the history of foreign (and Muslim!) oppression. This is at least one reason why xenophobia is also widespread *in* Christian congregations – encouraged and fortified by a strong anti-Bruxelles course of the Hungarian leading party and its prime minister Victor Orban (a member of the Hungarian Reformed Church). The 15 sermons analyzed show a whole set of different attitudes and concepts in this complex political and societal situation.

2.5 Perspectives from the Netherlands

Theo Pleizier presented the results of an analysis of a social-media sampling of sermons. The only criterion for sending in sermons was that they should have to do with the 'refugee crisis' and should have been preached in the 'last year'. Six sermons by five different preachers were analyzed.

The qualitative study started with an *open coding* of the sermons with some leading questions in mind: When is the 'refugee crisis' introduced in sermons? What perspective does the preacher take? What makes this perspective a 'religious perspective' in the sermon? What homiletical strategy does the preacher use in relation to the perspective he/she takes?

The analysis of three different sermons was presented (on fear, on Christian identity, on not understanding God). The analysis had (among others) the following results: (1) The way the 'refugee crisis' is introduced, determines the perspective on the 'refugee crisis' in the sermon. (2) The metaphorical use of the 'refugee crisis' exploits 'refugee crisis' for (religious) meaning-making. (3) The closer the 'refugee crisis' is to the life of the listeners, the more concrete it is portrayed. (4) The 'refugee crisis' awakens both ethical and religious reasoning: transformation of attitudes or spiritual quests.

2.6 Norwegian perspectives

The Norwegian case study (Sivert Angel, Tone Stangeland Kaufman, Elisabeth Tveito Johnsen) clearly showed a shift of the public discourse in autumn/winter 2015/16. The new Norwegian immigration minister used the term “Godhetstyranni” coined by Terje Tvedt: the tyranny of Goodness. The idea behind this concept is that in public discourse there may be a tyranny of a totalitarian opinion (demonizing discord) connected with “goodness” – and that this may be the problem in church declarations and sermons in 2015 (and 2016). The term can – of course – be used in a polemical way, but also in an analytical perspective.

On this backdrop the Norwegian research team analyzed sermons from a congregation near the Norwegian border and sermons from a cathedral in the capital. The striking result: In the border case there was a stunning silence about the refugee crisis. If it was mentioned at all it could be used as just an example of bad things happening in the world and an introduction to the question, how God acts in this world.

The situation was totally different in the cathedral case, where nine out of 12 sermons addressed the refugee situation and stressed the solidarity of the preachers with a liberal refugee politics.

2.7 Swedish perspectives

In Sweden 40 sermons were analyzed by Carina Sundberg and her team. The 18 sermons from September 2015 speak in ‘one voice’, welcome the refugees, and plea for a radical openness of Sweden that attempts to empower the congregations to continue the good work with the refugees. Biblical, historical, ethical, empirical, and theological arguments go hand in hand in order to prove this point.

Also in Sweden, the political and public discourse changed totally in the following months – and the position of the church was and is challenged by new paradigms of public argumentation. But in the sermons, openness remained, sometimes new decisions of the government were addressed, terrorism was a new topic named, but there was not more complexity or any other change.

3. A possible research agenda

The Leipzig symposium of October 2016 showed impressively that the *interrelation of public discourse (on its many levels) and homiletics* is a fundamental question in *all* the European contexts we had the chance to get into conversation during the two days of our symposium.

Put in other words: *Local speech* and *public discourse* 'meet' in preaching – and the question is, how they relate to each other. The sermons can be seen as an outstanding example and research object in order to find out (1) how public discourse 'enters' religious discourse and is perceived there, (2) how religious discourse tries to influence public and political discourse.

It is important to note that none of these discourses 'is there'. Both of them are being constantly made and changed, constructed and destructed. Sermons are one of the instruments of this construction and deconstruction – and are thus worthwhile of more extensive study.

There are many open questions which can be seen primarily on the *homiletical* side: How do political themes enter into sermons? How are they made relevant for listeners? How are they connected with theological or Biblical aspects? Do these sermons use arguments or rely more on the evocation of emotions (or do they do both)? How do they differ from political speeches? Do they only 'use' political realities as metaphors for spiritual aspects they are actually dealing with?

One of the most important questions for future research is the question of sermon sampling – of bringing together the material for international homiletical studies. Then the most suitable empirical methods have to be chosen. It can be expected that empirical analysis will help to sharpen homiletical theory and to connect it with other scientific perspectives (interdisciplinary cooperation).⁷

All this should be done in order to help preachers to find a 'voice' in their sermons that not only affirms what is already there, but fractures, interrupts, and challenges the discourses to proclaim God's power against the powers and principalities of this world.⁸

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⁷ A panel at the International Academy of Practical Theology, Oslo, April 2017, continued the discussion of this article and considered possibilities for further collaboration.

⁸ Cf. *Charles Campbell*, Preaching Gospel. Four Theological Tones, in: idem/Clayton J. Schmit/Mary Hinkle Shore/Jennifer E. Copeland (eds.), Preaching Gospel. Essays in Honor of Richard Lischer, Eugene (OR) 2016, 1–15, esp. 9–14.

Preaching in Times of the European 'Refugee Crisis'

Scandinavian perspectives

**Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen; Tone Stangeland Kaufman; Carina Sundberg; Sivert Angel;
Pia Nordin Christensen; Tron Fagermoen; Elisabeth Tveito Johnsen; Pernilla Myrelid;
Linn Sæbø Rystad**

Abstract

Toward the end of 2015, 65.3 million people were seeking refuge or were otherwise forcibly displaced globally. This is the largest number since the recordings began around World War II. In Europe more than 1 million people arrived by sea in 2015 – more than four times as many as the previous year.¹ The crisis situation stirred public debate as well as church-based initiatives trying to deal with the situation. In order to understand the interaction between public discourse and local preaching a group of homileticians from seven European countries collaborated on an empirical study of how the refugee crisis impacted preaching. In what follows we present the initial results from the Scandinavian countries.

1. The Research Project

The research project on preaching in times of the 'European Refugee Crisis' is a result of collaboration between homileticians from Hungary, Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. The study was initiated at the Societas Homiletica Conference in South Africa in 2016 by Professor Alexander Deeg. The initial research was presented and discussed at a meeting at Leipzig University in 2016 and as part of a panel presentation at the International Academy of Practical Theology in Oslo in 2017.² In the following we present insights from 104 sermons preached by 36 different pastors in Norway, Sweden and Denmark in the period from September 2015 until Easter of 2016.³

¹ In 2016 the number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe declined drastically compared to 2015. Yet despite the decline, the number of people who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in their attempt to reach Europe rose to a record of more than 5,000 people. cf. UNHCR Refugee Agency 25 Oct. 2016: "Mediterranean death toll soars, 2016 is deadliest year yet" cf. <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/articles/2016/12/29/year-in-review-the-refugee-crisis-in-2016>.

² For an introduction to the larger framework of the project see Alexander Deeg's article: "Preaching in Times of the European 'Refugee Crisis' A Symposium in Leipzig" (October 2016) and the starting point of a European Research Project on the Relevance of 'Pulpit Speech' in Society and Politics in: *International Journal of Homiletics* 2017.

³ 40 sermons from 17 Swedish preachers, 12 sermons by 6 Norwegian, 52 sermons by 13 Danish preachers. Thank you to all contributing preachers!

The research questions that guided the analysis of the empirical material gathered for the study were: 1) How do the sermons relate to the 'European refugee crisis'? 2) What words are used to describe this 'crisis'? 3) What aspects of the 'crisis' are explicitly dealt with? 4) What is the position of the preacher? 5) Is there a change in the way the 'European refugee crisis' is dealt with from September 2015 to Easter 2016? 6) How do the sermons relating to the 'European refugee crisis' make 'use' of the Bible? What kinds of Biblical hermeneutics can be analyzed? 7) How can the role of the preacher be described in the sermons? 8) Are there any other interesting or striking aspects in the sermons? The research questions have been treated more or less intensively in the three national contexts depending on the character of the received material. Therefore, the insights from the three studies are also presented differently as it suits the material. Since the genre of preaching is defined by a tension field between biblical texts and contextual situations, as well theological reflection and public events, we will begin with a brief introduction to the relationship between church, state, and society in the Scandinavian contexts before presenting the homiletical material that was gathered in this part of the world.

