Academy of Homiletics Annual Meeting 2015

Homiletical Theology Project Papers

Do You See This Woman? A Little Exercise in Homiletical Theology

André Resner
Professor of Homiletics & Church Worship
Convener of the Department of Pastoral Theology and Director of the Chapel
Hood Theological Seminary
Salisbury, North Carolina
www.hoodseminary.edu

Introduction

A sermon is an imaginative interplay between numerous texts and contexts. The sermon generates in the preacher, certainly, but a mysterious confluence of things give rise to it: the Holy Spirit, the human spirit, a biblical text (or texts), a congregational context and need, a societal occurrence or event, or a special day on the liturgical or secular calendar. Sometimes it's just an idea, perhaps an inspiration. Mapping the movement is maddeningly difficult. Tracking the Spirit for the purpose of predicting for preachers how God's movement in the sermon process "works" is futile and probably idolatrous.

Yet for those who want to understand preaching, there is always an attempt to describe what is happening in sermon preparation and delivery, a description that hopefully leads to a prescription for how preachers might make the process more fruitful and consistent. One must do this probing work of description and prescription always in fear and trembling, for if God is truly involved in some way—and I for one believe that preaching's efficacy and usefulness depends upon this wager of God's true and gracious involvement—then our attempts to describe and prescribe must always be provisional and tentative.

I do not wish to discount the importance of the preacher's person in the process of sermon development. That is simply not what I am going to focus on here. For those who wish to pursue these matters further I recommend not only a disciplined spiritual life, as well as a thoroughgoing exegetical life, but the hiring of a therapist to get at and behind many factors from one's personal history that affect the way the preacher does and sees what she or he does and sees in texts and contexts.[1]

Here I wish to focus on one way in which text and context can influence one another as the preacher leans toward a sermon. The following little exercise begins with an engagement of a biblical text, but this text could have come into view for me because of my prior experience. To me it doesn't matter whether the chicken or the egg comes first, just as long as when they are both in the preacher's consciousness that they respect one another, and are treated by the preacher as mysterious sources of God's gracious revelation, each together disclosing a fresh word for a waiting congregation of hearers.

Setting the Scene in Luke 7:36-50: Distanciation[2]

"One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment."

[1] See in this regard the useful book by Merle Jordan, *Reclaiming Your Story* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

[2] See Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. J.B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

The Gospel according to Luke is often referred to as the gospel of the marginalized. That word, "marginalized," is a powerful metaphor. It refers to those who are on the outskirts of the main story line, those not usually part of the primary plot. But in Luke's alternative version of reality those in the margins are transported to a place in the text, eclipsing the big name movers and shakers who usually account for the story of humankind. In Luke 7, one such mover and shaker, a Pharisee named Simon, a man with education, accomplishment, and socio-cultural cache, is displaced in the story of God's alternate realm of reality by a nameless, "sinner woman."

Almost everything in this story that Luke tells is strange to our twentieth–first–century eyes and ears. Yet, Luke is setting a powerful contrast. We have an elite male: powerful, rich, a homeowner, with a circle of powerful, male guests, including the current cultural phenom, celebrity, curiosity, and crowd-sensation—the invited guest, Jesus. And then we have a woman from the city, whose only identifying characteristic is that she is a sinner. We are not told the sin, or sins, that led to this being the way she was known by others in this city. Many have surmised that she was a prostitute in the town. That is possible, perhaps even probable, and would, if true, accentuate the divide and double–standard that was in place in first–century Palestine. She was the "sinner" in this situation, after all, not her clients, certain men of the city, even though it definitely takes two to tango. It is a curious thing how Simon was so aware as to exactly who she was, and, "what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner."

We might think it bold and brazen of her, with her reputation, to show up at Simon the Pharisee's house in the midst of a crowded dinner party. What moxie! But in that day and time, it was almost inconceivable. What could possibly make a woman, who was viewed the way she was, put herself in a place of humiliation and perhaps even deadly harm by interrupting a Pharisee's dinner party, especially one where he was hosting a special guest such as Jesus. Her actions crossed serious social and religious boundaries and not only put Simon and his household to shame, but her actions also risked charges of defilement of the innocent and "clean" against her. This latter matter was no small thing in first century Jewish culture. As historian Marcus Borg has pointed out, just about every issue in that time and place boiled down to a purity issue.[3] Her presence at his party flew in the face of such grave concerns.

But Luke has already clued us into her mission. Somehow she knew that Jesus was going to be there that night, and she has come with an alabaster jar of ointment for him. "She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment." To us as privileged readers, we have what seems to be an unconscious, overwhelming display of emotion—gratitude, joy, and love mingled with tears over something that has transpired between her and Jesus. We will find out later in the story what that is: forgiveness, release, and acceptance of her as a person. It was an experience so overpowering that it had *dis*empowered any fear she had about being in the presence of the judgmental Pharisee, Simon, and his colleagues and their moral fastidiousness. Her freedom, and her desire to show Jesus her gratitude tangibly, overcame the social and religious implications of her invasion of Simon's home and dinner party. But Simon did not see it that way.

"Now when the Pharisee who had invited him *saw it*, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.'" Simon is appalled. Note Luke's careful phrasing: "Now when the Pharisee who

[3] Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*, rev. ed. (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 1998), 8.

had invited him saw it . . . " It is his title and position, his place of authority and his religious stature in the community that are first highlighted; Luke does not use his name. If anyone ought to know what is going on, if anyone should be able to discern and interpret rightly the situation, it is the professional interpreter and spokesperson for God and the tradition. Secondly, he is the one who had invited Jesus to his home, and now here is this intruder. Not only is the woman in the wrong for horning in on Simon's home and invitation–only dinner party, Jesus shows poor form in allowing her time, space, and audience on Simon's turf, table, and clock. Lastly, Luke zeros in on the objectified optics of the situation. These nearly silent actions of the woman had created quite a scene for everyone to see. "It" was Luke's way of summing up the entirety of the spectacle before them all.

Simon. Saw. It.

"It" was the scene in front of him, the display now on show for everyone. The weeping, the bathing of his feet with her tears, the letting down of her hair, and her wiping his feet to dry them with her hair. The kissing, the anointing. And, Jesus at the center of it all, for God's sake, permitting *it*.

Simon and his guests could not but be revolted, disgusted, and dismayed by *it*. Jesus may have been the unknown entity in the room, but she was the known. And now, what they knew about her revealed to them what they were to surmise about Jesus.

It would have been probably impossible for them to have seen anything other than something sensual, even erotic, going on in this intimate exchange between the woman and the now discredited prophet—a fact that makes what Jesus does next so remarkable. Simon saw *it*. And *it* not only horrified him, but became the hermeneutical key for Simon's delegitimizing the potential prophetic status of Jesus.

Jesus spoke up and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' 'Teacher,' he replied, 'speak.' 'A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon answered, 'I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.' And Jesus said to him, 'You have judged rightly.'

Simon must have felt like he was being set up by Jesus' simple riddle, a common mealtime activity. It seems so innocuous. And obvious. Simon answers Jesus' question as one who seems to know that this whole scenario Jesus has created is too easy, a ruse. "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." The Greek phrase for Jesus' response to Simon is perhaps best translated, "Bingo!" But then comes the not so obvious question: "Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman?'"

What kind of a question is that? To Simon it must have seemed like the dumbest question he had ever heard in his life. "Do I see this woman?! Are you kidding me? Do I see this *sinner* woman who has had the gall, the nerve, to barge into my house in the middle of my invitation–only dinner party with my colleagues from the synagogue and with my specially invited guest? What do you mean, 'Do I see her?' *I haven't been able to see anything else since she dared enter my home uninvited.* My eyes saw every step she took across my floor from the door to the table, every one of her unclean footmarks on my floor rendering everything in her path ritually unclean, every step—"Unclean!" "Unclean!" "Unclean!"—until she got to you and put on this embarrassing and sordid display at your feet with her crying, her putting her hair down, her kissing your feet, and her anointing them with the ointment…*Do I see this woman?* My God, I haven't been able to see anything but this woman ever since she invaded my private space and

imposed her presence, her filth, her sin, her shame on my home. How could you possibly ask me if I see this woman? Are you out of your mind?"

Just for a moment, shift your focus, and your position in the room. We've been looking from Simon the Pharisee's perch, down at this woman and Jesus' feet. But now I want you to come over to her, down on the floor, at the end of the table. I want you to see what she sees. Glance with her over to Simon. What does she see when she sees Simon's face looking down at her? She cannot look long at Simon. She flinches away from his harsh gaze the same way you flinch when someone suddenly throws a sharp, blunt object at you. You take cover, hoping the object will miss, or at least not leave too deep a mark or permanent scar.

Simon's penetrating gaze is like a pressure, pushing her down, down into a sinkhole where she has been for years, so long that it is a socially constructed reality that defines who she is: "loser . . . scum of the earth . . . sinner . . . whore . . . " She is rejected and judged aberrant and immoral by these ruling, elite men, who also, conveniently, speak for God.

They do not mind using her when they want to. But somehow they never sink. They throw their bodies at her, and their dirty coins. Then they leave, only to return when they need to impose on her their rage and lust. They can come to her whenever they choose, but she must not come to them, at their homes. They leave her to her place, down there, beneath human dignity, little more than a waste can for their excess. Simon's gaze holds her down, keeps her down, forces her lower, never to rise. It reminds her how things are in this world. Some are righteous, some are sinners. Some are blessed, some are cursed. God knows who is who, and Simon and his colleagues inform the people of God's thoughts on the matter. Simon's gaze leaves its impression in no uncertain terms: "Remember who you are, sinner woman. Look away, stay away, for you there is no hope."

But now, look with her, with the woman there with Jesus, as she flinches away from Simon's condemning glare, and turns toward Jesus' face. I imagine that he had turned his face away from Simon and toward her when he asked Simon the question, "Do you see this woman?" Now she looks full into his face, into his eyes. What does she see? Light, joy, freedom, forgiveness, hope. He is a man, but no man has ever looked at her this way. No man has ever seen her for her own sake instead of what she could be for him. In her life a man's gaze has only meant a pending business transaction, manipulation, exploitation, abuse, torment. But not this man. From the moment he first saw her, his gaze felt like a burden lifted, a hand reached out toward her to lift her out of the sinkhole of her life to a newness of being she did not know was even possible. A cool breeze in a scorched life. A drink of fresh water for a parched soul. His countenance was for her a lifeline out of a hell she had always known.

At first I'm sure she feared believing this man's face, mistrusted her own judgment that he might be different—he was still a man after all, but his face didn't change. It never mutated into a sales pitch. His expression never shifted, never angled to take advantage of her and her trust. She let herself believe him. And in that release of all the cautions and skepticisms she had layered over her heart, she experienced freedom, lightness, and life. That was why she was here at Simon's, risking what appeared to be everything in front of Simon and his guests, but really, since experiencing what she had in Jesus' presence, felt no risk, she feared nothing.

Perfect love had cast out fear, and she was freed, and thus now empowered to love.

There was nothing a man like Simon could do to her now that she had seen the face of non-manipulative, freeing, love. How does one get to such a place? How does one get to the place of freedom where this woman now found herself, and no longer be stuck, as we now see poor Simon to be, in his judgmental, countenance-destroying gaze? We have to go back to Jesus'

little parabolic riddle to Simon. Which of the debtors, the fifty denarii debtor or the five hundred denarii debtor, will love the man who forgave both debts more?

An unexpected $5,000 repair bill to our house, car, or, you name it, would impose a serious crimp in most of our budgets for perhaps even a few years. But a sudden and unanticipated $50,000 bill would cripple most of our lives permanently. To have someone come along and wave a magic wand so that both bills disappeared would create a definite party for the first person, but something of a life-altering celebration and awe for the second.

Jesus says to Simon, "That's the difference between you and her. For you, Simon, there is not much change when you meet God in worship. Everything is pretty much the same. You go through the motions, even offer the right sacrifice for your sins, and *voila*, all is taken care of, then back to life as usual. For her, everything has changed. An insurmountable mountain has been removed. And, interestingly, you were a big part of that mountain."

"I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.' "Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"

Simon saw *it*. Jesus saw *her*. The first leads to death. The second to life.

The power of Simon's judgmental gaze kept her down, stuck, and bound. The power of Jesus' gaze conveyed forgiveness, freedom, and a reciprocal love.

Distanciation Turns to Nearness and Mission

A challenge in our world is to continue Jesus' freeing presence through our fallible lives. All of us suffer from self-interest. None of us, after all, is Jesus, with 100% pure motives. Yet ministry in the name of Jesus compels us to see in and through these stories in the gospels our world and the way that the gospel might similarly change our world, and the lives we encounter in our world, into one where heaven's agenda meets and eclipses, or perhaps better, transforms the earth's agendas.

The preacher engages a biblical text to discern and feel the gospel pulse of a story. Usually that happens, as it did in this preacher's engagement with the story in Luke 7, with an examination of the characters and their interaction with one another. To find the gospel pulse one typically starts with the God–figure in the story, in this case Jesus, and then observes what that character does and says, watching closely for the effects that those words and actions have on the other characters. As the God–figure here, the preacher privileges Jesus' actions and words as gospel actions and words, unless they can be proven to be in conflict with what God's predominant actions and words are elsewhere throughout the biblical witness.[4] In this case, the preacher focuses on the difference between what Jesus sees when he looks at the woman and what Simon sees.

[4] In the New Testament, Mark 7:24-30 is a notable text in this regard. Jesus there refers to the Gentile woman begging for Jesus to exorcise a demon from her daughter as a dog and thus unfit for kingdom's benefits. Jesus' words are disturbingly racist, and thus raise serious questions about the anti-gospel words and actions of the God figure, Jesus, in this text.

