

## From Dislocation to Relocation<sup>1</sup>

### Preaching in Times of Transition

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#### **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.*

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#### **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

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<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> As mentioned above,

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

<sup>3</sup> Richard A. Jensen, *Thinking in Story. Preaching in a Post-Literate Age*, Lima (OH) 1995, 14. Cf. Roger C. Shank, *Tell IJH* vol 1 no 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....”<sup>4</sup> Fred Craddock, talking about the power of words, states that much of life is mediated and even constituted verbally.<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup>

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.”<sup>7</sup>

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

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

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 14.

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

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>7</sup> *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.”<sup>8</sup>Analysing 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

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<sup>8</sup> *Kevin M. Bradt S.J., Story as a Way of Knowing, Kansas City 1997, viii.*

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 Narration<sup>9</sup>**

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.”<sup>10</sup>

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

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> *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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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,<sup>13</sup> 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,

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

<sup>12</sup> *Craddock* (note 5), part 2 p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *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.<sup>14</sup>Craddock 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."<sup>15</sup> 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.

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

<sup>15</sup> *Gerhard Ebeling*, *The Nature of Faith*, translated by R.O. Smith, Philadelphia 1961, 186. Cf. *Craddock* (note 5), 4.



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.<sup>16</sup> 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.

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<sup>16</sup> *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.”<sup>17</sup> This takes us to the eminent scholar and philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s threefold structure of narrative: prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration.<sup>18</sup> Mary Catherine Hilkert elaborates Ricoeur’s mimetic structure of narrative, prefiguration, configuration and refiguration, by applying it to the Emmaus Narrative.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

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.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., ix–x.

<sup>18</sup> *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.

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

<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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

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<sup>21</sup> 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 Hillkert, 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.”<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup> 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

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<sup>22</sup> *Hilkert* (note 19), 101.

<sup>23</sup> 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 Hilkert 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 [...]”<sup>24</sup> 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.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Hilkert (note 19), 97.

<sup>25</sup> Bradt (note 8), xii.