2. Relationships between Church and State in the Scandinavian Countries

The term Scandinavia denotes the three countries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, which have close historical and cultural ties as well as mutually intelligible languages. The Evangelical-Lutheran Church is the majority church in all countries with 61–76 % of the population as members.⁴ Historically the Evangelical Lutheran Church has been the state church in all of the Scandinavian countries,⁵ but the relationship between church and state has been loosened in a continuous process since the 1840's when freedom of religion was inaugurated.⁶ The former close relations between church and state in Sweden were basically dissolved in the year 2000 when the church stopped being supported by the state and Lutheranism ceased being the country's official religion. Likewise, the Church of Norway became an independent subject separate from the state in 2012. Albeit no longer a state church, the majority church in Norway still bears the name 'Church of Norway.' However, it is spoken of as a folk church, as is also the case with Church of Sweden. In Denmark the majority church is called the Church of the People (Folkekirken).

⁴ In 2016, 61.2% of the Swedish population were members of the Church of Sweden, 71.5 % of Norwegians were members of the Church of Norway, and 76% of the Danish population were members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark (Folkekirken).

⁵ The churches of Denmark and Norway can be labelled as "state churches" since the Reformation in 1537, when King Christian III of Denmark-Norway took leadership of the Church. However, the characteristic is more appropriate for the constitutional form of the church after 1660 when absolute monarchy was inaugurated in the twin-kingdoms.

⁶ Denmark: National Constitution/Grundloven 1849, (Sweden: Edict of Toleration of 1781 + Religionsfrihetslagen 1951).

The Scandinavian countries are built upon similar social structures, also called the Nordic welfare model.⁷ Characteristic for this model is that benefits are universal in the sense that all citizens have the right to help regardless of factors such as income. The welfare system is paid by the common tax base. Although the Scandinavian countries differ somewhat in their access to free health care, higher education etc. they all share high standards of living and tend to be placed at the top in international comparisons of mutual trust and happiness.⁸

The high degree of happiness is partly attributed to a significant equality between the sexes regarding shared participation in childcare as well as labor force and education. Actually the education gender gap is reverse from many other parts of the world in the sense that women make up the majority of students enrolled in academia. The populations of Scandinavia have historically been quite homogenous in terms of ethnicity, religious and political beliefs. However, the numbers of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe are perceived by many as a challenge to the traditional balance in which all citizens contribute to and are taken care of by the welfare state. One of the public discussions is whether the Scandinavian welfare models can survive the intake of a large group of refugees or, conversely, whether the welfare model depends on more new citizens in order to be sustained in the future?⁹

In the following we present how the interaction between public discourse and local preaching as well as responsibilities and possibilities of churches in light of the refugee situation are addressed in homiletical case studies in the Scandinavian countries in 2015–16. The presentation begins with the Norwegian, followed by Swedish and Danish case studies.

3. Norwegian Study – Salience and Silence: The Abstract Refugee as Religious Object in Norwegian Sermon Manuscripts¹⁰

Norwegian Context

The political context for the Norwegian cases may be described as ambiguous. On the one hand it is characterized by distance: Though Norway received far more refugees than usual in this period, the numbers were moderate compared to other European countries. Norway is situated in the

⁷ See Uffe Østergaard, *Lutheranism, Nationalism and the Universal Welfare State* in: Katharina Kunter/Jens Holger Schjørring (eds.) for an analysis of the relationship between church and state in northern European contexts.

⁸ <http://time.com/4706590/scandinavia-world-happiness-report-nordics/>.

⁹ See also Grete Brochmann, Anniken Hagelund (eds.), *Immigration Policy and the Scandinavian Welfare State 1945–2010*, Hampshire 2012.

¹⁰ The Norwegian authors responsible for this section are: Tone Stangeland Kaufman, Associate Professor in Practical theology, Norwegian School of Theology, Sivert Angel, Associate Professor in Practical Theology, University of Oslo, Elisabeth Tveito Johnsen, Associate Professor in Practical Theology, University of Oslo, Tron Fagermoen, Senior Lecturer in Practical Theology, Norwegian School of Theology, and Linn Sæbø Rystad, Doctoral Research Fellow, Norwegian School of Theology.

periphery of Europe. Refugees have to pass through several other countries to get to Norway and the country's borders are easily controlled. The Norwegian welfare system also lends a form of distance to the crisis, since there is a culture for primarily regarding the needy as a responsibility of the government. When refugees enter the country, they are therefore first handled by official institutions, which engage and hire civil society organizations to contribute.

On the other hand, in this particular period, there was also a sense of urgency in the political discourse on refugees: opposition and support in local societies for accepting a larger number of refugees than before, strain on the police and customs services that were to receive the refugees, a new right wing minister who took on responsibility for immigration and refugees and sharpened both refugee politics and rhetoric. Moreover, the public role of the Lutheran church was also debated in relation to the refugee situation.

Method: Sampling, cases, and analytical strategy

The Norwegian sermons are strategically sampled from two different cases: One, from what we call Case Border Area, where refugees enter Norway, and where the presence of refugees in the local community would most likely be prevalent, and one from Case Cathedral, which can be considered a public pulpit, playing a political role as part of a national folk church.¹¹ Thus, both of these cases can be described as extreme cases, or perhaps even as critical cases.¹² Moreover, we decided to ask for sermons from Christmas Eve and Christmas Day too, as our hunch was that the refugee situation might be more explicitly addressed during those days, where a larger part of members who don't attend worship regularly actually do come to church.

The sermons in our two cases relate to the context described above in two different ways. The Cathedral sermons relate to a context where refugees are very much discussed, but rarely explicitly encountered, whereas the Border Area sermons relate to a context where refugees entered into the country at a border station that is located in the parish. The timeline for the sermons is associated with a slight shift in public discourse. The time from September through Christmas is marked by a discourse on the number of refugees and Norwegian immigration politics, while the terror attack in Brussels and the discourse on IS terrorists hiding among refugees receives considerable attention around Easter.

In order to examine how the sermon manuscripts produce meaning and take part in a political and theological discourse on refugees, we analyze the sermons from three different perspectives.

¹¹ Although the Church of Norway is no longer a state church, there are still strong bonds between the Norwegian people and the Lutheran church of Norway.

¹² Bent Flyvbjerg, Case Study, in: *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th Edition, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2011, 306–307.

Firstly, we ask how they use the Scripture in their argument. The findings will also be discussed in connection with the role of lectionaries in terms of enabling preachers to address a specific situation, such as the 'refugee crisis.' Secondly, we look at the role or function of refugees in various image grids,¹³ such as what other images, characters, stories or situations refugees are combined with, as this might contribute to bringing out what the sermon says about refugees both politically and theologically. Thirdly, we describe how the role of the preacher is expressed. We arrive at the description of the preachers' role partly by the two previous steps and partly by studying the preachers' explicit and implicit self-presentations.

Case Cathedral: A Salient Presence

The sermons from the cathedral case were preached from what can be characterized as a public pulpit in one of the major Norwegian cities. The main finding is that the presence of refugees is salient in the sermons. In our material of twelve sermons (preached by six different pastors) nine deal with refugees. The other main finding is that none of the sermons are negative to refugees or signal support for a restrictive refugee politics. On the contrary, when refugees are mentioned, it is always in a positive way, and to the extent they address the political issue, it is always in favor of hospitality and liberal politics.

Role of Lectionary

The use of a lectionary seems to be quite flexible, since refugees are regarded as a relevant reference in the interpretation of almost all texts. Regulating the choice of the Sunday Gospel, the lectionary lends authority to the message about refugees. In our interpretation of the Case Cathedral sermons, the message does not simply arise from the preachers' political engagement, but from the text itself, which is not chosen by a politically engaged preacher. Rather it is laid out beforehand by a lectionary, which is chosen in relation to the liturgical year. However, having to preach from a lectionary might even strengthen the message in this particular situation. An example of this can be found in a sermon presented on the Sunday before Election Day in Norway. The preacher reminds his congregation to take the question of the refugees into account when choosing whom to vote for and to evaluate which party would serve hospitality and care best. He finds authoritative support for this call in the lectionary system:

In today's reading, Jesus says: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It is very special that this text was predetermined for us just today – "those who

¹³ David Buttrick, *Homiletic. Moves and Structures*, Philadelphia 1987, 157.163.
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are persecuted because of righteousness". This is what it is all about, and what we are becoming increasingly aware of as one of the biggest challenges of our time, and which has only just begun.¹⁴

Use of the Bible: Exegetical Deduction, Analogy and Typology

In our material, two sermons use the biblical text in an exegetical deduction arriving at a message of human dignity and love of neighbor, which is applied in a counsel on how to relate to the 'refugee crisis,' even though this specific concept is never mentioned. What to take into account in the election is how to think about the refugees, which gives the sermon a strong political profile.

Most frequently, the Biblical texts are interpreted as an analogy to the present situation. The situations or phenomena described in the text resemble present situations and phenomena. The vulnerability of the widow in Nain resembles the refugees' vulnerability, Jesus coming to us as a stranger resembles the refugees, in the parable of the weeds, wheat and weed that cannot be separated resemble Norwegians, refugees and terrorists that cannot be separated.