The preacher here also engages in some between–the–lines "sanctified imaginings" of what it would feel like to be under the contrasting gazes of Jesus and Simon. One could say that Luke does not develop this theme overtly, and thus question whether the preacher should develop this theme in a sermon. This raises one of the most interesting questions for homiletical theology as it thinks about the preacher's use of biblical texts for preaching. If one's conventional exegesis leads the interpreter to conclude, in this case, that Luke did not develop the theme of what the woman felt under the gaze of the two men in the story, on what grounds would the preacher make much of it in the sermon? Might we not be imposing a psychological interpretation on the text that the text itself does not generate?

This is where the audience for the sermon comes in. The preacher stands between the text (and the gospel claims that the text exerts) and the potential listeners to the sermon. Thus, the sermon and preacher serve a mediating position. I would argue that if the preacher senses a need in the hearers to hear a word that the text whispers (rather than shouts), then the preacher is justified in teasing out implications of the text that the text's author or editor may not be seen to fully develop.

That requires the preacher to think in a series, first about the text's varying emphases, then about the implications of those emphases on the hearers. But the hearers in this case will also be invited to imagine themselves from each character's vantage point, and, assess the impact of the gospel for them in each case.

Homiletical Theology is, thus, partly a hermeneutical activity. Two metaphors help us see how that is the case. First, the text is seen as a mirror. And second, the text is seen as a window.

Text as Mirror

When the text is held up as a mirror, the preacher invites people to see themselves in the various characters, their actions, their words, and their reactions. In the story at hand, the hearers would be invited to examine their "inner Pharisee," that very serious religious side of themselves where they have taken great pains to be right and keep right with God. They have been faithful attendees at religious services and generous contributors to charity events. They have gone the second mile and attended Sunday school, maybe even taught classes, and contributed money to, and gone on, mission trips. They have served as deacons, elders, council, and vestry members. They have not only pledged, but gone above and beyond.

In all this good, meaningful religious activity, they could not help but notice others not as committed, not as faithful, not as fervent as they have been. The fervently faithful are not overt in their judgment of the others not as fervent as themselves, but thoughts cross their minds about those who appear to take their faith seriously and those who seem to be just along for the ride, not to mention those who never even darken a church door, or, worse, those actively engaged in clearly sinful behavior. When the text serves as a mirror for hearers to examine their inner Pharisee they can see the oft–times ironic downside to religious devotion: entitlement, judgment, and a dramatic loss of the capacity to empathize and love.

For others in the audience the text serves as a mirror refracting off of the woman: they have been victims of unrelenting religious judgment. They know what it is like to have their lives defined socially and religiously by either mistakes they have made that will never be undone in the minds of those around them, or, crimes committed against them. They may be victims of other people's abuse of power or a skewed social system in which some have de facto power, status, and interpretive control and others because of gender, ethnicity, or some other status marker, are forever doomed to some stigma that keeps them in a societal sinkhole of shame.

These may be, like the woman in the story before her encounter with Jesus, still stuck in that socio–cultural and socio–religious hole. But others may have experienced a moment of grace like the woman in the story, and, in an encounter with God, become undeserving recipients of grace, forgiveness, and welcome. By God's grace they have become as full and complete human beings deserving of dignity and humane treatment in spite of where they have been, what they have done, and what has been done to them by society, culture, and even church.

As recipients of this grace, forgiveness and dignification, something is prompted in the woman/hearer, Luke's Jesus calls it "love." It is the kind of love that gives back to the Giver, extravagantly, without self-consciousness, sometimes even in socially reckless abandon. She is like David dancing naked before the Ark of the Covenant as it is ushered into the Temple. Simon is like David's wife, Michael, disgusted by the display and hyper–aware of the social humility such a display can attract. But only someone who feels what David and the woman felt in the gracing presence of God knows that calculated, politically correct responses are impossible in such moments.

Qoheleth wrote in Ecclesiastes 3 that there is a season for every matter under heaven, and the experience of this woman at hand in Luke 7 is that of dancing, weeping for joy, and rejoicing. If Simon only sees disgust, ignorance, sin, and thus sits in judgment on her and Jesus, then he has missed the season that bloomed before him. In the midst of this conflict of worlds—that of Simon's and the woman's—Jesus' riddle attempts to unveil for Simon why he "sees" this situation wrongly.

So in this case, the text does have at its heart a conflict of optics: what Simon sees vs. what Jesus sees when they look at the woman. If the sermon is going to challenge the people who hear it to do a personal evaluation of themselves, a looking in the mirror to examine their own inner Pharisee, if you will, then the preacher will imaginatively lift up the characters as mirrors to the hearers, inviting identification and critically reflective introspection.

Text as Window

Shifting metaphors, in a different hermeneutical move the preacher may also explore the opacity of the text, lifting it up as a window through which one may see our world. In this move, the text as window helps us see ways in which characters and situations may be interpreted by means of analogy.

In this text we have the Pharisee who is the image of a judgmental religious orientation that ironically functions to keep those who need God, love, freedom, and forgiveness most, stuck in their places of victimization. We have the sinner woman, the image of a victim of a society, a culture, and a religious system that has a double standard firmly in place. We also have the God figure in the person of Jesus who breaks convention, crosses boundaries, breaks religious rules, all for the purpose of reaching and freeing the most vulnerable in the situation, in this case the woman. Jesus also exposes Simon the Pharisee for his hypocrisy, his arrogance, and his toxic religious system and practices. This is the work of justice—the exposure of exploitative acts and systems that hurt and discriminate against the innocent, and that keep them stuck in the sinkhole of despair and shame, while those who operate the system reap the benefits of a society that rewards them and honors them as righteous, good, and Godly.

The preacher now looks through these portraits or windows from the text at his or her world to find analogies. The operative question becomes, who are these characters in my world? Have I ever seen in my own experience, in cinema, literature, or elsewhere, any similar characters and situations so that my hearers can more fully identify and "get it," because the

situations and claims in the text and the text's characters are visible and active in their world? This look at the world through the windows of the text for the purpose of preaching the gospel means that we are not just looking at the world blindly. The text has ground lenses for our perception of our world and its characters and their actions and words.

We are, thus, looking very specifically for distinct analogies, and we are interpreting what we see in our world in terms that the text helps us see and interpret. The text colors our viewing of our world and in that sense the text is not just any window, but a stained glass window of sorts. Just as the church through the ages has annealed glass with colors to tell the story of the gospel, when the biblical text becomes the window that the preacher holds up to the contemporary world to understand it, to interpret it in terms of the text and the gospel reflected in the text, the text, and ultimately the gospel to which it bears witness, become the hermeneutical presupposition for our perception of the world.

Connecting with a Facet of the Gospel in Life—Association

A conversation with Don Mowatt at Laity Lodge, a retreat center in southwest Texas, prompted him to invite me to Washington state to encounter a very different kind of world. When I went to visit Don's friend, Bob Ekblad, in Seattle, I didn't know what to expect. Bob and Gracie had started Tierra Nueva Del Norte five years earlier. Tierra Nueva (New Earth) is a ministry that seeks to share the good news of God's freedom in Jesus Christ especially with people on the margins of our affluent, North American, society and culture—immigrants, prison inmates, ex–offenders, and the homeless. Through Bob's theological training in Montpellier, France and experience in working side–by–side with impoverished field workers in Honduras, he became passionately dedicated to proclaiming through word and deed the good news of God's reign "on earth as it is in heaven" with especially the oppressed in his region, for everyone's mutual liberation, healing, empowerment, and total salvation.[5]

We started at Bob's office, a simple, storefront space that served as many functions as presented themselves on an almost daily basis. The first day I sat with Bob and four Honduran friends who had come north for the berry season. Bob had known them for almost twenty years, since the early eighties, when Bob worked beside them in the fields in Honduras. They were poor farmers, then and now, but each was now an evangelist, too, with a deep faith and powerful connection with God, the gospel, and the scriptures. We sat on couches and, with Bob translating, one–by–one they told me the story of their lives. The fabric of their very selves, relationships, work, and faith unfolded before me and I began to experience a profound humbling, though I had no words for what I was feeling.

From there Bob and I went to the jail for the Spanish Bible study. We sat in a room with nine inmates dressed in bright orange jumpsuits with "SGAKIT COUNTY JAIL" stenciled on their backs. Bob began the time by asking how things were going with the men. Feeling an obvious sense of ease with Bob, something nurtured through many such visits, they poured out their concerns and issues. Bob listened intently to each, then led a prayer and laid his hands on each man, praying specifically about the concerns that each man had voiced. After the prayer, Bob sat back in his chair and opened his Bible to a text from Exodus. Before he could begin however, one of the men, José, who had been studying the Bible with Bob for several weeks now, had a question about the Samson story. The hour–long study now shifted its focus to Samson, his birth, God's unlikely choice of Samson's mother, and God's setting apart of the boy

[5] See their website for more information, http://www.tierra-nueva.org/core-values/, accessed December 10, 2014.

for God's work even before he was born for purposes that God had in mind. Prodding them through back and forth dialogue, Bob helped them to see how each of them could be just as unlikely a choice for God to call and use for God's purposes. The time ended with each man embracing Bob and me, then all Bibles were collected and stacked at the back of the room. The chairs were put back in order for the next meeting in the room.

For four days Bob and I went from one such meeting to another. Another day in Bob's office, settled back in the rough tweed couch, a woman named Rocio told me what it was like to have committed the worst sin of her life without even knowing she had done so, namely, by being born with brown skin, brown eyes, black hair, in an impoverished, Spanish–speaking–only home in America. She told us what it feels like to be in the grocery store or a department store and being watched closely by security guards and store clerks who assume she will steal if they look away. The aisles of the market seemed to close in on her as she pushed her cart around and between other mothers who pulled their children closer and patted their purses just to make sure that neither was vulnerable to Rocio's possible reach. She described the judgmental faces of other shoppers as they looked into her cart and sized up the kinds of food that she was intending to buy. She could not get used to being pulled over by the police simply because she was a Hispanic woman driving a car, having her license and registration meticulously studied, even though she had done nothing wrong. She had only been who she was, trying to survive another day in a place and among people who kept making it abundantly clear that they wished she was not there.

Bob asked her what her image of God was. She told of the God who had been brokered to her by the dominant culture around her, a God who looked like a larger than life elderly white man with a snowy white, flowing beard, stern expression, and a stick in his hand to strike at the slightest of wrongdoing. She had grown up believing that anything bad that happened to her was God's will, and anything good that happened was dumb luck. God was on the side of the cultural powers—the police, the courts, and judges in black robes, and was himself a kind of divine lawgiver and law enforcer. Church was a place for people who had figured out how to be good all the time and never did anything or thought anything wrong. It was also officiated by authority figures whose robes looked alarmingly similar to the stern judges in the courts where nothing ever good would happen for her or her friends and family.

Something had happened to her, however, that had begun to alter all of her preconceived ideas about God and church. Though she worked in a fish–packing plant from 4 p.m. to 4 a.m., six days a week, she somehow had met Bob and Gracie and began meeting with them and studying the Bible with them. Hearing some of the issues she was having, Bob had stepped into her legal life as an advocate. Over the years Bob has put together a team of helping associates: medical doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, police officers, firefighters, and others who believe in Bob, the work of Tierra Nueva, and ultimately that the promises of God in the gospel can come to pass in this age, even if only in some temporary and partial ways, here and now in the lives of the oppressed. When Bob and Gracie start walking alongside someone, each person experiences the grace of the "kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven." Rocio testified as to how her life had changed because of what she experienced in relationship with Bob, Gracie, and the others who were part of the Tierra Nueva ministry. Her view of God, of white people, of grace, mercy, justice, and the possibilities for Christian community beyond traditional church had been transformed. She was a different person as a result of these relationships. Integral to her new perspective was the Bible study that Bob led them all in, one always tilted in the direction of a liberating, freeing gospel.

Reynalda, with her eight-year-old daughter sitting silently close by, told of how everyone in the town was more strict on the Hispanic population: the police, the doctors, the businesses. She felt non-valued as a human being. She said, "You could even have the winning lottery ticket, but they wouldn't let you collect. They would figure out a way to keep you from the money."

Jorge was a migrant farm worker in the Seattle area for the berry–picking season. Bob had known him in Honduras and Jorge was supposed to have returned home the night I arrived but Bob had arranged for Jorge to be examined by a local doctor. Predictably, Jorge had a severe hernia and needed surgery urgently. The doctor was going to require Jorge to stay for three weeks of recovery after the surgery, which he was performing *gratis*. Jorge told me of the many fellow field workers in Honduras who had hernias. He said that they would take pieces of wood and put them on top of the hernia then wrap a belt around the wood, pressing the hernia in so it wouldn't protrude, just so they could keep working in the fields. Sometimes it worked. Other times their hernias burst and they died in the fields.

Each told what it was like to live on the marginal outskirts of society in northwest Washington state. They felt God-forsaken, like beggars with no rights. Everyday was a fight to climb out of their plight. They felt isolated, ghettoized, and a nuisance, that is unless they are needed to do something that the dominant culture would rather not do, like pick berries and vegetables in a hot field with backs bent, working for wages that sometimes were withheld at the end of the day by a capricious boss who knew that his conscripted laborers had little recourse to justice. In the four days I was there we went to more than one meeting with field bosses where Bob demanded cash in hand for some short-schrifted field workers that he had come to know at Tierra Nueva.

Looking at my experiences in Seattle at Tierra Nueva, the jail, the fields, the churches, and the courthouses through the stained glass window of Luke 7:36-52, I cannot help but see the characters in Washington take alignment with the characters in Luke's narrative. José, Rocio, Reynalda, Jorge, the Hondurans, the other men in the prison, all refract the profile of the "sinner woman." They are objectified, victimized, judged harshly, and they feel the gaze of the dominant culture on them constantly, wishing they were not there, suspecting the worse in them. Nobody's place can change in such a caste system. All are stuck, to the benefit of the powerful and to the demise of the vulnerable.