A sermon on Easter Day employs typology and interprets Jesus' death as a type for today's situation after the terror attack in Brussels where the people felt the forces of death. Common for these preachers, though, is that they negotiate an understanding of the present situation by drawing on the texts from the Bible.

Image Grid: The Refugee as part of a Religious Inventory

In some sermons, the refugees are mentioned as objects for a love of neighbor and as protected by the Christian view of human dignity. This way of mentioning refugees is associated with the exegetical deductive way of using the biblical text. The refugees play a similar role as an image in the sermon that employs a typological explanation of the Bible. Here they are mentioned together with the situation they are a part of in society and politics, a situation of terror, strife and struggle. The image appears in conjunction with images from the bible in a way that serves an altered or renewed understanding of the present situation. It is not a situation of fear and death, but of God's love and hope.

In the sermons that employ an analogical explanation of the biblical texts, refugees are combined with a variety of other images. In one sermon it is combined with the family bringing a child to baptism, traditions of the church, family rituals to let the refugees illustrate that the lives of humans are intertwined with each other. In another sermon refugees are combined with rich and poor Norwegians, stubborn children and a terrorist to make the point that it is impossible to distinguish between humans. In yet another sermon the challenges to refugee politics are combined

¹⁴ Sermon preached on Matthew 5:10–12, September 2015.
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with readjustment processes, body image pressure, and loneliness, which are contrasted with positive images, such as peace talks in Syria, positive students, and positive stories on TV, as a sign of hope. In these sermons, refugees become part of a religious inventory and serve as a strengthening of religious experience and religious aesthetics. In this group of sermons we see a tendency that the sermon seeks to repeal distinctions. Good and evil may not be easily separated, and one should avoid demarcating us from them.

A tendency that can be seen in several sermons is that of paradoxical love rhetoric, not too dissimilar from the one expressed in the spontaneous rituals that responded to the terrorist attack in Oslo on July 22, 2011.¹⁵ Fleeing refugees traveling for a better future are seen as symbols of hope, and the sense of vulnerability they represent are described as awakening a faith in what is good.

Position and Role of the Preacher: The Political Preacher and the Reserved Interpreter

Some of the preachers in the Norwegian context seem to take on a political role. Two of them take on a role as counselors in connection with the coming election, though without mentioning concrete party politics. One preacher does it as an interpreter of the terror attack and as a supervisor for how one should react to it and relate to the refugees, though without concrete instructions for action. In the majority of the sermons, the preacher takes on a very reserved role, where the political reality of the refugees come to serve their role as administrators of the cult and facilitators for religious experience. The cultic context frames their message, so that the refugees are there to enhance the relevance and reality of what takes place in the Sunday service. In general, the preachers seem to employ refugees quite flexibly and effortlessly, and they avoid antagonism when addressing the issue.

Case Border Area: A Surprising Silence

In the Border Area case we were at first rather surprised to find that only one of the sermons preached in September actually addressed the refugee situation, and the term 'refugee crisis' was not mentioned at all in the twelve sermons we were given to analyze from September, January and Easter preached by one female and two male pastors.¹⁶ Furthermore, the theme was referred to only on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, but completely absent in the few sermons available to us from January and during Holy Week. Thus, although various aspects of the 'crisis' or situation were referred to, the most salient observation was a surprising silence. Due to this silence, we don't

¹⁵ *Jone Salomonsen*, Graced Life After All? Terrorism and Theology on July 22, 2011, in: *Dialog – A Journal of Theology*, 54(3), 249-259; *Ida Marie Høeg*, Silent actions – emotion and mass mourning rituals after the terrorist attacks in Norway on 22 July, 2011, in: *Mortality* 20(3), 197–214.

¹⁶ Only the female pastor addresses the refugee situation in some of her sermons.

see any changes from September to Easter in this case. Apart from one September sermon, it is the Christmas sermons that address the 'refugee crisis' most explicitly. However, when the refugee situation is mentioned, it is always in support of an open policy in terms of welcoming refugees, and whenever a call for action is uttered, it is a call for hospitality based on the biblical example and Christian ethics.

Role of Lectionary

Not yet having analyzed case Cathedral, we asked: Could the absence of attending to the refugee situation be understood in light of the lectionaries for the particular September Sundays? The Gospels of the Sundays were: Luke 17:7–10 (the widow of Nain), Luke 10:38–42 (Mary and Martha), Matt 5:10–12 (part of the Beatitudes) as well as the text chosen for the worship service particularly aimed at children and families from Matt 18:12–14 or Luke 15:4–7 (the one sheep that got lost and was found).¹⁷ In the sermons preached in September based on the first three of these Gospel stories there are absolutely no references to the refugee situation.¹⁸ However, at least in the case of the widow of Nain and the Beatitudes this theme could easily have been included, both based on the text itself as well as how the sermons were crafted. The link is not far from the widow of Nain who has to bury her son to refugees watching their children drown or die while seeking to cross the Mediterranean or other dangerous territories on their way to a safe space. When preaching on the Beatitudes, the preacher several times refers to those who are being persecuted, those who suffer, and even how Jesus himself was a refugee who had to flee to Egypt. This is also the case in the sermon from Epiphany on Matt 2:1–12 (the visit by the Magis).

Use of the Bible: Typology

In the one September sermon that explicitly addresses the refugee situation, the Gospel is interpreted typologically: What happens to the one sheep and the ninety-nine in the parable, is seen as a typos for the situation of refugees who "enter our country at [Name of] NN Border Station," as the preacher puts it. The biblical text is used to describe the situation of the refugee (now), and to interpret the presence of the good shepherd in the contemporary situation. Even though the parable is interpreted typologically, the preacher breaks with the logic of the parable. It is the sheep that searches and finds, not the shepherd. The sermon does not use terms such as 'refugee crisis' explicitly. The reason given for why the little sheep has fled to Norway is that "it is much better here" and that there is war in her home country. Norway is in other words described as the

¹⁷ It should be noted that we do not know what these preachers preached in August, October, November, and February. They might have addressed the 'crisis' more directly then.

¹⁸ It is not unlikely that the listeners still experienced an implicit layer of refugees in their context when hearing the preacher describe Jesus as a refugee child, but this remains an undocumented assumption, as we have not interviewed listeners.

promised land, and the good shepherd has guided his flock through Russia to this land. Thus, we also find traces of the exodus-motif in this sermon.

Image grid: The Refugee Situation as an Example of 'Bad Things Happening in the World'

The refugee situation is typically referred to in conjunction with other examples and images of 'bad things' happening in the world. For example, in the sermon from Christmas Day the 'crisis' is only hinted at, as "pictures on TV of people fleeing across the ocean." Moreover, this is only one of several challenges in our present situation, which shows that the world "is still in the dark." Similarly, the sermon from Christmas Eve revolves around many images that can be linked to the 'refugee crisis.' The preacher mentions poverty, Jesus being born far from home, and the poor.

By using the refugee situation as one case among other challenging situations, the sting of this particular and critical case is partly glossed over by numerous other possible challenges that the congregants might face as part of a world that "is still in the dark." The preacher describes these challenges in an existential and rather abstract way. This serves to include as many of the listeners as possible as well as to avoid a distinction between us and them. Political deliberations concerning the 'refugee crisis' is on the whole absent, although the preacher on Christmas Eve makes an explicit reference to Norway sending out asylum seeking children "fast and efficiently," thereby revealing that she does not agree with this policy and treatment.

Rather than focusing on the ethical challenges that the 'crisis' creates, the sermons that mention the 'crisis' focuses on how it reveals God's presence in this world. The central point of the sermon on Christmas day is for instance that God became human, and thus became poor among the poor, a voice for those who have no voice themselves, our friend in need, and the one who overcomes death. Through the incarnation mystery, God has given us hope; hope for a better tomorrow. We are not alone: God is with us. Faith is not about understanding, but about receiving: and what we receive is a child that "soon had to flee." What we see in these sermons is that the political situation becomes a point of departure for invoking the refugee in a religiously oriented aesthetics.

Position and Role of Preacher: Identification

The position of the preacher in the sermons where the refugee situation is referred to is that of identification: She identifies with the little sheep that has to flee (refugee child), and emphatically acts out what it can be like to be a refugee. Every one of us is vulnerable and can be poor, if only in our hearts. Hence, she is careful not to distinguish between 'us' and 'them.' Rather, a larger 'we' is constructed, consisting of every human being who shares part of the same existential human condition. In one of the sermons she specifically calls for the congregants to act: The right thing to do is to help and to welcome the refugee. In a different sermon, the same preacher positions

herself as one who is “walking with” the congregation, as a sojourner: She is no expert on the refugee situation, and she does not prophetically challenge her listeners to take action in any specific way. Rather, she offers a theological reflection and interpretation of the situation.