Lurking around them in the socio-cultural environment are the churches, the legal system, the penal system, the medical establishments. Most of the people in these realms fit the profile of Simon the Pharisee. Accomplished, in power, self assured, and often arrogant and judging. These usually keep their distance from the "aliens," though they do not consciously calculate this fissure in the social fabric when they prepare and partake in their fruit salads.

There are, however, exceptions. Just as in the gospel accounts, here and there, a Pharisee (like Joseph of Aramathea and the Pharisee that Jesus praises as being not far from the Kingdom of God) shows himself to be genuine and compassionate, a person of God open and willing to connect with a fellow human being in need. Bob and Gracie have been able to enlist such people to help in their ministry. They become the advocates in the courts and before the field bosses for those without voice. They become the surgeons wielding their healing arts for the injured and ill who have no insurance or money.

Bob and Gracie and the Tierra Nueva ministry align in the Lukan stained glass window with the person of Jesus and the freeing, life-altering way that he is with people, especially the most vulnerable. But they also embody his prophetic presence in the churches, in the courts, at the prison, and in the everyday commerce in the fields. They call people out and through their

parabolically lived existence. They embody a revelatory, apocalyptic exposure of inequity, racism, and any of a number of other God–denying, hypocritical, blasphemous, and self–serving and God–forsaking social actions by often and otherwise church attending, tax–paying, America–loving citizens.

Concluding Reflection

The text serves as a mirror for hearers to see themselves in the story, even taking turns looking at each character and seeing likenesses and differences. The text serves as a window through which we could see in our world analogous characters, actions, and words. When the preacher uses a scenario like that of the ministry of Tierra Nueva in order to show what the theological and missional implications of the text look like in our contemporary world, the concretization becomes a mirror and window too.

The characters in the Tierra Neuva story help hearers identify themselves, and thus evaluate the narrative's and the gospel's implication for their own lives. But the contemporary story also becomes a window through which we approach the Lukan text. The "sinner woman" in Luke 7 does not evidence all the characteristics of the people to whom Bob and Gracie minister in Skagit County. Yet her character is malleable enough to contain the variety of characters, all under the rubric of the poor and marginalized. So too with the figures in power in both the biblical text and Washington context. There are no Pharisees in Bob's world, but that image and character construct is flexible enough to adapt to the many powerful people in his sphere. And some of them even turn out to be good Pharisees, seeking God's justice, grace, and shalom.

This little exercise shows one way of holding text and context in tension with one another while allowing each to mutually illuminate the other. As such, my hope is that the preacher's task as a steward of God's mysteries is made a little more clear, a little more complex, or a little more arduous, depending on the needs and orientation of the preacher who reads this.

The Gospel of Prosperity: Jesus, Capitalism and Hope

Debra J. Mumford
Frank H. Caldwell Professor of Homiletics
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky
lpts.edu

The social context that most influenced the birth of what has become known as prosperity gospel is the capitalistic context of the United States of America. Prosperity gospel is a theology in which believers in Christ are taught that God wants them to be rich and enjoy good physical health. Prosperity gospel did not emerge ex nihilo with the preaching of Kenneth E. Hagin in 1962. Long before Hagin began preaching his message of financial prosperity, preachers of many different Protestant sects, as well as movements outside of Protestantism, integrated their faith with capitalism; thereby, laying the groundwork for the emergence of prosperity gospel.

In *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber contends that the groundwork for the marriage of capitalism and Protestantism was first laid in Europe during the Reformation. Many sects such as the Puritans, Calivinists, Pietists, and Quakers brought their commitment to asceticism with them to the New World. A commitment to asceticism necessarily meant keeping all of the bodily passions and desires in check. A person with an idle body and mind was more likely to fall into sin.[1] In order to avoid falling into sin, everyone was required to work in the particular labor to which he or she was divinely called.[2] Puritans, for example, believed that God provided each person with a calling in which they were required to labor even if they were already wealthy.[3] The work into which one was called had to be done to the glory of God. As a result:

> The power of religious asceticism provided [employers] …with sober, conscientious, and unusually industrious workmen, who clung to their work as to a life purpose willed by God.[4]

For Weber, the Protestant ethic also offered an explanation for the unequal distribution of wealth. Some had more worldly goods than others because of "special dispensation of Divine

---

[1] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958). This work was first published as a two part article in 1904.

[2] Ibid., 40-41. Weber credits Martin Luther with developing concepts of *calling* and *asceticism* which were very different than the traditional monastic view. Weber believed that Luther grew to believe that monastic life was an abdication of worldly responsibility. However, one of Weber's most prominent critics, H.R. Robertson, demonstrated that the concepts of calling and worldly asceticism that Weber attributes to Luther's actually existed long before Luther's time. For example, Franciscan Friars were sent out into the world to spread the gospel beginning in the 12th century. Robertson also contended that the Calvinist positions were misrepresented in Weber analysis. Not all Protestants, in particular the Calvinists, valued the worldly work of the laity as highly as they did the work of ordained ministers. See Hector Robertson Mentieth, *Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism: A Criticism of Max Weber and His School* (New York: Kelley and Millman, Inc., 1959), accessed August 6, 2015; Available from https://archive.org/details/aspectsofriseofe00robe.

[3] Ibid., 106.

[4] Ibid., 120.

Providence."[5] Only God understood why some were allowed to have more than others. As it relates to the potential pitfalls of wealth, acquiring wealth just for the sake of acquiring wealth was frowned upon. However, acquiring wealth while fulfilling one's calling was acceptable as long as it did not lead to unrighteous behavior.[6]

The marriage between Protestantism and capitalism was colonially consummated within the institution of chattel slavery. Perhaps it was the belief that God provides every person with a specific calling and in the special dispensation of Divine Providence that enabled Protestants seeking religious liberty to enslave other human beings. Protestants of various stripes made their way to North American from England fleeing religious and political persecution in pursuit of liberty.[7]

Africans first arrived in Jamestown, Virginia as indentured servants in 1619.[8] In 1643, Puritans in the Plymouth colony joined with Puritans in the Massachusetts, New Haven, and Connecticut colonies to form the New England Confederation. Though the primary purpose of the Confederation was to protect themselves from their common enemies, they also made laws legalizing slavery and managing fugitive slaves.[9] Quakers like William Penn, established colonies by insuring all "freemen" who lived in their Provinces and territories and who believed in Jesus Christ, would be free from political and religious persecution.[10] While Penn and other Christians were committed to religious and political freedom, they had no issue with slavery.[11]

After arriving in the New World, the colonists used slave labor on farms to yield a variety of food crops, tend livestock and in urban settings as tradesmen, coachmen, gardeners, and extra help in kitchens, stables, and laundries.[12]

---

[5] Ibid. Weber attributes this particular perspective to John Calvin. However, he provides no citations as evidence of his contentions. Critics like David Little posit the Weber's contention that Calvinist doctrine such as Divine Providence was the basis for a new social order ignored the development of Puritanism that took place between Calvin (1509-1564) and Puritan Richard Baxter (1615-1691) whom he cited so liberally. See David Little, *Religion, Order, and Law: A Study in Pre-Revolutionary England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

[6] Ibid., 109 -114.

[7] Quakers, for example, whose beliefs differed greatly from the doctrines of the Anglican Church, were being persecuted because they denied the existence of the trinity, refused to swear oaths and espoused a doctrine of inner light.[7] They also believed the individual's moral conscience was the moral authority for the individual rather than the bible.[7] These and other beliefs and practices made them the target of political and religious persecution. See William Penn, *The Political Writings of William Penn* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund Inc., 1670), accessed August 4, 2015; Available from http://oll.libertyfund.org/, 6.

[8] Thirteen/WNET, *Slavery and the Making of America* (New York, NY: A & E Television Networks, LLC., 2004), accessed August 4, 2015; Available from http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/timeline/1619.html.

[9] William Henry Elson, *Chapter Vi, Colonial New England Affairs* (New York, NY: MacMillian Company, 1904), accessed August 4, 2015; Available from http://www.usahistory.info/NewEngland/index.html.

[10] William Penn. *Pennsylvania Charter of Privileges*, Constitution Society, 1701, accessed August 4, 2015; Available from http://www.constitution.org/bcp/penncharpriv.htm.

[11] The Quakers are known for being abolitionists. However, the Quakers participated in the slave trade for many years. In 1758, they prohibited their members from buying and selling slaves. They were unable at that meeting to get a consensus to mandate slave owners to free slaves they owned at the time. In 1776, they officially prohibited their members from owning slaves altogether. See Angell, Stephen. *Quakers: From Slave Traders to Early Abolitionists* (Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Service, 2003), accessed August 4, 2015; Available from http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/journey_1/p_7.html.

[12] *Introduction to Colonial African American Life: Slavery Existed in Every Colony* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2015), accessed August 11 2015; Available from http://www.history.org/Almanack/people/african/aaintro.cfm. Slavery existed throughout the colonies including the northern colonies of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut. The Boston Globe reported how Puritan governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop, helped to write the first law in North America

However, many Protestant newcomers to the colonies not only embraced slavery personally by becoming slave owners, they used the bible to justify the institution of slavery and developed their own *slave prosperity gospel* for the benefit of all of those who would profit financially from slave labor. The *slave prosperity gospel* had two main goals: convincing slave owners that Christianized slaves made better slaves (than those left unconverted), and indoctrinating African slaves with select biblical passages to shape them spiritually and emotionally into profitable commodities.

In an essay entitled: "The Negro Christianized: An Essay to Excite and Assist that Good Work, The Instruction of Negro-Servants in Christianity" Puritan minister and Harvard graduate Cotton Mather responded to reservations of slave owners about converting their slaves.[13] He reminded them of the biblical mandate to share the gospel with their slaves and to attend to their spiritual well-being. Though Mather did not refer directly to calling, he argued that Negroes had a "low" place and function in the world that could not be changed. What could be changed was their destiny in the world to come.

> The State of your *Negroes* in this World, must be low, and mean, and abject; a State of Servitude. No *Great Things* in this World, can be done for them. Something then, let there be done, towards their welfare in the *World to Come.*[14]

Mather also addressed the concern of some slave owners that slaves would have to be set free after Baptism. Mather assured them that baptism was not a license for manumission. Indeed, quite the opposite. Christianizing of slaves had benefits: better and more financially profitable slaves. Mather used the words of the Apostle Paul in Philemon to justify his contention that Christianized slaves can be profitable:

> Your *Servants* will be the *Better Servants,* for being made *Christian Servants.* To *Christianize* them aright, will be to *fill them with all Goodness. Christianity* is nothing but a very Mass of Universal *Goodness*. Were your *Servants* well tinged with the Spirit of *Christianity,* it would render them exceeding *Dutiful* unto their *Masters,* exceeding *Patient* under their *Masters,* exceeding faithful in their

---

sanctioning slavery in 1641. See C. S. Manegold, *New England's Scarlet "S" For Slavery* (Boston, MA: The Boston Globe, 2010), accessed August 11 2015; Available from http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2010/01/18/new_englands_scarlet_s_for_slavery/.

[13] Reiner Smolinski, *Biography: Cotton Mather* (Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University, 2011), accessed August 9, 2015; Available from http://matherproject.org/node/22. Cotton Mather was a Puritan pastor, philosopher and scientist who wrote over 450 books and pamphlets during his lifetime. His unusual name was a combination of his maternal grandfather's name (John Cotton) and his family name (Mather). He was the pastor of Boston's Second Church (Congregational). Among his many publications include one of the most comprehensive medical handbooks in colonial American, *The Angel of Bethesda.* He also published more than fifty works related to eschatology. Mather's many scientific and theological achievements have been eclipsed by his role in the Salem witch trials in which he had people investigated for witchcraft.

[14] Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized. An Essay to Excite and Assist That Good Work, the Instruction of Negro-Servants in Christianity (1706)* (Boston, MA: University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1706), accessed August 5, 2015; Available from http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/28/, 9. While Mather advised slave owners to treat their slaves well, he also believed that slaves could be made better slaves if they were indoctrinated with select biblical passages and teachings.

> Business, and afraid of speaking or doing anything that may justly displease you.[15]
>
> *Onesimus* was doubtless a *Slave*: but this poor *Slave*, on whose behalf a great Apostle of God was more than a little concerned; yea, one Book in our Bible was Written on his behalf! When he was *Christianized,* it was presently said unto his *Master,* Philem. 11. *In time past he was unprofitable to thee, but now he will be profitable.*[16]

It is in the section of the pamphlet leading up to the catechisms that we get a glimpse of Mather's Protestant theology, anthropology and ethic. Africans were slaves because God called them to be slaves. If they served Jesus Christ faithfully in their calling and lived Godly lives by not sinning against God, they would be rewarded with eternal happiness in heaven. It was only in heaven where they would enjoy rest from all of their labors and troubles.

> Tell them; *That if they Serve God patiently and cheerfully in the Condition which he orders for them, their condition will very quickly be infinitely mended, in Eternal Happiness.* Show them, that it is GOD who has caused them to be *Servants* ; and that they Serve JESUS CHRIST, while they are at Work for their *Masters*, if they are *Faithful* and *Honest Servants,* and if they do cheerfully what they do, because the Lord JESUS CHRIST has bid them to do it ; and that, if they give themselves up to JESUS CHRIST, and keep always afraid of Sinning against Him, it won't be *Long* before they shall be in a most *Glorious Condition* ; It can't be *Long* before they Dy, and *then* ! they shall *Rest* from all their Labours, and all their Troubles, and they shall be Companions of a*ngels* in the Glories of a *Paradise*.

Left out of the *slave prosperity gospel* are sections of the bible that would lead slaves to believe that they should be free such as the entire book of Exodus or Luke 4. Passages such as Ephesians 6:5 (slave obey your masters…) were highly recommended. The Ten Commandments were part of the catechism with slight modifications such as:

> Q. *What is the Tenth Commandment?*
> A. Thou shalt not Covet.
> Q. *What is the meaning of it?*
> *A.* I must be Patient and Content with such a Condition as God has ordered for me.

In this *slave prosperity gospel*, faithfulness to God was conflated with service to the slave master so that slaves could only please God when they pleased the slave master. They could only be rewarded by God when they met the many standards of the slave master. Slaves who pleased their slave masters were financially profitable to the slave masters as well. Therefore, the greatest financial beneficiaries of the *slave prosperity gospel* were the slave masters. Slaves benefitted by being introduced to the gospel of Jesus Christ and receiving the spiritual reward of being with God in the afterlife.

---

[15] Ibid., 13.
[16] Ibid., 14.

New Thought Movement

Within the North American capitalistic context, outside of Protestantism, a quiet movement began in New England under the leadership of a clock maker named Phineas Parkhurst Quimby — a movement that would prove foundational for what would become known as the Word of Faith movement or prosperity gospel. This movement is New Thought metaphysics or, more simply, New Thought. The term metaphysics indicates a belief that individuals can control the circumstances of their lives by controlling their thinking.

Quimby, born in 1802, was particularly interested in mental healing. After being healed of tuberculosis, he was inspired to better understand the relationship between a person's physical illness and his or her thoughts. He began to study and practice mesmerism (hypnosis) and eventually developed his own healing theories. For example, in a short essay titled "Is Disease a Belief?"[17] Quimby wrote of the relationship between the mind and disease:

> If I am sick, I am sick for my feelings are my sickness, and my sick- ness is my belief, and my belief is my mind; therefore all disease is in the mind or belief. Now as our belief or disease is made up of ideas which are matter, it is necessary to know what ideas we are in; for to cure the disease is to correct the error; and as disease is what follows the error, destroy the cause, and the effect will cease.[18]

Quimby felt that by discovering the connection between the mind and disease, he had rediscovered the healing technique of Jesus. Out of the New Thought movement grew several other movements. Quimby's best-known student was Mary Baker Eddy, who founded Christian Science. In turn, some of Eddy's students included Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, who founded the Unity School of Christianity; Malinda E. Cramer, who cofounded Divine Science; and Ernest Holmes, who founded Religious Science. Over the years, proponents of New Thought taught that changing one's thinking could not only affect one's health but every aspect of one's life, including financial well-being.

Almost one hundred years after Quimby developed New Thought, those teachings somehow found their way into the preaching and teaching of a Methodist minister named Essek William Kenyon.

Kenyon and Hagin

Though Kenneth E. Hagin is often credited with being the father of the Word of Faith Movement, it was Essek William Kenyon who developed the theology up which the movement is based. Kenyon was an evangelist, pastor, and teacher who was born in a lumber camp in Hadley Hills, New York, on April 24, 1867.[19] Because of his family's poverty, at the age of twelve, Essek began to work at a carpet mill twelve hours a day. During his teen years, Kenyon dreamed of becoming an actor. However, upon converting to Christianity at the age of seventeen while attending services at a Methodist church, Kenyon discerned that he was called to preach. He was given an exhorter's license by the Methodist Episcopal Church in Amsterdam, New York. At the age of nineteen, he preached his first sermon. His intellectual curiosity led him to

[17] Debra J. Mumford, *Exploring Prosperity Preaching* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2012), 10-11.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 13-14.

explore philosophy and metaphysics. He attended services of a Unitarian minister and also received training at Emerson College of Oratory in Boston.

With very little formal education and a great zeal for preaching and teaching the word of God, Essek William Kenyon pastored several churches and preached as an evangelist throughout the United States. His utmost concern was for Christians to live victorious lives. For Kenyon, once Christians understood the rights and privileges that the death, burial, victory over hell, and the resurrection of Christ afforded them, Kenyon believed that Christians would no longer live defeated lives – lives contaminated by sickness, disease, and poverty. When believers embraced the truth of the bible, they would become the supermen and superwomen God intended them to be. The biblical truths believers needed to embrace include material prosperity, physical healing, and authority to obtain whatever they confess in the name of Jesus.

Other Protestant preachers like Russell Conwell (1843- 1925), a Baptist pastor and founder of Temple University, combined their Protestant work ethic with the belief that God wants God's people to be materially prosperous.[20] In a sermon/lecture/dramatic presentation entitled "Acres of Diamonds," Conwell told story after story of people who traveled far and wide looking for treasure in foreign lands when everything they needed to make their fortune was already in their own backyard (sometimes literally). In the sermon, Conwell argued that Christians should get rich if they can do so in ways that still honor God because "money is power:"

> Love is the grandest thing on God's earth, but fortunate the lover who has plenty of money. Money is power: money has powers; and for a man to say, "I do not want money," is to say, "I do not wish to do any good to my fellowmen." It is absurd thus to talk. It is absurd to disconnect them. This is a wonderfully great life, and you ought to spend your time getting money, because of the power there is in money... We ought to get rich if we can by honorable and Christian methods, and these are the only methods that sweep us quickly toward the goal of riches.[21]

In the sermon, Conwell makes it clear that he believes there is nothing honorable about being poor --especially for those who do not have to be. People with money have the power to make their lives and the lives of people in their communities and nation better. Therefore, the person who has an opportunity to become rich but does not take it is not living within will of God for herself or himself.

Positive Christianity

More than one century after Quimby made his discoveries about the mind and disease, Norman Vincent Peele (1898 – 1993) combined New Thought with his Methodist evangelicalism, Calvinist language and belief in the American dream to develop positive

---

[20] *Russell H. Conwell* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 2015), accessed August 15, 2015; Available from http://www.temple.edu/about/history/russell-conwell. Conwell was the pastor of the Grace Baptist Church in Philadelphia. He began what would become Temple University in 1884 by tutoring people who had little money and little formal education in his church study. The number quickly grew from one to six and then to forty. In 1887, Conwell announced the formation of Temple College. The first commencement was held in 1892. It was incorporated as a university in 1907.

[21] Russell Conwell, *Acres of Diamonds* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), accessed August 16, 2015; Available from http://www.temple.edu/about/history/acres-diamonds. Conwell claimed to have preached this sermon more than 6000 times.

Christianity.[22] His quintessential text, *The Power of Positive Thinking* sold over five million copies. Building on earlier books *The Art of Living* and *You Can Win*, Peale defined power as the ability to control one's own life, health and destiny. Throughout the book, Peale offers stories and practical advice about how to tap into the power of God through Jesus Christ to change one's life and circumstances.[23]

Peale grew up in poverty in Ohio. He was the son of a Methodist minister and a faith-filled mother. Peale earned a bachelor's degree at Ohio Wesleyan and a master's degree from Boston University School of Theology. While serving as a pastor in the 1920s and 30s, Peale surveyed the culture and observed that church attendance was in decline. Many people were growing disillusioned, bored and frustrated with church. Gradually allowing New Thought to inform his ministry, he published *The Power of Positive Thinking* in 1952, a time when the United States culture was embracing religious authorities who were addressing needs and concerns of the masses in unique ways. Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich had become public intellectuals and celebrities. Billy Graham and Rabbi Joshua Liebman wrote books that were accessible to the public. [24]

Peale's positive Christianity did not promise adherents that they would be rich. However, he did teach that no one had to live in poverty or lives of defeat. If they put their faith in God and believed in the power of God at work in them, there was nothing they could not accomplish.

The Word of Faith Movement (Prosperity Gospel)

For Kenneth E. Hagin (1917-2003), best known as the father of the Word of Faith Movement, the 1960s were a time of new beginnings. Hagin, a Southern Baptist, converted to Pentecostalism because he wanted to fellowship with people who believed in divine healing.[25] Hagin's belief in divine healing was undoubtedly influenced by his own divine healing at the age of seventeen. Hagin had suffered from a deformed heart and incurable blood disease all his life. However, after reading Mark 5:34 wherein Jesus healed the woman with the issue of blood, he was completely healed.[26] Soon after his healing, Hagin began to preach.

In 1962, Kenneth Hagin began preaching and teaching that reality is "created in the minds and affirmed in the speech of believers."[27] Hagin founded the Kenneth E. Hagin Evangelistic Association which was the beginning of the Word of Faith Movement.[28] Though Hagin claimed that his teachings were inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is believed that Hagin actually plagiarized his teachings from Essek William Kenyon, an independent evangelist and bible teacher.[29] In turn,

---

[22] Carol V.R. George, *God's Saleman: Norman Vincent Peale and the Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 135.

[23] Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1952). Throughout the book, Peale tells stories about people who have changed their thinking and thereby changed their lives. In many chapters, he offers step-by-step instructions about how to change particular ways of thinking or adopt new spiritual practices. For example, in the chapter entitled "Believe in Yourself" he offers ten ways to build one's self confidence such as: picture yourself succeeding, cancel negative thoughts with positive ones, don't build up obstacles in your imagination, and repeat ten times a day "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31.

[24] Ibid., 128-129.

[25] Kenneth E. Hagin, "Healing and Miracles through United Prayer," *The Word of Faith Magazine*, August 1998, 4-8.

[26] Kenneth E. Hagin, *New Thresholds of Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1985), 3-4.

[27] Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 5-6.

Kenyon is believed to have adopted many of his teachings from Christian Science and New Thought.[30] Central to Kenyon's message was understanding: practicing positive confession; and experiencing material prosperity and physical health as divine right.[31]

Hagin advanced Kenyon's argument that poverty is abnormal by declaring poverty to be a curse. Kenyon taught that it was abnormal for believers to be in poverty and that believers should have success and victory in their lives because they share in God's creative ability. In his sermon, "Redeemed from the Curse of Poverty," Hagin contends that Christ has redeemed Christians from the curse of the law. The curse of the law is threefold: poverty, sickness, and second death.[32] Under the New Covenant, the blessings of Abraham belong to Christians. The blessing is also threefold: material spiritual, and physical. In the sermon, Hagin preaches that it is not wrong for the Christian to have money. But it is wrong for money to have the Christian. If the believers' material possessions, or desire for material possessions, are preventing them from serving God with their whole hearts, then believers are misdirected. Hagin is also clear that God's promise to meet all of believers' needs according to God's riches does not relieve believers of responsibility to work and make an effort to earn a living.

Seed-Faith Doctrine

An essential tenant of prosperity gospel is Oral Roberts' doctrine of seed-faith. Oral Roberts (1918 – 2009) was a licensed as a minister in the Holiness Pentecostal tradition. Born in Pontotoc, Oklahoma, Roberts was healed of tuberculosis during a revival meeting at the age of seventeen. His healing was the beginning of a ministry in which people were encouraged to believe in miracles.[33]

Roberts' doctrine of seed faith is the basis of the Word of Faith teaching of the *divine economy*. The divine economy is an economic system based on the belief that God wants to provide God's people with material prosperity.[34] An alternative to the secular economy, the divine economy is activated by faith in the goodness of God and the law of sowing and reaping or seed-faith.

Robert's doctrine of seed-faith is composed of three core principles which, if applied properly in the life of the believer, can ensure that she or he will have abundant life or a life of prosperity.[35] The first core principle is that Christians should turn their lives over completely to God by recognizing that God, not humanity, is the source of all their needs.[36] People who help Christians at various points in their lives are instruments of God but they are not the source of any blessings. God is the source.[37]

---

[30] D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 30.
[31] Harrison, *Righteous Riches,* 8.
[32] Kenneth E. Hagin, "Redeemed from the Curse of Poverty," in *Classic Sermons* (Tulsa, OK: Faith Library Publications, 1993), 173-186. Hagin cites Deuteronomy 28:16-19, 38-40 as evidence of the curse of the law which would befall those who did not obey the law of God, "Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be they basket and they store. Cursed shall be the fruit of the body, and the fruit of the land, the increase of thy kind and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out…"
[33] David Edwin Harrell, *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 37. Roberts was ordained in the United Methodist Church and considered himself an independent evangelist.
[34] Perriman and Evangelicals, 51.
[35] Oral Roberts, *The Miracle of Seed-Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Ministries, 1970), 37.
[36] Ibid., 15.
[37] Ibid.

The second core principle is the principle of sowing and reaping.[38] Whatever the believer gives freely to God becomes a seed for God to multiply back to the believer in the form of their needs. When the believer sows seed of any kind by giving of their talent, time, love, compassion, or money, they will receive those things in return. If believers want God to supply their financial needs, they should give seed-money to God for God to reproduce and multiply.[39] Roberts is very careful to differentiate seed-faith giving from tithing. Seed-faith giving is done before the miracle is manifested or the need has been met.[40] Tithing is giving after one has been blessed by God financially.

Roberts is also clear that giving to God means Christians give to the church or they give to someone to whom God has directed them.[41] For example, there was a time when Roberts and his wife were struggling to pay their rent. Roberts was led to give a seed-faith offering to God. After he gave the offering, a man who was a member of the church Roberts was pastoring gave Roberts an amount seven times the offering Roberts had given to the church. As a result, Roberts and his wife were able to stay in the house.[42]

The third core principle of seed-faith, is immediately to expect a miracle after the seed has been planted.[43] In order to expect a miracle, the believer must "release their faith" in God by truly believing that God is going to grant them a miracle.[44]

Though Roberts advises believers to plant seed like the miracle they need, for example, planting a seed of time if they need time, of love if they need love, he simultaneously espouses planting of money seeds to meet other types of needs. For example, he recounts a testimony of a young woman who planted a seed of faith for reconciliation in her marriage. When she decided to plant a financial seed, it was the point of contact she needed to release her own faith. She and her husband did reconcile. However, it would seem that if believers should sow like seed, rather than giving money she should rather have helped someone else reconcile their relationship as a way of mending her own.