Comparison of the two Norwegian Cases

When comparing the two Norwegian cases, there are both differences and similarities, which will be discussed in the following.

Differences

The most striking difference in the two cases is the salience of the refugee situations in sermons from the cathedral case and the silence of this theme in the border area case. Furthermore, it seems as if the preachers in the former case find themselves to have a more explicit political role than the preachers in the border area case. Another significant difference is how the same lectionaries were used as an entrance gate to address the refugee situation in the one case, whereas this did not happen in the other case.

Nora Tubbs Tisdale refers to a study on how the Gulf war was addressed the first Sunday after the Gulf war broke out.¹⁹ The researcher found that strikingly few sermons attended to this vast political event. In interviews with twenty-four preachers the researcher was given the answer that they did not say anything about it because they “follow the lectionaries,” and thus did not find any opportunity to include this world event.²⁰ This point was used by Eugene Lowry to question the use of lectionaries, or at least to identify some of its flip sides.²¹ So whilst our border area case supports Lowry’s point, the cathedral case opposes it.²²

Similarities

In both cases, sermons that do address the refugee situation are unanimously positive towards welcoming refugees, encouraging the listeners to be hospitable. This attitude is not questioned in any of the sermons, and the biblical material is used to support such a position. Nevertheless, the ‘crisis’ is kept at arm’s length, and the preachers call for a religious or Christian attitude rather than political action. By referring to this situation in conjunction with other negative things that indicate that our world is still “in the dark,” the refugee situation is preached about in an existentialist and abstract way as part of our shared human condition. This is further supported by the refusal to

¹⁹ *Leonora Tubbs Tisdale*, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Minneapolis 1997, 101.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

²¹ *Eugene L. Lowry*, *The Homiletical Beat: Why All Sermons are Narrative*, Nashville 2012, 91.

²² Also the Lutheran Church of Norway follows a three-year lectionary according to the Nordic model where internal coherence between the three texts to be read a given Sunday is prioritized over the coherence and connection from Sunday to Sunday.

distinguish between “us” and “them”, “good” and “bad,” which could be related to an egalitarian society and culture and a welfare state that is responsible for taking care of the needy.

The preachers in our material are situated in a privileged position. They themselves are not experiencing an existential crisis as refugees or find themselves in a political situation that is instable, volatile, or directly threatening to them. Hence, the 'refugee crisis' is no personal crisis for them. Sociologist of religion David Smilde argues that such a disengaged approach is often associated with people in a privileged and dominant position.²³ This could be a way of relating to the issue that conceals conflicts of interest and underplays the urgency of the concrete challenges of the refugees. However, there could also be different reasons for the way of addressing or not addressing this situation in these sermons that we have not been able to explore in this study.

4. Swedish Study – “It Could Have Been Me!”²⁴

Introduction to the study

For the Swedish study we received 40 sermons from 17 preachers. We chose to focus on 15 sermons from five of the preachers, who all sent three sermons from the requested period of September 2015 through Easter 2016. These priests are all active in parishes which are part of the network “The Future Lives With Us” (Framtiden bor hos oss, FBHO²⁵). We chose this network as the primary focus group because these parishes have several years of experience in direct work among people with origin from different countries, many of them with experience of being refugees. Of these 15 sermons there are 10 that in some way or another relate to the situation of refugees. The other five have a more general human focus and provide a picture of every preacher's unique way of preaching and theology. That is why we include them in our analysis.

The questions addressed in the project are: How do the sermons relate to the “European refugee crisis”? What descriptive words are used? Is there a change in approach during the specific period? What is the purpose of the sermon? What is the position and role of the preacher? In what way does the preacher use the Bible? We have also been looking into the theology of the sermons.

²³ David Smilde, *Beyond the Strong Program in the Sociology of Religion*, in: Courtney Bender, et al. (eds.), *Religion on the Edge. De-centering and Re-centering the Sociology of Religion*, Oxford 2012, 47.

²⁴ Authors primarily responsible for the following section on the Swedish context are: Carina Sundberg, Diocesan Theologian, Linköping, Sweden, PhD Theology and Pernilla Myrelid, short term project leader in Migration and Theology, MA Interreligious Relations. See also article published in Swedish “Att predika om “flyktingkrisen”: En studie av några predikningar i Svenska kyrkan” in *Swedish Church Journal / SKT – Svensk Kyrkotidning*, January 2017.

²⁵ For a description of the network in Swedish see: www.svenskakyrkan.se/framtidenborhososs.

There are many issues to look into within a short scope of time; therefore, the results presented will be provisional.

Imagery

A first observation is that all the sermons have an open attitude as regards refugees coming to Sweden and the fact that they are being welcomed in Sweden and Europe. The sermons highlight the difficulties of what is happening globally, locally, and individually from slightly different perspectives, but the open welcome remains. It is also theologically motivated, and we will return to this. We see no major difference in perspective from September to Easter. We would rather say that it is a consistent view.

All preachers we have studied use stories and images in a clear and conscious way. The expression "refugee crisis" is not used, but the situation is described using words such as tragedy, chaos, darkness, walking in the desert. Two sermons make the comparison with the situation during and after the Second World War and the many refugees during that period. In this way they put the situation into a historical context, relating it to a greater dramatic story, which had a major impact on our world. One of these sermons also refers to history by saying that there is no example of:

"a country or territory [which] afterwards has had regrets that [...] we received and gave shelter to these refugees. However, history is full of examples of countries and contexts that subsequently have regretted and apologized for shutting people out and failing to take more action to provide protection to the people who were in distress."²⁶

In this way statements made in past time become arguments for openness now. Individual stories are important in all sermons and a few links are made to history by highlighting individual stories such as the story of a relative who fled during World War II or an acquaintance that fled the Balkan War.

Some preachers refer to contemporary media images, pictures "we've all seen." Sometimes this is done with a few words, such as "barbed wire fences" or "the Mediterranean Sea", sometimes the picture is made bigger. This occurs both in September, as well as in the rest of the period. One preacher says:

"It is remarkable how far it has to go before we react. We have read and heard about this for such a long time but somehow it has come to a tipping point this week. Maybe there are images of refugees living in and outside the main railway station in Budapest. Maybe it's the knowledge that winter is coming soon with the cold and snow. But mostly I think

²⁶ Sermon preached on Luke 10:23–37, 13th. Sunday after Trinity, 30th of Aug. 2015.
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it's an image that has appeared in the media. This is a picture of a small child who has drowned, an image of a dead child on a beach."²⁷

One of the sermons expresses reluctance to show these pictures, but believes they might still be necessary for us in order to understand what lies behind the statistics. In terms of statistics, all the preachers put the number of people received in Sweden and Europe into a global context, where those who come to us are described as only a small part of all the refugees in the world, for example compared with the people in Syria's neighboring countries. Statistics are used to reinforce the stories and highlight proportions. But the figures are not only used as a contrast. They are also exemplary. For instance, they show Germany as a good example of receiving refugees. Germany is said to have received 800,000 by September. At the same time, nobody claims that they know exactly what needs to be done. Or, as one says, "I do not know how we could help all those who are now on the run, but I know that we must do something."

Images and stories in a sermon serve as illustrations, but they can also form the supporting frame, on which the preachers attach images, stories, and arguments. One theme that is central in many of the sermons, is the question of who is inside and who is outside, and who is "them" and who is "us." A metaphor which supports this argument and occurs in several sermons is walls. This is used both for the outer and inner life. The sermons mention for example, politically constructed walls in Europe (barbed wire fence, passport controls, asylum laws, borders), social barriers between people (approaches), and inner walls (fear, uncertainty). To create walls, to shut people out by using these walls is seen as problematic.

Another metaphor is rootlessness, a complex of problems related to the relationship between internal and external. The theme of rootlessness is discussed in for example one sermon using the metaphorical image of trees/roots: "Every time I walked past the fence around the construction site and saw the tree, I was thinking of all those people who right now are plucked up by the roots and are fleeing."²⁸ This whole sermon then reflects on what it means to realize that "the stable foundation we thought we stood on is torn away" and the hope of "taking root and flourish again". Other supporting themes/metaphors are light/darkness, death/life, where the language is clearly taken from the biblical texts related to the liturgical year. None of the sermons express the way from darkness to light and from death to life as only inward or individual events, but events that unite the social and the individual, the community and the church.

²⁷ Sermon preached on John 17:9-11, Eph 4:1-6, and other parts of the Bible on 14th Sunday after Trinity, 6th of Sept 2015.

²⁸ Sermon preached on Matt 6:31-34, 15th Sunday after Trinity, 13th of Sept, 2015.

Inspiring role models are also highlighted, from biblical texts (e.g. the wise men and Mary), and from history (Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dag Hammarskjöld), and from contemporary life (Angela Merkel). But also local role models, for example people in the congregation who volunteer to meet refugees.