Roberts cites Galatians 6:7 as evidence of the law of sowing and reaping, which is the central premise of his teaching, and Luke 6:38 as evidence of God's promise to give back to those who give. As was previously done with Kenyon and Hagin, we will compare Roberts' use of scripture, with the interpretation of biblical scholars.

Summary

Prosperity gospel is a product of the North American capitalistic culture. Throughout the history of the United States, preachers have combined their personal experiences and values (religious persecution, poverty, sickness, disillusionment with the religious establishment), with their Christian beliefs (such as providence, and divine calling) and capitalistic understandings to develop sermons and theologies that reflected the culture of their times. Further study of the origins of prosperity gospel will undoubtedly uncover countless other examples of movements and theologies that reflect interest in financial prosperity. Omitted from this brief paper is the

[38] Ibid., 23.
[39] Ibid., 21. Roberts cites Luke 6:38 as evidence of the need to give, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."
[40] Ibid., 27-28.
[41] Ibid., 57.
[42] Ibid., 18. Roberts also sees no conflict of interest in accepting a personal offering from a church member.
[43] Ibid., 29-30.
[44] Ibid., 30-31.

infiltration of prosperity gospel into African American communities during and after the great migration and beyond.[45]

Though many attempt to isolate the prosperity gospel as an anomaly and heretical brand of Christian theology, we must all knowledge that it is not that simple. Protestantism has been influenced and affected by capitalism since the first Europeans set foot on North American soil. Therefore, our task should not be to cast aspirations on any one movement. Rather our task should be to examine our own religious beliefs and traditions and discern how best to extricate negative capitalistic influences from our personal and communal faith.

[45] Mumford, *Exploring Prosperity Preaching*, 16-17.

"When Our Words Fail Us: Preaching Gospel to Trauma Survivors"

Joni S. Sancken, Ph.D, Assistant Professor of Homiletics
United Theological Seminary
Dayton, Ohio
www.united.edu

Russian poet Anna Akhmatova's poem "Requiem" begins with a description of women who had witnessed and experienced trauma waiting outside a prison where their loved ones were suffering,

> During the terrible years of Yezhovshchina I spent
> seventeen months in the prison queues in Leningrad.
> One day someone recognized me. Then a woman with
> lips blue with cold who was standing behind me, and of
> course had never heard of my name, came out of the
> numbness which affected us all and whispered in my
> ear—(we all spoke in whispers there):
> 'Can you describe this?'
> I said, 'I can!'
> Then something resembling a smile slipped over what
> had once been her face.[1]

This paper will address preaching the gospel in a context marked by the presence of trauma survivors. People who have experienced trauma often share a set of assumptions caused by their experience of powerlessness, imminent death, and the ineffectiveness of language. Survivors struggle to feel safe, to trust others, and to find meaning in life. Survivors also may struggle with experiencing time in a natural way. The past may be frozen in the moment in which the traumatic event occurred as the survivor experiences it again and again unbidden, while the future is completely closed. While some preaching contexts, such as worship at a Veterans Affairs hospital may have more awareness of trauma and the presence of survivors of trauma, most if not all congregations have participants who have been touched by trauma in some way and trauma has social ramifications for the community that surrounds a survivor. Two concerns lie at the heart of this paper.

1) Often preachers turn to therapeutic language to minister to trauma survivors. I want to encourage robust theological engagement that restores the power of language and creates connections between the experiences of survivors and claims that lie at the heart of the gospel. As we too consider the question on the blue lips of the woman in line with Akhmatova, by the power of the Spirit, preachers can harness language to validate the experiences of survivors and raise awareness and hope within the context.

2) Because many trauma survivors may experience shame and isolation, I want to explore how theologically anchored sermons might draw trauma survivors into a congregation and participate in healing.

[1] Anna Akhmatova, "Requiem," *Selected Poems*, trans. R. McKane (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 90. See also *The Diane Rehm Show*, 4 May 2015, Guest: Richard Flanagan "The Narrow Road to the Deep North."

In light of these concerns, the paper will include definitions and descriptions of context as well as trauma and the effects of trauma—in part through the lens of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and explore how preaching that draws from the full experience of Jesus as attested to in the creed (and its undergirding doctrines) might allow for a deeper theological range in opening up opportunities for survivors of trauma to experience hope in the midst of a complex healing process.

Understanding Preaching Context

In his April 30, 1944 letter to Eberhard Bethge, Deitrich Bonhoeffer wrote about his concern for engaging with Jesus Christ in the present tense. He wrote, "What is bothering me incessantly is the question, what Christianity really is or who Christ really is, for us today?"[2] Jesus Christ is living so we must constantly ask who is Jesus Christ for us today? While God and the gospel itself are not dependent upon recipients, the Bible, Christian Tradition, and experience all testify that God's radical good news moves towards us, towards the world. This means that our contexts in all their complexity and diversity deeply affect how we receive and bear witness to the good news or gospel in both our words and our choices and behaviors. For us as embodied and enmeshed people, gospel and context are inseparable. For preachers, charged with bearing witness to the good news through the sermon, David Jacobsen and David Kelly helpfully draw a distinction between "context" and "situation" as two distinct arenas in which we experience the gospel "for us."[3] Jacobsen and Kelly describe context as "those enduring realities of culture, society, and language that shape our understanding and orient for good or for ill, the way in which we hear the gospel." [4] Jacobsen and Kelly delineate *situation* from *context*, so that the situation is "a moment or crisis that evokes a sense of limit or finitude that calls forth a decision."[5] For example, using Jacobsen and Kelly's definitions, the context might be viewed as the container or the interpretive lens by which we hold or view a specific event that constitutes a situation. Jacobsen and Kelly draw from David Buttrick's categorization of situations most ripe for gospel proclamation as being situations of "limit" or "decision."[6] Situations of limit put human finitude in conversation with God's transcendence, while situations of decision describe circumstances where we are in the midst of discerning God's will for our lives and future.[7] Other situations that call for gospel proclamation may include events that call into question the nature of being—how we understand ourselves in light of history, or events that necessitate moral discernment that necessitates that the Church speak from its particular standpoint of both "being saved" and "being in the world."[8] While most events that are used in trauma studies would not become situations for preaching, using Jacobsen, Kelly, and Buttrick's definitions and

---

[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Collier Books, 1972), 279.
[3] David Schnasa Jacobsen and David Allen Kelly, *Kairos Preaching: Speaking Gospel to the Situation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 29.
[4] Ibid., 9, 29.
[5] Ibid., 9, 29-30. Edward Farley offers a somewhat different definition of "situation" in "Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Practical Theology" in *Practicing Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 38. His definition, "A situation is the way various items, powers, and events in the environment gather together to evoke responses from participants," encompasses aspects of context into the interpretation of a situation. Farley's definition and broader thrust of his essay places the act preaching to a situation or context of trauma within the realm of doing practical theology.
[6] Ibid., 38-39. David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 408-411.
[7] Farley, *Practicing Gospel*, 38-39.
[8] Ibid., See also Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 525.

qualifications, some traumatic events may create discreet situations for preaching the gospel. Such events may be individual such as the violent death of a loved one or communal such as a natural disaster or fire that destroys a church.

The conversation around trauma, particularly as experienced through PTSD, and preaching primarily sits at the level of context. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks and recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Journalist David J. Morris describes our PTSD as a "cultural meme" noting that it is "everywhere now, an inescapable part of our historical moment…an expression of deeper anxieties, it defines our era in a way not unlike female hysteria defined late nineteenth-century Europe."[9] PTSD was first included in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)in 1980 and has clear symptoms and treatment strategies, however in tracing its history through a study of trauma Morris also views PTSD as "…a product of culture as much as a hardwired biological fact."[10] While also naming that this view of PTSD is controversial and is "upsetting to many veterans," he cites the work of Allan Young, medical anthropologist at McGill University, who writes, "the disorder is not timeless, nor does it possess an intrinsic unity. Rather it is glued together by the practices, technologies, and narratives with which it is diagnosed, studied, treated, and represented by the various interests, institutions, and moral arguments that mobilized those efforts and resources."[11] It is beyond the scope of this article to speak to whether the response to trauma is mainly timeless and biological or mediated by cultural elements, but study and literature points to the presence of both elements in the experience of those who experience trauma. Once trauma has occurred, relationship with survivors, particularly those who may have PTSD means that their experiences contribute to the broader cultural context. One of the challenges of engaging with those who suffer from PTSD is that they tend to withdraw from relationships—this absence too becomes a part of a context in which preaching may take place.

Understanding Trauma

In the wake of the attacks of September 11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, war correspondent and former Marine David J. Morris, describes the field of trauma studies as a kind of fair with various disciplines calling out like carnies from their posts, with expert perspectives ranging from clinical awareness brought by psychiatrists and neuroscientists to experiential knowledge from poets, memoirists, and anthropologists.[12] What these varied approaches have in common is confirming the thoroughly penetrating impacts of trauma on survivors and their communities. The effects of trauma are physical, emotional, cognitive, relational, sociological, and spiritual.[13] Those who have experienced a traumatic event are often not able to do "whole-brain" cohesive processing, instead more primitive "fight/flight/freeze" instincts take over.[14] Violence and trauma are often reciprocally related in that a violent act or event often causes trauma and unaddressed and unhealed trauma can lead to more violence. While Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is not synonymous with the experience of trauma, Morris calls PTSD "a

[9] David J. Morris, *The Evil Hours: A Biography of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), 14.
[10] Ibid., 62.
[11] Ibid., 62, 288 (note 60.) See also Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
[12] Morris, *The Evil Hours*, 13.
[13] Carolyn Yoder, *The Little Book of Trauma Healing* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), 6.
[14] Ibid., 5. See also Morris, *The Evil Hours*, 51.

cultural meme" that speaks to our time.[15] As such trauma and its effects, particularly PTSD have become part of our cultural context. Much of the literature around trauma engages with PTSD, which emerged as an official psychiatric diagnosis in the late 1970's following the experience of combat veterans who served in Vietnam. The symptoms of PTSD obviously existed long before the specific label, with some documenting examples from early literature and the Bible.[16]

Because the term is so often used imprecisely, it is difficult to pin down a specific definition of trauma. Director of Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resistance (STAR), Carolyn Yoder delineates between situations of extreme stress and trauma. Traumatic events, "involve threats to lives or bodies, produce terror and feelings of helplessness, overwhelm an individual's or group's ability to cope or respond to the threat, lead to a sense of loss of control, and challenge a person's or group's sense that life is meaningful and orderly."[17] Further, events that may be merely stressful to one person may be traumatic for someone else depending on "age, previous history, degree of preparation, the meaning given to the event, how long it lasts, the quality of social support, knowledge about how to deal with trauma, genetic makeup and spiritual centeredness."[18] Trauma can be caused by single events such as losing a family member in the September 11 attacks as well as long-term living in abusive or dangerous settings.[19] These longer-term situations are known as "cumulative trauma; continuous trauma; chronic trauma; sequential trauma; multiple or plural traumas."[20] Often trauma has multiple layers. For example Hurricane Katrina survivors experienced the original trauma of the hurricane with loss of property and life along with the "structural-induced" trauma of racist systems and lack of resources for the poor in New Orleans that were present as lower grade chronic trauma before but escalated due to the hurricane.[21] These compounding events can intensify the response and widen the circle of those affected. Broader communities and groups can experience trauma even if they are at a distance from the event.[22] Additionally, trauma can be transferred from one generation to another through time. For example the experience of enslaved Africans brought to the United States, cultural and physical genocide of Native populations, and colonialism.[23] Another more recent field of trauma studies also includes trauma caused to those who participate or perpetrate violent or abusive acts.[24] Because of the wide variability in reactions and triggering experiences, it is important for pastors to validate a traumatic reaction regardless of how the precipitating event or events may appear to others.[25] David Morris' study focuses on a small group of widely-recognized events that are known to trigger traumatic responses, for example, the experience of a devastating natural disaster such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the 2010 Haitian earth quake, and the Nepal earthquake of April

---

[15] Ibid., 14.
[16] Warren Anderson Kinghorn, *Medicating the Eschatological Body: Psychiatric Technology for Christian Wayfarers*, Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University, 2011, 207; Available from http://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/4644/KinghornThDDissertationfinal.pdf%3Fsequence=.
[17] Yoder, *The Little Book of Trauma Healing*, 10.
[18] Ibid., 11.
[19] Ibid., 11-12.
[20] Ibid., 12.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 12-13.
[23] Ibid., 13-14.
[24] Ibid., 14. Some have documented a PTSD-type response called Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress or PITS.
[25] Ibid., 11.

2015; rape; and the experience of war, which involves both being attacked and attacking others. Until relatively recently, much literature tracing the effects of trauma has an androcentric bias and has focused on male soldiers in a context of war rather than on the act of rape, which is most commonly an atrocity experienced by women or girls. However, many other events and chronic conditions can cause trauma, from the murder of a colleague or a car-accident to childbirth, serious illnesses or pandemics, human-caused natural disasters such as an oil spill, homelessness, being a refugee, or loss of identity.[26] Further because trauma impacts not only individuals but also groups, communities and societies, we can see how trauma—both named and unnamed is likely present in many congregations and other ministry contexts.[27]

Yoder's work tracks responses to trauma. The first series of responses are organized into a "survivor victim cycle," which includes whole-person responses with far-reaching impact.[28] Early responses include, physiological changes such as shutting down the cerebral cortex (or thinking brain) and operating primarily from the limbic system and amygdala that register fear and the brain stem that has no sense of time other than an ongoing sense of "now" controls the "fight-flight-freeze" response as well as other instinctual actions.[29] What this feels like is a state of "hyper arousal," as heart rate and breathing increase, blood rushes to muscles, and senses are heightened. Less crucial body functions such as digestion shut down.[30] After the moment of danger, traumatized people may shake or cry uncontrollably or sweat profusely.[31] Because these reactions may appear unseemly—often people will suppress them although allowing the body to release traumatic energy can actually be beneficial for long-term recovery.[32] Mentally, these responses to trauma can cause dissociation to keep us from being emotionally overwhelmed in the moment and memories are not created or retained in the usual way and later produce both extreme detail coupled with difficulty in recalling events.[33] Traumatic memories may return involuntarily with sensory details and a sense of collapsed time when the survivor encounters a trigger such as smell, sight, sound, or some other kind of dynamic—when a traumatized person experiences an "intrusive memory" it is as if the event is happening again in real-time and the body responded accordingly.[34] Fear of triggers and a sense that they should be "over it" can cause trauma survivors to grow isolated as they withdraw from regular activities and engagement.[35] Trauma may also over time so effect brain functioning that survivors frequently operate using mainly lower-brain functions rather than the "thinking brain."[36] This means that survivors may not be capable of thinking through consequences, may speak or act without a filter, and may respond to relatively minor annoyances with extreme actions—akin to going after a mosquito with a gun.[37] When the frontal cortex re-engages, the person may feel shame, emotionally numb, or may even deny what just happened.[38]

---

[26] Ibid., 15.
[27] Ibid., 7.
[28] Ibid., 18.
[29] Ibid., 18-19.
[30] Ibid., 19.
[31] Ibid., 21-22.
[32] Ibid., 22.
[33] Ibid., 20.
[34] Ibid., 21.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 22-23
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 23.

In addition to physical, mental, emotional and relational responses, trauma also deeply affects a survivor's sense of self and spiritual grounding. Because trauma destroys meaning and harms a person's sense of identity and ability to make meaning from her or his life, a survivor may question God and may need access to different theology and different language to make sense of life.[39] Particularly chronic or on-going trauma leads some of the physiological and emotional responses to become regular adaptive behavior that can help people to survive in dangerous settings, yet the effects can be corrosive. Judith Herman observes that those who experience a single traumatic event may feel that they are "losing their minds" while those who experience chronic trauma feel that they have "lost themselves."[40] While large-scale natural disasters can certainly cause trauma, the most damaging trauma is caused by deliberate harmful action by a person or people.[41]

Unhealed and unattended trauma does not just "go away." Rather, the pain is often transferred and the survivor may "get stuck" in a cycle of suffering and fear marked by a lack of power and lack of hope.[42] PTSD is given as a diagnosis when severe responses to trauma persist for longer than one month.[43] Specific symptoms of PTSD often overlap with the immediate symptoms of trauma such as "flashbacks" to the event, symptoms of increased arousal such as inability to sleep, and finding patterns where none actually exist.[44] Some research shows that flashbacks are more than just "vivid memories" and are likely stored differently in the brain than typical memories.[45] Memories can usually be verbalized but flashback memories exist beyond the scope of language, leading to frustration in explaining the experience to loved ones and professionals seeking to help.[46] PTSD is the most widely recognized response to trauma in our broader cultural vernacular but reducing all trauma to PTSD risks minimizing other responses to trauma that fall short of a specific diagnosis.[47] Focusing on PTSD is also less helpful in looking at trauma in non-Western contexts as well as trauma experienced by large groups. Finally, a PTSD diagnosis, while helpful for some risks "pathologizing" and medicating a natural response to traumatic experiences.[48]

The horror of trauma is well documented and must never be minimized. Engaging with those who have experienced trauma is not for the faint of heart and preachers and other caregivers should not enter into relationships with naiveté or optimism built on well-meaning platitudes. PTSD is a serious diagnosis and those who have experienced trauma or who have symptoms of PTSD should be under the care of professionals who are trained and experienced in dealing specifically with trauma. However, as Christians who believe in the God who brings new life from death, the horror of trauma is not the final verdict. Those who survive trauma emerge as new people, changed by their experiences. Healing, integration, and return to meaningful relationship is possible. New gifts and potential can grow in the aftermath of trauma. In fact, while present-day practice treats those who have survived trauma as patients who need treatment to re-engage with community, Morris' historical research showed that in ancient cultures those

[39] Ibid., 24-25.
[40] Ibid., 27. See also Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 158.
[41] Yoder, *The Little Book of Trauma Healing*, 29.
[42] Ibid., 30.
[43] Ibid., 31.
[44] Ibid. Morris, *The Evil Hours*, 111.
[45] Ibid., 109.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Yoder, *The Little Book of Trauma Healing*, 31.
[48] Ibid.

who survived trauma often became spiritual leaders or shamans in their communities.[49] They were the ones who taught and cared for "normal people" because their experience gave them great insight into the depths of human experience.[50] In other language, this logic also resonates with the experience of Jesus' own traumatic crucifixion and death at the heart of Christianity. God's own suffering in Christ means that even the most painful aspects of being human are drawn into the life of God and can be redeemed and transformed for the glory of God. Healing from trauma may become "the turning point of a life, a sign and symbol of God's goodness and care."[51] God's own over-coming of death is good news for any who have experienced overwhelming trauma, or who have loved ones who have experienced "intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation."[52]

Gospel as (Re)Construction of the Self through Preaching the Life of Jesus

In the face of trauma, it is helpful for preachers to begin with a posture of humility, confession, and prayer. In Deborah Van Deusen Hunsinger's words, "we ourselves, with our enduring failures to love, cannot truly redeem traumatic loss, we cling in hope to the One who can and does."[53] One of the challenging tenets of trauma healing is that healing must involve empowerment of the survivor while also involving the creation of new relationships.[54] Recovery occurs in a kind of space between, not dissimilar in some ways to the space where proclamation itself occurs, a space between the active agency of preachers and listeners where control is both exercised and surrendered and the power of the Holy Spirit brings life. If given permission to accompany survivors on a journey to healing, pastors and other loved ones cannot force healing and must give over control. In addition to the forging of relationships, Judith Herman notes several other "stages of recovery" including, "safety, "remembrance and mourning," "reconnection", and "commonality."[55] Preachers in particular should rightly hold the importance of creating a safe environment for trauma survivors where they can worship without fear of triggers. Awareness of the needs in your own immediate context and fostering a strong relationship with the trauma survivor and his or her family is key. Yet fear of saying the wrong thing is not a good reason for bypassing the important calling of preaching the gospel—particularly to those who need to experience its healing power. It may be that the best approach may be as a "compassionate witness" who can name God's redemptive and healing activity where appropriate—even in the wake of trauma.[56]

While the power of traumatic experience should certainly be validated, a trauma survivor is not to be reduced specifically to a horrific event or events. Rather, this person is a brother or

---

[49] Morris, *The Evil Hours*, 65-66.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Deborah Van Deusen Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable: trauma, gospel, and pastoral care" *Theology Today* 68, no. 1 (Apr. 2011): 9. See also Patricia Mathes Cane, *Trauma Healing and Transformation* (Watsonville, CA: Capacitar, 2000), 17.
[52] Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable," 11. See also N.C. Andrease, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, 4th ed. eds. H.I. Kaplan and B.J. Sadock (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1985), 918-924, quoted in Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 33.
[53] Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable," 9.
[54] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 133.
[55] Ibid., 133-236.
[56] Lynn Bridgers, "The Resurrected Life: Roman Catholic Resources in Posttraumatic Pastoral Care," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 15, no. 1 (2011): 38.

sister in Christ whose identity is in Christ and whose self and future are being transformed more and more into Christ's likeness. Nevertheless, Warren Anderson Kinghorn names the constructive role that psychiatric diagnosis plays not only as it relates to "Psychiatric technology" but also to the ways a person names and constructs her or his experience and identity as an "experiencing self." [57] In the context of exploring a mental disorder such as PTSD, the way that identity is formed has implications for an individual or community's chosen path of treatment or healing from trauma.[58] It is good and important for survivors of serious trauma to seek diagnosis and treatment from psychiatric professionals, but we should not short-change the role or pastors and preachers. The ability to re-tell or reshape story and identity in the wake of trauma is an important part of psychological integration and healing. As Christians, we hold that through the waters of baptism, the identity of Jesus Christ is a definitive constructive act in shaping our own identities both here and now as well as eschatologically. The events that helped to form Jesus' earthly ministry are named in the Christological section of the Apostles Creed.

> I believe in… [And] in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.[59]

Preaching through the Apostles Creed, either in a sermon series or explicitly allowing the doctrines present in the creed to come to the fore while preaching through Christian Year may offer preachers an approach to positively participating in the complex process of trauma healing as well as providing language and theology that may help to rebuild and restore the identity of trauma survivors in part through a "typological identification" with aspects of Jesus' life and ministry.[60] Lynn Bridgers discusses the healing potential of typological association with biblical themes, drawing from a tradition that allows for oppressed and marginalized people to draw strength and hope from typological association.[61] For example, enslaved Africans drawing from the Exodus experience of Israel being freed from Egypt or Puritan colonists seeking religious freedom in North America connecting to Israel being brought into the Promised Land.[62] Use of these key biblical images helped shape identity in ways that preserved and nurtured identity and calling in these groups. Bridgers invites survivors to see themselves not as "…bystanders in a scene that also involves Christ, but as Christians to see in their own lives the stages that mark the history of Christ's ministry."[63] Psychologically, another tool that the narrative of Christ may

[57] Kinghorn, *Medicating the Eschatological Body*, 204.
[58] Ibid.
[59] I've chosen to use the "traditional" version rather than the Ecumenical version likely used more frequently in worship because it includes the line, "he descended into hell." I see this element as being very important in light of the context of trauma and trauma survivors.
[60] Bridgers, "The Resurrected Life," 39.
[61] Ibid., 43.
[62] Ibid. See also Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 55.
[63] Bridgers, "The Resurrected Life," 43.

provide for trauma healing is association. Since dissociation is one of the responses to trauma that is likely to lead to PTSD.[64]

It may be common practice in many traditions to move in and out of the Christian Year or to emphasize some aspects of Christ's life and work and down-play or ignore other theological emphases that seem less important. However, since the journey to healing is multifaceted and different aspects of the Christ-event address different responses to trauma, the discussion that follows asserts that the entirety of Jesus' life should be preached, each event offers healing nuances.

"…Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary…"

God is deeply committed to creation and cares about what happens with human bodies in history. This is true throughout scripture but is most deeply marked by God entering into creation as a human. God's choice to become human in a sense lifts up the value of humanity. Incarnation exemplifies God's desire to connect to people. The theological emphases found in Jesus' incarnation emphasize the necessity of safety, relationship, and community. Preaching about these very human aspects of Jesus works against loss of self and isolation that many may feel in the wake of trauma. In the immediate wake of trauma, the first step towards healing is the need for safety for the survivor. Safety needs to be both physical or external and internal or emotional/psychological. Safety was a concern for infant Jesus as Mary sought a safe place to give birth as well and in Matthew's gospel the family lived in Egypt to protect Jesus. The way that those with PTSD respond to physical stimuli and are unable to effectively employ self-soothing behaviors is in some ways reminiscent of a newborn infant so that identification or association with the infant Jesus who is protected, honored, and loved may be helpful.[65]

Jesus' mother Mary's role and the fact that she was given a choice in Jesus conception may be healing themes to lift up in Advent sermons. Judith Herman writes poignantly about the loss of self that can happen for those who experience trauma, particularly women who experience rape. She writes, "…at the moment of trauma, almost by definition, the individual's point of view counts for nothing. …The traumatic event thus destroys the belief that one can be *oneself* in relation to others."[66] Jesus' ministry in some ways is characterized by being misunderstood in his closest relationships while also exhibiting a profound sense of understanding and compassion towards others.

In many contexts, it is common to preach about the "once for all-time" nature of Jesus' work. However, drawing from the strength of typological identification suggested by Bridgers, it may encourage connection to not speak about Christ's incarnation as a "one-time event that happened in the distant past, but that ended with Christ's death on the cross."[67] Rather, identification with Christ may be encouraged by taking a different approach that envisions, "…the incarnation as a rupture, as an eruption of God into the life of humanity whose impact is ongoing. The incarnation did not end with the cross but is continued in the lives of every believer

[64] Bessel A. van der Kolk, "In Terror's Grip: Healing the Ravages of Trauma," 5; Available from http://www.traumacenter.org/products/pdf_files/terrors_grip.pdf.
[65] Ibid., 6-7.
[66] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 53.
[67] Bridgers, "The Resurrected Life," 43.

today."[68] This might be fostered in preaching that uses present-tense verbs to talk about Jesus' incarnate presence and that consistently uses examples of believers acting as the present-day, incarnate body of Christ in our world.

"…Suffered…"

Jesus' suffering may be one of the most theologically challenging elements in preaching, especially as it relates to involuntary suffering today related to the immediate experience and aftermath of trauma. Bridgers comments concerning the eternal "eruption" of the incarnation of Christ may be helpful here as well. Indeed, while God has ultimately defeated death through the cross and resurrection, our world exists in an era of "overlap" where old life and new life exist together. It follows that Jesus may be understood to still be suffering with and in people who suffer today. However, this does not justify their suffering and preachers should be clear that it doesn't make their suffering a means to salvation or something that should be glorified in anyway. However, a link with Christ's own suffering does provide a way to find meaning and some sense of purpose or way forward in what would otherwise feel hopeless. This may particularly be the case when preachers are consistent in linking the cross with the resurrection. These two events invade our world simultaneously and we cannot speak of the cross without also engaging with the resurrection.[69] Jesus who suffers ongoing crucifixion wherever there is suffering today is also eternally raised and intimately involved in raising new life in our world.