The Purpose of the Sermon and the Position of the Preacher

In homiletics there are different views on what is the purpose of any sermon; to convince, to touch, to evoke, to call to repentance, to draw listeners into a Christ-event, providing moral and ethical guidance, to provide knowledge, just to mention a few. We would like to summarize the purpose of these sermons with the words "empowerment" and "encouragement." In the 10 sermons that specifically relate to the refugee situation, we see that it is about encouraging people to maintain an open and empathetic mind, to strengthen them to remain with the hard reality and still have a welcoming practice. There is a strong empathetic approach in the sermons. This purpose is theologically justified and relates to the preacher's position.

The position of the preacher in relation to those fleeing are in several of the sermons characterized by the preacher's identification with those who are called refugees, while the preacher at the same time is part of the worshipping congregation. One of the preachers says "... as long as anyone has to go into exile, we all live in exile, when someone suffers, we suffer with them." Another preacher says: "We want to help because we recognize ourselves in the pictures. It could have been me. You do not choose where to be born. We would all have tried to escape war, terror and death." Different experiences of how security has disappeared can help both the preacher and the congregation, in the identification. One preacher suggests that, for example, we can recognize ourselves in the situation where "the ground we stood on was pulled away." The preacher describes how despair, in more mundane, but still life changing circumstances, can manifest itself. "We are many that have curled up and cried our way through the night and wondered what exactly is happening?" A recognition and identification with the desperate is illustrated. This identification is found in several of the sermons. One of the preachers highlights people's capacity for identification, as described above, as part of being bearers of hope:

"In the midst of this tragedy that we are witnessing in Europe there is still a sense of hope. People are moved by these terrible pictures and we are torn in our hearts. Children crying at the borders, teenage boys clinging to the flatbed truck traveling through Europe. We want to help because we recognize ourselves in the images."²⁹

²⁹ Sermon preached on 14th Sunday after Trinity, 6th of Sept., on Eph 4:1–6 and John 17:9–11.
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In one of the sermons³⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer is quoted saying “the church is only the church when serving others.” It describes implicitly the refugees as the others that the church should be there for, therefore, in a sense, the opposite of identification with the refugees, as described above. The preacher however believes it is a constant challenge for the Church not to be present for its own sake. The preacher asks the rhetorical question whether this is a crucial part of our fundamental identity as a church.

None of the preachers expresses an intent to choose sides between the different political parties. One of the preachers mentions clearly that it is not the task of the sermon to be political in the sense of political parties. There are not many politicians mentioned by name but Angela Merkel is mentioned as a role model by two of the preachers. In one sermon she is mentioned as different from politicians in Sweden who normally talk about how we can limit the number of refugees. “If we are able to save the banks, we are able to save people” is highlighted as a quote by Angela Merkel.

Creation Theology and Christology

What hermeneutic have the preachers been working with? We identify two theological interpretation keys that seem to form the basic theology (a preacher’s “working theology”) that we perceive in these sermons. These control how preachers interpret and use biblical texts and how they relate these texts to the issues the sermon is touching on, in this case the refugee situation. The first key is creation theology. It is based on “the creation story,” an implied overall story, which is sometimes drawn upon by the preacher as referring to any fragment of Gen 1–3, though sometimes there is no explicit reference at all. The sermons are interpreted through this story. Humans are created in all our diversity by a God who loves diversity. Differences and diversity are good creation theology. Difference is not only about diversity, but is expanded so that we are described as unique individuals, with different skin color, faith, religious beliefs. This provides a theological justification for unity, but also for openness and compassion. A preacher says, for example:

“The basic story for our existence, both the biblical and evolutionary, teaches us that we all have the same origin. Everything comes from the same original cell. That God is behind all creation. And the whole world is linked. That man Adam and mother Eve live in the midst of all that God has created. There is a unity in this. But it should not be mixed up with resemblance. The story of our existence also teaches us that life is about diversity.

³⁰ Sermon preached on 13th Sunday after Trinity. No reference to where the Bonhoeffer quote is from.
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Different varieties, different species. Without the diversity of creation, all life would perish. We could not cope. The animals would not survive.”³¹

In this sermon Creation Theology is united with Christology, which is the second key of interpretation as shown in the following:

“Thus the unity carries diversity. Unity is not equivalent to uniformity. Unity is about commonality despite differences. We come from the same source. Everything flows from the same source. Is this valid also for the unity of Christ? Christ is not separate from God himself. Christ is God incarnate.”

One Sunday, one of the preachers finds John 17:9–11 problematic, in that “Jesus is praying, not for the world but for those whom God has given him.” The text has a tendency, says the preacher, “to be read in a way that excludes and rejects those who do not belong to Jesus.”³² The preacher changes “spectacles” and uses other Biblical texts to make visible the point he/she want to make. Eph 4:1–6 is used to show that “God is the Father of all,” but also Matt 25 about what “you have done for one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it for me,” and Luke 15, and “the story of the Good Samaritan” (which was the Gospel reading the previous Sunday) where boundaries are said to be erased instead of walls built.

The Christological interpretation key is based on Jesus Christ, as God’s self-giving presence, both as a model and example. Past and present are brought together. Jesus knows the events from the inside. He “was a refugee, he cries, he is empathetic, he feels pain, he is present, he helps, he cried out on the cross, he calls out now. He is every child, his mother is every mother.” The stories of Jesus’ childhood are used both literally/historically (meaning, he was, for example, actually a refugee) and figuratively (he is every refugee today).

The Holy Spirit is hardly mentioned. We have previously mentioned that the main purpose of the sermons seems to be “empowerment,” and that Jesus Christ is seen as present in the midst of a refugee situation, and this makes a difference in the sermons. However this difference is not always very clear. If we were to polarize the matter, we could ask the question this way: Is it more focused on kenotic theology (God's total self-giving and powerlessness in the world) or liberation theology (God is taking the people out of oppression)? Or are these held together? This is worth further study, but we believe that compassion, empathetic and self-giving perspective of the image of God is strongly emphasized. God stands behind and stays along with. This applies not only in Good Friday sermons but in the whole period. At the same time, we think this gives hope in itself.

³¹ Sermon preached on 14th Sunday after Trinity, 6th of Sept. on Eph 4:1–6 and John 17:9–11.

³² Ibid.

However, to abide, stand with and stay is also the challenge from these sermons to the Church and society. This is tied to Jesus as a model. We have already mentioned his refugee status. The story that seems to pop up no matter where in the liturgical year, that of the Good Samaritan, is highly interpretive of the whole situation. Jesus is the Good Samaritan. The congregation may be the Good Samaritan. The congregation is called to be there for the refugee, and as we understand the sermons, this is something that is already happening, and needs to keep being done in the congregations who listen to these sermons. Therefore these sermons can empower.

5. Danish Study – The Refugee Crisis as a “Game Changer” and Critique of Confusing Security with Peace

Introduction to the Danish study

In the following we present analysis of fifty-two sermons held by thirteen different preachers in Sept. 2015, January 2016 and Easter 2016 in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark.³³ We have chosen to collect sermons from four different groups of preachers, namely: I) Pastors who participated in a seminar called the “The Political Sermon” at the University of Copenhagen in March 2016, II) Pastors whose churches are situated close to the Danish/German border, III) Pastors who have a large group of refugees in their congregation, and IV) Two bishops³⁴ and a pastor whose sermons and statements in the media have stirred intense debate about the relationship between politics (namely the refugee “crisis”) and preaching.

The following analysis shows that preachers use the lectionary texts³⁵ to address the contemporary societal and political situation of migration in different ways. The sermons preached on the first two Sundays, namely 14th and 15th Sunday after Trinity – or Sept. 6th and Sept. 13th – are the ones that most explicitly address the contemporary societal situation. Whether this is due to the changed situation, in which refugees started coming to Europe in numbers hitherto unseen,

³³ *Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen*, Professor in Practical Theology, University of Copenhagen and *Pia Nordin Christensen*, Pastor and MA in homiletics, Frederiksberg Kirke, Denmark, are responsible for the Danish study presented in the following pages.

³⁴ Because the two sermons by the bishops has been publicly broadcasted and discussed in the media, we have decided to give credit to the bishops by name and refer to the sermon manuscripts which are available on the internet. The rest of the preachers and their sermons have been anonymized for the study. Thank you to all preachers who have contributed!

³⁵ The lectionary used in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark consists of a two-year series of readings. The second series is from 1885 and both series were revised in 1992 where texts from the Old Testament were added as required readings for the worship service. At the present time only the Gospel readings are used as the primary preaching text. Although there are ongoing discussions on whether we should add a third series of reading to the existing lectionary in the ELCD and perhaps start to preach on the Epistles and OT texts in addition to the Gospel pericopes, there seems to be a dominant consensus among pastors and theological scholars that the fixed lectionary texts are important and appreciated in the Danish preaching tradition.

or whether the Biblical texts gave reasons for this focus is difficult to estimate on the basis of our survey. However, it is clear that the same lectionary text is used for opposing ethical perspectives.

Early September: Refugee crisis as “game changer”

One of the sermons which were held in the beginning of September 2015 was by Henrik Wigh-Poulsen at his inauguration as the new bishop of Aarhus diocese. Since it was held at a bishop’s inauguration it received great public attention. However the content of the sermon and the public situation in which large groups of immigrants have just started arriving at the Danish borders called forth stronger interest and reactions than at similar inauguration sermons. The sermon was on Jesus’ cleansing of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11–19 and revolved around the lack of gratefulness that tends to characterize those of us who live in stable, affluent societies as in the following:

“We are not always good at recognizing what we have and receive in terms of peace, freedom and daily bread [...] Children, a spouse whom we do not have to force through a barbed wired fence by a Hungarian border. We take the gifts for granted. We are not always small enough to let the greatness of life catch our eyes. And then gratefulness fails. It is one of the condemnations of the welfare society; the anxiety of not getting and having enough. Do the others get more than I? More money, better health, more likes on Facebook, a more interesting life? Instead of rejoicing over what we have, we become preoccupied with whether we have enough. Or, if somebody intrudes, crosses boundaries in order to take the well-acquired from us.”³⁶

In a radio-transmitted interview broadcasted the week before his inauguration bishop Wigh-Poulsen describes the refugee situation as a “game changer” in the relationship between church and state. In reaction, politician and former pastor, Christian Langballe, confirmed that the refugee crisis challenges the present situation in Denmark but whether it changes the relationship between church and state is a political rather than a theological question to him – and as a consequence it does not belong in a sermon.³⁷

Fall of 2015: From worry to fear

The preaching text that seems to have caused the most discussion of the refugee situation is Matt 6:25–34. The sermons on this text are however also those that show the biggest theological differences regarding the ethical behavior in relation to the present situation. It is important to

³⁶ Sermon on Luke 17:11–19, held 14th Sunday after Trinity Sunday, September 6th 2015. The original sermon can be read in Danish at: <http://aarhusstift.dk/2015/09/henrik-wigh-poulsens-indsaettelsespraediken/>. All sermon quotes in the following pages have been translated from Danish by Lorensen.

³⁷ Cf. Discussion of the sermon in the radio program “Religionsrapport.” Broadcast on Danish National Public Radio DR P1, Sept. 8th, 2015.

notice that these sermons are all held on September 13th, 2015, which was the time when the number of refugees arriving in Europe increased rapidly. This increase very likely plays a significant role in the preachers' choice of focus. The sermons preached on Matt 6:25–34 all relate Jesus' exhortation: "Do not worry!" to the present societal situation. However the way the exhortation is interpreted varies from the two poles of an ethic of control/responsibility versus an ethic of ultimate ends/risk.³⁸

One of the preachers who articulated an "ethic of ultimate ends" in relation to Matt 6:25–34 was a preacher whose congregation is situated north of Copenhagen in an area that does not tend to have large numbers of refugees. In his sermon he discusses the numbers of refugees coming to Europe in relation to the number of who already live here. He does this in an apparent attempt to downplay the fear of great numbers of refugees coming to Denmark. The preacher ends his sermon by saying:

"We must hope rather than worry; hope for the best and believe the best – also about other people. Each day has enough trouble of its own - but today your trouble is my trouble, so welcome here, my Syrian brother and sister. You are safe here. Because we do not want the worries to overshadow our confidence, our humanity and hope for the future. Because we are a Christian country – as our government says ..."³⁹

The latter part of the passage is, most likely, polemical reference to the present government who has described Denmark as a Christian country in their declaration for the new government of 2015.⁴⁰ Several critics have questioned the intentions behind this statement and interpret it as a way to mark a difference between the cultural-Christian values and original inhabitants of Denmark on one hand and newcomers of other cultural and religious backgrounds and the preacher appears to join this critique implicitly.

Another sermon which can be seen as emphasizing an ethic of ultimate ends, in the sense of Weber, was held at the inauguration of the Parliament where the bishop of the Haderslev Diocese, Marianne Christiansen, addressed those members of the parliament who had chosen to participate in the traditional inauguration worship service. In continuation of John 14:1–7 the bishop opens

³⁸ Cf. *Max Weber's* distinction in *Politik als Beruf (Politics as a Vocation)* 1918. See also *Sharon Welsh's* distinction between an "ethic of risk" and an "ethic of control" as referred to in *Charles Campbell/Johann Cilliers, Preaching Fools*, Waco, TX 2012, 33.

³⁹ Sermon preached on the 15th Sunday after Trinity, Sept. 9th, 2015 on Matt 6:24–34.

⁴⁰ The declaration of the new government is titled: Together for the future and states, "Denmark is a Christian country, and the Evangelical-Lutheran church has special status as the national church. The Government wishes to preserve this special status." Translation of Danish text accessed June 1st, 2017 http://stm.dk/multimedia/Sammen_for_fremtiden_-_Regeringsgrundlag.pdf.

the sermon by saying: “Fear not, dear members of Parliament,”⁴¹ and she continues by referring to the first letter of John 4:18 claiming that “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.”⁴² The bishop’s choice of addressing the theme of fear, rather than worries as in the sermons of September, can be seen as characteristic for the development of reactions toward the refugee situation among many citizens and politicians in Denmark.

The bishop asks whether we may even pronounce the word, love, in “the real world” of today where “fear has become terribly in fashion.” She contrasts the fear of the world today with the love narrated in Scripture as well as in the hymns of one of the Danish church fathers, namely Nikolaj F. S. Grundtvig,⁴³ who claimed that Denmark was chosen to be a people of hearts, an earthen realm of love. She describes that much of our life and much politics is driven by fear and the fear of fear: “How can we make room for foreigners and refugees in our country when we are afraid of them, and how can we encounter the future if we cannot be sure that everything continues to be as it used to be?”⁴⁴ Throughout the sermon the bishop describes how love can drive out fear. She describes love as a way in the world where realities continue to catch up on us so that we are urged to relate to the suffering of other people even if we had not planned to and rather would have enjoyed ourselves with those that we know and like. As an alternative, she describes the contemporary situation as a “reality in which we can suddenly get new friends, people who come to us unexpectedly with help and a future we do not know”⁴⁵.

In contrast to the bishop’s insistence that love can drive out fear one of the other preachers in the Danish study criticizes this understanding and sees this “naïvety” or ethics of ultimate ends as part of the present societal and ecclesial problem – rather than as a solution. This interpretation is traced in the following.

New Year’s sermons: Wake up call to recognize evil forces at work

Although most of the sermons we have studied that mention the refugee situation appear to admonish their congregations towards a welcoming attitude and an ethic of ultimate ends, some of

⁴¹ Sermon held at Christiansborg Castle Chapel on October 6th, 2015 on 1. Cor. 13 + John 14:1–7. The following quotes are Lorensen’s translation of the Danish original which is accessible at: <http://www.folkekirken.dk/Resources/Persistent/b/b/8/0/bb80b0acc0e82a10f9f59a847e0d210aa5643a03/Pr%C3%A6diken%20ved%20Folketingets%20%C3%A5bningsgudstjeneste.pdf>.

⁴² With reference to the hymn sung at the worship service titled: *Kærlighed til Fædrelandet* [Love of the Fatherland] by *Nikolai F.S. Grundtvig* (1853) including the line: “Therefore, Denmark, fear not! Fear is not of love!”

⁴³ For an introduction to the work of Grundtvig see *Anders Holm*, *Nikolai F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872)*, in: M. Becker (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Lutheran Theologians* (Refo500 Academic Studies, Vol. 31), Göttingen/Bristol (USA), 2016, 67–86. Grundtvig was a contemporary of the Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard. For an analysis of this perspective see: N.F.S. Grundtvig, *The Matchless Giant*, in: Jon Stewart (ed.): *Kierkegaard and his Danish Contemporaries*. Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources: Vol. 7. Tome II: Theology. Farnham UK/Burlington USA, 2009, 95–151.