Besides links with resurrection, survivors often speak anecdotally of feeling Christ's presence with them in experiences of intense suffering. Jesus' presence and solidarity with suffering people is a powerful word in the face of the isolation and sense of separation that many survivors either experience based on other's discomfort or impose on themselves out of fear. Preaching that people are never alone in their experiences of suffering is an important word of comfort and hope.

"…Was crucified, dead, and buried…"

Death is a part of trauma; both the close brush with physical death itself through near loss of one's own life or the death of a loved one. Like Jesus on the cross, Judith Herman notes that in situations of terror people seek out elemental sources of "comfort and protection."[70] "Wounded soldiers and raped women cry for their mothers or for God. When this cry is not answered, the sense of basic trust is shattered. Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. …they belong more to the dead than to the living."[71] Jesus' own cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" resonates with this experience and testifies to the gospel promise that God hears those cries and ultimately acts. Following the establishment of bodily safety and safe relationships, the second phase of recovery from trauma named by Herman is "remembrance and mourning." This is essentially the reclaiming and telling of the traumatic experience or memory so that it might be integrated into an emerging way forward.[72] Because much of traumatic memory and experience

[68] Ibid.,43-44. Bridgers comments on feminist concerns around women being able to identify with the male Jesus Christ, which has an exclusionary history of restricting women's authority. However, Bridges sidesteps this concern by focusing on the form of Jesus' life. Along similar lines, I would argue for identification in Jesus' actions more than his specific gender identity.

[69] See also Bridgers, "The Resurrected Life," 45.

[70] Ibid., 52

[71] Ibid.

[72] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175.

is stored in the brain without words, speaking the story and shaping it is transformative for survivors in part because it tells the truth of what happened and it allows them to become whole people.[73] Herman writes, "In the telling the trauma story becomes testimony. …Testimony has both a private dimension, which is confessional and spiritual and a public aspect, which is political and judicial."[74] In telling the story, the survivor moves from "shame and humiliation" to "dignity and virtue."[75] They "regain the world they have lost."[76] Creating appropriate time for testimony and allowing testimony to become part of the preaching moment may be a way for pastors to reach-out to survivors. The survivor must take the lead, but the preacher will also want to be aware of the situation and the appropriateness of the testimony. Preaching that touches the complexity of atonement will want to not only build identification but also show that Jesus' actions have a vicarious power. Jesus takes on the horror for us so that we don't have to bear it alone. Jesus' death also brings a finality that can be life-giving in particular for those with PTSD who experience aspects of the traumatic event again and again without a sense of ending or finality.[77] Survivors can send their experiences to the cross with Jesus and let them end once and for all. Inviting participants to write on a paper or bring forward a symbol to place on the cross may even be a helpful worship-ritual for a Good Friday service. Integrating celebration of Communion with themes from the sermon may offer a helpful way for worshippers to experience Jesus' self-giving presence physically in ways that are beneficial when pain and brokenness are beyond the words.

These means of rehearsing the death and resurrection of Jesus in a way that allows for deep identification offers potential healing paradigms for survivors of trauma. When the re-living of the traumatic experience is able to end, the memory changes and the psychological response changes as the survivor is able to more forward again in new life.[78] However, a ritual action and accompanying proclamation rarely address the questions of "why" and "why me" that follow integration of the trauma experience.[79] Here Bridgers again suggests that the life of Jesus is helpful, although the perspective of Jesus' followers may be more relatable than Jesus himself. Jesus' disciples did not understand the promise of the resurrection until it happened. Our human perspective has limitations and it can be beneficial for preachers to acknowledge these unknowns, it is not a cop-out to acknowledge mystery, rather it affirms our creaturely relationship to God.

"…He descended into hell"

The "middle day" of the Easter Triduum passes quietly in many traditions, but this time between Christ's death and resurrection where Jesus "harrows hell" may serve as a theological holding space for trauma survivors who may also feel caught in the middle between the past and the future, between life and death.[80] Trauma survivors may see their own journeys as a kind of

---

[73] Ibid., 175-181.
[74] Ibid., 181.
[75] Ibid., See also R. Mollica, "The Trauma Story: The Psychiatric Care of Refugee Survivors of Violence and Torture," in *Post-Traumatic Therapy and Victims of Violence,* ed. F. Ochberg (New York: Bruner/Mazel, 1988), 312.
[76] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 181.
[77] van der Kolk, "In Terror's Grip: Healing the Ravages of Trauma," 3-4.
[78] Ibid., 5.
[79] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 178.
[80] Shelly Rambo, "Saturday in New Orleans: Rethinking the Holy Spirit in the Aftermath of Trauma," *Review and Expositor* 105, no. 2 (2008): 231-232.

descent into hell—a place of torment where others cannot reach and from where there is not return. Part of Jesus' redeeming act is to reach into hell—to reach beyond where humans can reach and return. Jesus is not limited, even in his death. Jesus is Lord of the dead and the living.[81] While preaching the descent into hell may take the form of pure lament in the tradition of the biblical psalms directed to a God who is present and listening. James Kay brings in Jewish understandings of Sheol as a place of the dead—where they exist as "shadows" cut-off both from the world of the living and "oblivious to (the praise of) God.[82] This sounds like an apt description of those who are suffering the isolation of PTSD. Early commentators on the Apostle's Creed describe Jesus' actions in Hell as involving proclamation and liberation where the good news is preached and the damned are set free from the chains and prisons that have held them.[83] Thus the first taste of resurrection is offered to those who are dead and enslaved and Christ's descent into hell is the transitional move from cross to resurrection.[84]

This is profound good news for any who have been to "hell," but preaching Christ's descent into hell may be particularly helpful for ministering to a particular group of those who suffer from trauma, those who perpetrated violence against others—those who are guilty of crimes or who may have killed enemy combatants or innocent civilians in the context of war. Some congregations may have special worship services for recent parolees whose conditions of release do not permit them to worship in traditional church settings.[85] Some may suffer from Perpetrator Induced Traumatic Syndrome (PITS) due to the honest and justifiable guilt they may experience from past actions. When he descends to hell, Jesus takes on the punishment reserved for the worst of the worst.[86] He takes his ranks among them. In Kay's words,

> Here we stand before an incomprehensible mystery where the Father and the Son, joined by a mutual Spirit of love and freedom, take into the very dynamics of their relationship the ravages of sin in order to destroy its dominance over the human creature. …Divine power is now seen as that which comes all the way down in suffering love to the depths of depravity and estrangement to bring forth eternal life. By descending into hell, God in the person of Jesus Christ places the worst that can befall human beings within the redeeming embrace of the cross.[87]

Finally, treatment and healing from trauma take time. The journey is long. Marking Christ's descent into hell and the "middle time" of Holy Saturday acknowledges that the move from death to new life may be slow and painful. Preachers may want to mark this day as way to

[81] See also James F. Kay, "He Descended into Hell," *Word & World* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 23. Rom 14:9.
[82] Ibid., 20
[83] Ibid., Kay cites Rufinus, *A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, trans. and ed. J.N.D. Kelly (New York: Newman, 1978), 51-52, 61.
[84] Kay, "He Descended into Hell," 23.
[85] I am most familiar with Dismas Fellowship services that primarily serve recently released sex-offenders. I volunteered with Dismas from 2007-2009. The congregation where my husband served as pastor hosted these services in Hamilton, ON. Dismas Fellowship or similar services may feel controversial for congregations and can raise issues particularly for some trauma survivors in the congregation. Preaching Jesus' descent into hell may be a helpful means for a pastor to work through the theological rationale for a program like this with a congregation.
[86] Ibid., 24
[87] Ibid.

slow the congregation down in the "rush" to get from Good Friday to Easter.[88] For family members and friends who accompany survivors on their journey, Christ's descent into hell offers assurance that Christ's power extends beyond the earthly and heavenly realms to those who are unable to respond and seem beyond reach and beyond hope.[89]

"…He rose again from the dead…"

Resurrection or new life in the form of a new start that brings something new from death, is a deeply embedded theme in literature related to trauma and trauma recovery. Survivors often use language that is reminiscent of the language the church uses to talk about death and resurrection to talk about their experiences of trauma and its common for family members to speak similarly (John was a different person when he returned from Iraq….) Allowing the paradigm of Jesus' resurrection to offer narrative and formative structure to impact the way a survivor talks about his or her experience may be healing.[90] Theologically framing resurrection as not only an event that happened to Jesus long ago but as an eschatological event that is occurring in the eternal now may help survivors who must continue to choose life over death over and over as they slowly move through healing.

This perspective takes time and it cannot be forced on a survivor, but many find healing and purpose in allowing the traumatic experience to become a "gift" to others, part of a sense of mission in the world.[91] When a person successfully works through her or his experience, she or he may desire to share about it and the sermon may be a space where this can happen.

"…He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty"

The doctrine of Ascension is not often addressed or engaged in preaching, but when held together with the fullness of Christ's identity and work it offers nuances that may be helpful for preaching in the context of trauma. Part of the healing process for some trauma survivors is finding a sense of containment for the traumatic experience.[92] A way to leave it behind so that it doesn't leak-in and contaminate all parts of life. When Jesus ascends to heaven, he does so as the Crucified and Risen Lord, the experience of the cross has been integrated into his identity but he is not bound by it—the cross remains contained while Jesus is free and sovereign. Worship itself can also become an isolation defeating communal act and a holding space where participants can name the grief and loss associated with trauma and move liturgically towards praise and acknowledgment of the life-preserving power of God made manifest in Jesus.[93] As Jesus is lifted up, so too our lives, experiences, and concerns are lifted up to God.

Jesus' ascension also marks his promise and gift of the Holy Spirit who serves as both comforter and advocate in the midst of both trauma and the long, slow process of healing. Indeed, the Spirit is the one that empowers our own advocacy on behalf of those who may be suffering in on-going situations of chronic abusive trauma. In the glory of Jesus' heavenly reign, we also have a glimpse of our own eschatological destiny. In Hunsinger's words, "We find comfort in the midst of affliction when we are reminded that the One who descends into every

[88] Rambo, "Saturday in New Orleans," 234, citing Walter Brueggemann "Readings from the Day 'In Between,'" in *A Shadow of Glory: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust,* ed. T. Linefelt (New York: Rutledge, 2002),110-111.
[89] See also Kay, "He Descended into Hell," 23-24.
[90] Bridgers, "The Resurrected Life," 42-43.
[91] Ibid., 47.
[92] Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable," 17.
[93] Ibid., 24, Bridgers, "The Resurrected Life," 51.

human hell we create and unwittingly or maliciously perpetuate is the very one who sits at the right hand of the Father in glory."[94]

"From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead"

Many preachers struggle to preach about Jesus' second coming and the final judgment. However, for survivors who long for retribution and revenge, preaching Jesus' return may offer a release as revenge and retribution are given over to God. The roots of much violence, both interpersonally and on a larger scale may originate in unresolved pain and trauma. Director of the Center for the Study of Violence at the Harvard Medical School, James Gilligan writes, "All violence is an effort to do justice or to undo injustice."[95] Unresolved trauma may cause survivors to "act-out" on others or "act-in," harming themselves. For those who have unanswered questions and who have experienced the profound injustice of trauma (particularly chronic trauma caused by abuse over time) we can proclaim that Jesus will return and set things right. For those who have afflicted trauma on others, who suffer trauma from honest and earned guilt, Christ's coming judgment may be framed "cosmically" so that Jesus judges all that represents death and destruction.[96] All actions and experiences are subjected to the "universal victory of life over death."[97]

Conclusion

Christian ethicists and preachers have long called upon the faithful to live "in the way of Jesus."[98] The "way of Jesus" encompasses both the Living Christ as the means to life as well as living the "way" Jesus lived. Thus "the way of Jesus" is also the way to healing and hope and like all discipleship mysteriously involves both the grace-filled love and power of our God that comes as miraculous gift along with "an active decision to forgive" the one or ones who caused the trauma—even if that includes oneself.[99] Trauma must be attended to seriously and by psychiatric professionals and preachers should not be naïve about the effects of trauma and the challenges of ministering to survivors of trauma; however this paper has proposed that preachers and congregations can be channels for Christ's healing and has described the experience of trauma and the presence of trauma survivors as a context for preaching, exploring "the way of Jesus" as professed in preaching the theological emphases of the Apostle's Creed as a means of fostering association with Jesus and positively supporting healing for trauma survivors.

One of Judith Herman's pivotal stages of healing involves the trauma survivor telling her or his story to a witness.[100] Shelly Rambo elaborates upon the importance of this act, "Bearing witness is a practice that brings to light what has receded; it involves acknowledging the distortions of time, body, and speech that deter a survivor from *living on* in meaningful

---

[94] Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable," 25.
[95] James Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (New York: Random House, 1996), quoted in Howard Zehr, "Doing Justice, Healing Trauma: The Role of Restorative Justice in Peacebuilding," *South Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 1.1, (Spring 2008): 5 and Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable," 15.
[96] Kay, "He Descended into Hell," 25.
[97] Ibid.
[98] John Howard Yoder, "the Radical Revolution in Theological Perspective," in *For the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 111, cited in Cynthia Hess, "Traumatic Violence and Christian Peacemaking," *Brethren Life and Thought* 51, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 203.
[99] Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable," 20.
[100] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175.

relationships with others."[101] Here we may also find a meaningful connection with the biblical concept of bearing witness and the task of preachers to bear witness to the gospel truth. The truth is that trauma is "not the last word."[102] Jesus Christ has ultimately overcome death and the forces of death that drain life and meaning. The rupture between the Realm of God and our world is being healed and God is making God's home among people—wiping away tears and bringing peace and abundance. It can be challenging for pastors or chaplains to continue to bear witness to this truth when they preach in the presence of death, yet part of our calling as witnesses is to watch for God's healing presence in the wake of trauma, to acknowledge the complexity, and begin to testify to that which may lie beyond words.