⁴⁴ Sermon held on October 6th, 2015 on 1. Cor. 13 + John 14:1–7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

them clearly belong to the ethics of responsibility category in the sense of Weber. One of the representatives of the latter group interprets the present societal situation as a wakeup call to face the evil forces at work in the world. While trying to illustrate this seriousness the preacher criticizes those who use the situation as a means of staging oneself or, as other critics have put it, of “flashing their own goodness.” This preacher claims that the present situation places most of us in a grey area where the impetus to act wisely in the great picture and the impetus to witness of oneself tend to be confused.⁴⁶

In her sermon on January 3, 2016, this preacher claims that the great question which the year of 2015 has brought us all is whether we understand the seriousness and how we react on it – because people have always had troubles being sufficiently alert. With the events of 2015 the preacher refers to the killings in a concert hall and cafés in Paris in November 2015 as well as in the synagogue and at a public debate arrangement in Copenhagen in February 2015. As a way to substantiate her interpretation, the preacher paraphrases an excerpt from one of Martin Luther’s sermons on the Gospel of John:

“Do not walk around as if in sleep all the time – as if there was no danger in sight! The world is so daft and foolish, so blind and hardened, that it thinks that happiness lasts forever, as long as it smiles and everything looks good. Therefore people walk around in a daze and cannot imagine anything evil; but they live their life as if both the Devil and all afflictions were nothing.”⁴⁷

In the interpretation of this Danish preacher the words of Luther could as well have been written in the year of 2016 “where the events of 2015 have caught us unguarded.” The preacher asserts that the surprising societal development has several causes, but that part of the explanation is that it is so difficult for us to acknowledge that evil really exists. As an example, the preacher criticizes the Danish Prime minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who quoted the father of the Jewish man who was shot while guarding the synagogue in Copenhagen in February 2015 by the same person who, on the same night, shot a film instructor participating in a debate arrangement on freedom of speech. The Prime minister quoted the father of the young Jewish man saying: “Evil can only be conquered through goodness between people.”

The preacher acknowledges the good intentions behind this statement but rejects it as a fundamental misunderstanding. She claims that if human beings only encountered evil with goodness, evil would conquer time and again. The root of the problem lies in the belief that human beings possess the power and ability to do well towards each other and thereby fight evil. However,

⁴⁶ The critique of works righteousness or using the refugee situation as an opportunity to “flash one’s own goodness” runs as a common thread through several of the sermons and public debates in the year of 2015. We have chosen not to go into this discussion in the present essay although the theme is worth discussing further.

⁴⁷ Sermon held on Epiphany Sunday, January 3, 2016 on John 8:12–20.

this is dismissed as an unchristian thought that neglects the fact that the presence of evil in the world supersedes human powers. The preacher emphasizes that it is important to realize that the presence of evil rests in all of us but that the idea that human beings can exterminate evil powers is prevalent particularly among those who see themselves as very civilized. The preacher claims that in our context, there is a great groping and embarrassment towards the religious which is part of the problem of our lacking sense of the existence of evil – regardless of how civilized we become.

The preacher articulates something similar to the ethics of responsibility's critique of the ethics of ultimate ends by asking: "But isn't it Christian to believe that goodness will conquer in the end? And shouldn't we let compliance step forth? She answers the rhetorical question as follows:

"No, not unconditionally, because we must remember that although we should never hate anyone, it isn't us who can conquer evil through goodness – only Christ can. We are not the triumphant ones, he is, and the well-intended words that the prime minister quoted illustrate how we continue to put ourselves in the place of Jesus. Thereby we demonstrate our impotence because we have lost sense of our own limitations as well as the insight that there is a fundamental battle that must be fought. Evil cannot be rendered harmless through more love but must be fought through resistance.⁴⁸"

The preacher continues by claiming that if we are to infer anything positive from the year of 2015 it must be that perhaps these events can make us wake up and recognize the existence of evil in the world as described by the preacher: "With its conflicts, migration, and terror massacres perhaps the year that has passed can contribute to a new alertness toward the human life which can never just be seen as something that cannot waver.⁴⁹"

New Year critique of confusing peace and security

Most of the sermons in the Danish study articulate a fear of the stranger and an uncertain future as a characteristic of large parts of their congregation as well as the Danish society as a whole. Several preachers dismiss the worries in light of the biblical exhortations of "Fear not." However, others claim that the contemporary situation forces us to take the fear seriously and acknowledge that there are evil forces at work in the world. These voices emphasize that it is about time that people recognize this battle between good and evil and stop being naïve. The two perspectives tend to collide in the sense that they criticize each other's position indirectly in their sermons or explicitly in the public media. One of the preachers who tends to choose the via media between the "fear not" versus the "wake up" position is a preacher who

⁴⁸ Sermon held on Epiphany Sunday, January 3, 2016 on John 8:12–20.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

throughout his sermons recognizes the fear that people have, yet challenges and qualifies common understandings of fear and peace in a theologically thoughtful manner.

In his sermon on New Year's Day this preacher describes how the refugees tend to call forth not only sympathy and compassion but also anxiety and perplexity. He describes how fear has become a theme and it feels as if the world never has been as insecure and chaotic as right now. However, he also claims that this is where we are mistaken: "The world has never been secure and safe. There has always been war and chaos. There have always been severe, threatening forces around us and people have always felt as if their time was the worst and the most threatening."⁵⁰

The preacher refers to the words of the angelic hymn: "Peace on earth to people who enjoy his favor!"⁵¹ and continues, "Yes, so we think; let us hope for peace. Let us be in peace from all that threatens us in the world that we live in. Peace and safety. But the question is: What lies in the word "peace"?" As an answer, the preacher quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer's speech at an ecumenical conference on the Danish island, Fanø, in 1934, before the 2nd World War broke out⁵² in which Bonhoeffer warned against our tendency to mistake peace for security:

"Peace cannot be created through security. Peace must be awoken. Peace springs forth from courage – courage to live together with others here in this world. Courage to live strongly and with hope, in spite of war and violence and insecurity. The courage not to run for cover. Yes, security is the opposite of peace - for the more we secure ourselves, the more we try to make our own little world safe, the more we cultivate distrust and the hatred towards what is foreign."⁵³

During his paraphrase of the Bonhoeffer speech the preacher acknowledges that we do have to fight evil and that Bonhoeffer himself took part in the unsuccessful assassination attempt on Hitler in 1943. In spite of this acknowledgement the preacher continues his paraphrase of Bonhoeffer when he claims that:

"Peace is not won through weapons. Peace is won through faith and strength, through courage and spiritual edification. Peace is a commitment. Peace is to put our lives in the hands of God, in faith and obedience. We tend to associate peace with silence, passivity, a kind of happiness or wellness. We think that it is our right to be left at peace. But that is

⁵⁰ Sermon preached on New Year's day, 2016, on Matt 6:5–13.

⁵¹ Luke 2:14, International Standard Version.

⁵² The Danish preacher has paraphrased and altered Bonhoeffer's original German speech which can be read in its entirety at: <http://www.dietrich-bonhoeffer-verein.de/index.php?id=48>.

⁵³ Sermon preached on New Year's day, 2016 on Matt 6:5–13.

not the way it is if we go to the great Christian thinkers: Bonhoeffer, Luther or Grundtvig.”⁵⁴

Impact of the presence (or lack) of refugees in the congregation

When we compare the geographical location and demographic context of the analyzed Danish sermons, it turns out that the pastors who have large groups of refugees in their congregation do not mention the refugee situation particularly often. When they do, they tend to refer to the situation of the refugees rather briefly. In our interpretation this is not due to ignorance of the refugees and their situation. Quite contrarily, the presence of the refugees seems to be such an integrated part of the congregation's shared situation that they play an implicit part in the way the sermon is prepared and heard.⁵⁵ When the refugees and their situations are mentioned in the sermon it is often treated briefly, as an example drawn from the congregation's shared reservoir of experiences. One of these preachers only needs a few key words to make a connection between the events of Good Friday and the experiences of the refugees in the congregation when he talks about the “witnesses to pain and suffering, seeing the person, that one loves, get whipped.”⁵⁶

Another of the briefly mentioned references to the situation of refugees could be heard in a sermon held on Easter night where several refugees were baptized following the sermon. The sermon was on Matt 28:1–10. In order to describe Christ as conqueror of death, the preacher took his departure in a painting printed in the worship bulletin that portrays Christ in the realm of the dead. In continuation of an interpretation of the painting, the preacher refers to the situation of the refugees: “the many rows of empty, hollow faces. People left to themselves, self-sufficiently autonomous. This emptiness and darkness in the people's faces is not just about people who end up in concentration camps or have to drag away their years in asylum centers.”⁵⁷

These kinds of references to the refugees differ from the congregations who only have a few, if any, refugees in the congregation. When the refugee situation is mentioned in these congregations it is often in the form of an illustration that is brought into the congregation as a foreign element with several details⁵⁸ and time for a plot to unfold. The experiences of the ethnically Danish part

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ This interpretation is consolidated through a qualitative study of the Apostles' Church in Copenhagen in June 2014. cf. *Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, Preaching as Repetition – in Times of Transition*, in: *International Journal of Homiletics* volume 1 (2016), 50.

⁵⁶ Sermon held Good Friday, March 25th, 2016 on John 19:17–37.

⁵⁷ Sermon held Easter night, March 27, 2016 on Matt 28:1–10.

⁵⁸ These illustrations might also be compared with the anthropological notion of “thick description” as developed by *Clifford Geertz*, *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, in: *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*. New York 1973, 3–30. *David Buttrick's* distinction between examples and illustrations can be illuminating in order to understand the different approaches in our study: “Examples emerge from common
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of the congregation and those of the refugees, primarily of Middle East descent and Muslim background, tend to be very different, which supports the contemporary homiletical acknowledgement of the otherness at stake—not only between God and humans but also at an intersubjective level.⁵⁹

In addition to the different kinds of references to the refugee situation there tends to be a difference in the way the question of responsibility is discussed. In some of the congregations who have very few, if any, refugees in the pews the pastors appear to take the question of responsibility rather lightly, as described earlier in the sermon of Sept. 6th where the preacher said: "... today your trouble is my trouble, so welcome here, my Syrian brother and sister. You are safe here. Because we do not want the worries to overshadow our confidence, our humanity and hope for the future".

On the other hand the preachers in the congregation with large numbers of refugees express an acknowledgement of their limitations in carrying the burdens of those in need of help. In a sermon on the Magnificat, one of these pastors explains that Mary sings about the joy in suffering because it is about what God has done for us – rather than what we are able to do: "God will lift up the one who is lonely, the one who is kept down – because we just don't have the energy ..."⁶⁰ In our interpretation the preachers of the congregations who are composed of a significant number of refugees tend to balance somewhere between the earlier mentioned poles of "ultimate ends" and "ethics of responsibility" because they are forced to acknowledge the human limitation in spite of an ideologically well-intended ethics of all means.

6. Summarizing comparison

Despite the internal differences between the three Scandinavian countries there seems to be a consensus that the number of people seeking refuge in Europe must be acknowledged as a challenge to the traditional roles and responsibilities of churches and society.

The most striking difference between the two Norwegian cases is the salience of the refugee situations in sermons from the Case Cathedral and the silence of this theme in Case Border Area. Furthermore, the preachers in the former case seem to have a more explicitly political role than the preachers in the border area case, and their use of the lectionaries differ respectively. In both cases, though, sermons that do address the refugee situation are unanimously positive towards welcoming

congregational consciousness whereas illustrations are brought to a congregation from beyond the sphere of shared experience." *Buttrick*, (note 13), 128–135.

⁵⁹ See *John McClure*, *Otherwise Preaching. A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*, St. Louis 2001 and *Ronald J. Allen*, *Preaching and the Other. Studies of Postmodern Insights*, St. Louis 2009.

⁶⁰ Sermon held on Luke 1:46–55 on Annunciation Day, March 13th, 2016.

refugees, encouraging the listeners to be hospitable. As opposed to the Danish case, this attitude is not questioned in any of the sermons, and the biblical material is used to support such a position. Nevertheless, the 'crisis' is kept at arm's length, and the preachers call for a religious or Christian attitude rather than political action.

In the Swedish study one overall conclusion is that the sermons share a general and consistent openness towards the refugees coming to Sweden. The message is that the Swedes, as church and society, have to do something, even if we are not able to help everyone. The preachers' position in relation to the migrants or refugees is most often "to stand with" as a kind of identification with the refugees. The identification is expressed in statements such as: "As long as someone is in exile, we are all in exile" or "it could have been me" – as the title of the Swedish contribution summarizes it. This is closely linked to what we see as the overall purpose of these sermons, which is about "empowerment."

The common voice found in the Swedish and Norwegian studies stands in contrast with the findings of the Danish study, where the preachers express quite different interpretations of the situation: the question of fear as well as whether we ought to receive more refugees or not. One of the reasons why there appears to be greater diversity in the theological positions and interpretations of the contemporary societal situation could be that the Danish study includes a larger number of sermons than the other two studies – and that the strategy of sampling has included preachers whose sermons and theology has caused discussion in the public media. However, it is also likely that the reason has to do with different understandings of ecclesiology in the Scandinavian countries. Specific to the Danish context the sermons are characterized by theological differences in relation to the concern for the future as well as whether evil forces can be conquered by human goodness. According to our interpretation the congregations that are substantially influenced by the present situation, in the sense that they have a large group of refugees as part of their congregation, tend to transcend the dichotomy of the two kinds of ethics as they help the refugees and other marginalized people as much as possible yet are painfully aware that the final responsibility must be left to God.

In spite of the differences between the sermon material collected from the three countries as well as the preachers within each country, the sermons that we have studied appear to express a more welcoming attitude towards refugees than in the societies at large, especially when compared to the discussion in the public media during the same time period.

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Squib: Preaching Politics

David M. Stark

As an American homiletician living in Leipzig, Germany, I am often asked for my thoughts on American Christianity and the current presidential administration. I never know how to reply. What do you say about something so globally and personally affecting?

Do I tell them that I am still grappling with the role different forms of Christian proclamation played in the election? A reported 81% of evangelicals supported one candidate. A large proportion of white voters did the same. What does this mean for evangelicalism and for my own mainline denomination, which is 94% white? More pressing, what does this mean for black, latino/a, and LGBTQ communities? Or, for Muslims, the poor, immigrants, refugees, and women?

I learned of the presidential election results on November 9th, just as ceremonies were underway in Leipzig to remember the victims of Krystallnacht. It is a frightening connection that many others have made. With the political rhetoric in 1930's Germany and in the U.S. today, many American pastors and professors have called for a new Confessing Church movement, even crafting statements of confession (cf. <https://confessingfaculty.org>). I think about this kind of resistance every time the congregation prays the Lord's Prayer. "*Dein Reich komme.*"

But, then, I also wonder about how effective a new Confessing Church movement could be. At its strongest it seems to offer a type of prophetic, poetic preaching that counters the prosaic worldview of domination.¹ At its weakest, it may be overly subtle—too vague to foster resistance in its hearers.²

Some leaders in my denomination are currently calling for preaching that focuses on unity. While well-intentioned, such a call may risk encouraging an unreflective kind of preaching that

¹ Cf. *Walter Brueggeman*, *Finally Comes the Poet. Daring Speech for Proclamation*, Minneapolis 1989, 3.

² Cf. *William Skiles*, *Preaching to Nazi Germany*. UCSD Dissertation, 2016. "The data indicates that if one were to sit in a confessing church during the Nazi dictatorship, one would hear – but only rarely – a critical comment about the Nazi regime, its ideology, and policies. On that rare occasion, the parishioner would hear a sermon like any other – a testimony about God's work in the world in times past and present. But she would also hear a brief comment, perhaps only buried in the commentary about the biblical text, which undermines Nazi leaders, National Socialism, or its persecution of Christians. [...] No doubt it would take concentration, reflection, and will-power for this parishioner to actually be moved to some kind of action based on the pastor's criticism" (281).

undermines the invitation to repentance, normalizes oppressive action, and silences the vulnerable. I am reminded of what Albert Rabateau wrote in *Slave Religion* about the ways an overly-spiritualized faith has been used to assuage the guilt of policies that exploit (especially) black bodies.³ Could focusing on preaching unity be a new form of spiritualizing faith?

A few of my pastoral colleagues in the U.S., who are engaged in bold preaching and protest, have advised me to enjoy my respite from the American church and politics. I have considered it, but Dietrich Bonhoeffer⁴ and Martin Luther King, Jr.⁵ keep disturbing me.

And, my desk overlooks Nikolaikirche, the cradle of the Peaceful Revolution that energized resistance in 1980's East Germany. Every Monday the church was open for all people. A colleague here calls this Leipzig's original Moral Monday protest, the fruit of which is remembered each November 9th as the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Nikolaikirche reminds me of the foolishness of God. Who would use prayer as a form of resistance, preaching as a counter to police brutality, and candles as an agent of change? Surely only the God who chooses Israel, a people caught in the shadows of superpowers. Surely only God, the one who works deliverance as a disruption of Pharaoh's economy and a mockery of Rome's power. It is this God whose scriptures consistently refer to such politicized themes as refugees, immigrants, women, and care for the poor and sick.

Living in an international context, I still don't know exactly what to say to a new acquaintance who asks me about the presidential administration or even what I will preach next. But, it seems to me that the homiletical question can no longer be whether or not to offer a political word. Rather, the question is whose politic does our preaching explicitly and implicitly support?

³ Cf. *Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion. The "Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South"*, New York 2004, 109.

⁴ I think specifically of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words to Reinhold Niebuhr about why he had to return to his home country: "I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people ..." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 16: Conspiracy and Imprisonment 1940–1945, 1).

⁵ "I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says, 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action;' who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time; and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a 'more convenient season'" (*Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," August 16, 1963*).

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