[101] Shelly Rambo, "Trauma and faith: reading the narrative of the hemorrhaging woman," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 242

[102] Serene Jones' phrasing. Shelly Rambo, et al. "Theologians engaging trauma transcript," *Theology Today* 68. No.3 (Oct. 2011): 227.

Deconstructing a Gospel of Reconciliation: Locating Trouble and Grace in Postcolonial Preaching

Sarah A.N. Travis
Lecturer, Worship and Homiletics
Knox College, Toronto School of Theology
www.knox.utoronto.ca

Introduction

At mealtimes, my family prays a responsive grace which we learned from friends in Malawi. "God is Good, all the time. All the time, God is Good. Because that is God's nature." These shared words confess what my family - white, affluent, Canadian - understands about God in the world. They are an affirmation that comes amid knowledge of a world that suffers, a world in which it is not always easy to see or interpret God's action.

The writers of the gospels shared their particular visions of how the good news of Jesus Christ came alive in their own contexts. Preachers today continue the task of locating good news in both its generality and its particularity. We search this time and this place for trouble and grace in order to proclaim God's action in response to the sorrows and dis-ease of life. The gospel that is preached and heard is distinctly contextual. Gospel promises of life, power, victory and blessing are interpreted according to historical specificity. While modernity assumed a universal human condition according to which the gospel is always and everywhere the same, postmodern hermeneutics challenge notions of universality. The essence of God's good news in Jesus Christ is consistent in all times and places, but the experience and articulation of the gospel is dynamic and rarely straightforward. It is a theological task to interpret gospel for this time and this place.[1]

This paper considers how the reality of colonialism has problematized gospel as it is spoken out loud in particular worship settings. How may we understand trouble and grace in a postcolonial world? I urge preachers to revise their articulation of gospel in light of postcolonial insights, not just for the sake of novelty but in the belief that postcolonial insights will deepen the encounter between communities of faith and the Triune God.

I have a deep appreciation for the theological integrity of homiletic perspectives built on the interplay of trouble and grace.[2] These perspectives maintain a tension between law and gospel, allowing the preacher to move between them in order to shed light on the brokenness of creation and the power of God in Jesus Christ. Paul Scott Wilson's *Four Pages of the Sermon* is perhaps the most fully articulated and theologically focussed treatment of trouble and grace for preaching. According to Wilson, there are four theological functions which correspond to four 'pages' of a sermon: Trouble in the Bible, God's Action in the Bible, God's Action in the Bible, God's Action in the World.[3] This manner of interpreting the gospel is a strong theological

[1] Gospel (capital G) in simplest terms remembers God's action in Jesus Christ crucified and risen, as distinguished from gospel (small g) which here refers to human experience of God's grace.
[2] See Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* for a description of the development of the law-gospel/trouble-grace school of homiletics.
[3] Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

resource for preaching gospel in a postcolonial church. What I present here is an adaptation of a trouble/grace mode of preaching in light of insights from postcolonial theory and theology.

Postcolonial perspectives attend to the local and global implications of uneven power relationships, and the shifting nature of power in a globalized world which bears the continuing effects of colonialism/imperialism. While the age of formal colonization is over, the world is imperial in nature insofar as powerful nations continue to control resources and maintain power over others in a variety of ways. In North America, we see evidence of the negative impact of colonial and imperial actions, for example economic and social disadvantages for particular races and ethnic groups. Both postcolonial theory and preaching are 'anticipatory discourses' - they are devoted to the transformation of the present toward a future reality that is unchained from the limitations of the past. Postcolonial preaching reorients the Christian gospel away from the false gospels of empire, recognizing that these gospels have often been conflated historically. Searching history and the traditions of the church for instances of colonial and imperial power, postcolonial preaching imagines possibilities for healing, reconciliation and transformed relationships both among human communities, and in terms of human-divine relationships.

Postcolonial preaching is a theo-ethical discourse that is concerned with the well-being of all who are caught in the web of colonialism/imperialism. It is a relational discourse, and thus the preached gospel is not restricted to gathered listeners in their own context, but always also considers what is good news for others, elsewhere. In other words, what is the grace of this sermon for those who are not in the room, and in what way does that grace respond to the specific troubled faced by those who are not in the room? For those who live on the others side of the world? Even for those who live in a distant past or future? A problem arises for preaching when what is 'good news' for others is not, or does not seem to be, good news for us. Or, conversely, when what we perceive as life-giving is detrimental to the lives of others. When preaching desires abundant life for all, that which is bad news for some is bad news for all.

Reconciliation and the healing of shattered relationships become possible because of God's love in Jesus Christ. To proclaim such possibility is to name God's grace into deep trouble. Reconciliation, however, is not a straightforward process, and serves as an illustration of the challenge of articulating aspects of gospel in light of historical particularity. I have chosen to focus on one example of tragic suffering related to my own nation's colonial history - the situation of Canada's First Nations peoples with regard to residential schools. Against the backdrop of the ongoing process of truth and reconciliation, I name the ambiguities inherent in preaching trouble and grace in a postcolonial context. Finally, I engage with trouble and grace homiletic perspectives in search of resources that can aid preachers to speak a more adequate truth about the world as it was, is, and shall be.

The Gospel and Postcoloniality

Biblical texts are products of empire, as are the scriptural and theological traditions of the church. These have been inscribed and interpreted in a colonial world. This colonial situation has impacted the proclamation of the gospel in different ways depending on historical, social and geographical location. In various ways, empire has successfully claimed and subverted the gospel. Colonizers from Christian nations have frequently acted in the name of Jesus Christ, with full participation of the church. Colonial seizure of lands, peoples, and resources has been viewed as providential - commanded and enacted by God. A victory of settlers over aboriginal peoples might be considered by the colonizers as an example of God's grace, and the conversion and Christianization of native peoples as a blessed fulfilment of Matthew 28. The conquest of

North America by Britain, Spain and France was very good news for those nations, and interpreted to be evidence of God's gracious care for the leaders of those lands. Conquest, however, was a violent and harmful process for the existing inhabitants and is certainly not to be equated with God's love in Jesus Christ. Good news for the colonizer has meant trouble for the colonized.

A postcolonial perspective will pry open interpretations of gospel, asking "is this good news? For whom?" A process of decolonizing gospel might argue that the gospel of Jesus Christ invites the church to occupy a marginal position and willingly concede both social standing and real estate. It might argue that the good news is found in service rather than conversion. It might argue that conquest is never synonymous with good news, and that imperial acts actually serve as a counter-gospel. This process of decolonizing gospel is painful because it signals the end of something for constituencies which have benefited and continue to benefit from colonial/imperial processes. In that sense, decolonizing is a sign of God's grace, but it sounds a lot like trouble for those who might lose standing, power, money or control.

Effective sermons accomplish something among the hearers, but despite the best efforts of the Holy Spirit, sermons do not always accomplish something that is good or synonymous with Gospel. Sermons can intentionally or unintentionally entrench existing power imbalances, cooperate with the powers that be, condone acts of discrimination or segregation. Thus our proclamation of 'grace' requires careful thought. It becomes much more difficult to identify and proclaim good news insofar as what is good news for me might be the opposite for my neighbor. Any simple designation of trouble/grace is called into question.[4]

A focus on God's action is a strength of Wilson's model, but one of the realities of trouble is that it is sometimes hard to see what God is doing. It is also easy to misinterpret what God is doing - as demonstrated by those who have equated conquest with God's gracious action. What becomes challenging for preaching in a postcolonial world is not the balance of trouble and grace in a sermon, but rather the very understanding of what constitutes trouble and grace. From a postcolonial perspective, preachers will wonder: "this is good news for my community, but is it good news for others? And if it is not good news for others, is it still good news for my community?" What God is doing in the world does not always sound like good news for this particular gathered community. It must have been bewildering for listeners in slave-owning congregations in the American South in the era of emancipation, who had long heard slavery equated with gospel in terms of God's ordering of humanity. In terms of perception of the gospel, liberation belonged on trouble's page, if you were preaching to slave owners. And on grace's page if you were preaching to a slave. Perception of trouble and grace depends on who is preaching and who is listening. The cost and benefit of grace and trouble will depend on where you are standing.

It will be bewildering for some listeners today to be challenged with the negative side of their own blessing. For example, in the congregation in which I worship, there are several individuals who hold key positions in Canadian mining corporations. This is their livelihood, this is where they find their vocational purpose and earn the money that benefits their families. They will likely interpret this wealth as blessing, as the outcome of gospel for them. Yet consider a family at the other end of the spectrum - perhaps a family in a Nicaraguan mining town, perhaps one whose land has been confiscated under unfair terms. What is interpreted as gospel by the white executive in Canada is most certainly the trouble from which the Nicaraguan family prays

[4] Wilson does not advocate a strict binary division between trouble and grace, but in fact sees a dynamic relationship between trouble and grace that is helpful here and will be discussed below.

for release. What is gospel in this situation? What is the responsibility of the preacher in terms of naming the trouble experienced by others, especially when that trouble is linked to grace in the experience of others?

A task of postcolonial preaching is to participate in the healing of relationships endangered or destroyed by colonial processes, in fact, to participate in a process of imagining and constructing a future that does justice within these relationships. While governments and national churches seek to redress the past and enact reconciliation in financial, material and symbolic ways, preachers use words and theological imagination. In order to address the continuing effects of colonialism, it is helpful for preachers to consider the contextuality of trouble and grace. An example arises from an important Canadian social issue - the relationship of Canada's aboriginal peoples to the population at large.

Trouble and Grace in Context: Residential Schools and Reconciliation in Canada

Recently, a national process of Truth and Reconciliation has sought to understand the situation of Canada's aboriginal peoples (First Nations). In a similar manner to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this process has named out loud the trouble caused by colonization, racism, and assumption of cultural superiority on the part of white, European settlers in relation to the original inhabitants of the land. The final report of the commission has received considerable attention from media outlets, and has prompted responses and resources from Canadian churches. It is a subject that will, and should, find its way to the pulpit. Canadian Christians are not easily characterized, but many belong to multi-cultural denominations that were established in a colonial age, participated in colonial projects and continue to experience the legacies of the colonial past. Finding the words to articulate gospel amidst these multifaceted and disturbing realities, especially in proximity to aboriginal neighbours, will be a tremendous challenge for preachers. The articulation of trouble and grace is difficult, and becomes formidable when preachers participate in the process of reconciliation.

When European colonizers first landed on the soil that we now call 'Canadian,' the land was already occupied by a native population. While Canada's self-identity is rooted in a sense of tolerance and welcome, the opposite has been true in the experience of aboriginal peoples. As the fledgling nation of Canada was settled in an east-west pattern, the original residents were removed from the lands they called home, and relegated to reserve lands which were not able to support traditional livelihoods. "For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada."[5]

In the late-1800's, schools for aboriginal children were established with the aim of 'removing the Indian from the child,' in other words, assimilating them to the predominant white Christian culture. These schools were part of a systematic act of cultural genocide. In the words of Canada's first Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald,

> When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage

[5] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future. Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,* 1. Public domain. www.trc.ca. Accessed August 19, 2015.

> who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.[6]

Canadian denominations, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, Methodist, and Presbyterian, were active participants in the establishment and operation of residential schools. The fact that former residents of these schools are generally called 'survivors' gives some indication of the conditions within the schools. Harsh discipline, uncomfortable living conditions, and the suppression of aboriginal language were part and parcel of life in the schools. Children were separated from their parents and their culture, and often encountered danger and abuse. Some residential schools remained in operation until the 1990's, thus the memories are recent and the wounds are still fresh for many. The end of residential schools, however, does not signal the end of injustice for Canada's First peoples. Inequality in heath care and education continues, and aboriginal children are at significant risk. Hundreds of aboriginal women are missing or have been found murdered, a vast over-representation in relation to the population at large.[7]

The epigraph to the Truth and Reconciliation report reads: "The truth of our common experiences will help set our spirits free and pave the way to reconciliation,"[8] and the report goes on: "The Survivors acted with courage and determination. We should do no less. It is time to commit to a process of reconciliation. By establishing a new and respectful relationship, we restore what must be restored, repair what must be repaired, and return what must be returned."[9]

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission acknowledges the difficulty of the term reconciliation, an acknowledgment shared by postcolonial theorists. From a postcolonial perspective, there is a suspicion that reconciliation processes, rather than seeking the good of those who have been victims of colonialism, are politically expedient or serve economic interests. Some anti-colonial leaders, such as Franz Fanon, have categorically denied the possibility of reconciliation in a postcolonial society.[10] The word reconciliation implies the restoration of a relationship to a former state, yet few would wish a return to historical modes of relationship among aboriginals and non-aboriginals in Canada. For the Commission, "reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples."[11] This process has indeed begun to change the conversation about this relationship, and raise awareness among Canadians, many of whom are unaware of the degree of pain and destructing lurking in the seemingly benign halls of Canadian history.

The historical relationship among aboriginal peoples and others who dwell in this land has created a postcolonial situation which challenges the colonial question "who is 'savage'"? While white populations acted according to a belief that native peoples were savage because they were not Christian and did not follow European customs, their own behavior was truly savage

---

[6] Canada, House of Commons Debates (9 May 1883), 1107–1108. Quoted in *Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 2.
[7] See the report of the RCMP; available from http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/mmaw-faapd-eng.htm.
[8] www.trc.ca
[9] *Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliaiton Commission*, 6.
[10] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 39.
[11] *Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 6.

and destructive. In the persistent attempt to civilize aboriginal populations, the Canadian government revealed itself to be mired in trouble. Those who perceived their own culture to be superior were in fact revealed to be unjust and irresponsible. Such ambiguity lies at the heart of all colonial relationships.

The Canadian churches' response to the report of the Truth and Reconciliation commission acknowledges that churches "share a responsibility to ensure that the task of reconciliation does not end today"[12] This responsibility will play out through various channels, one of which will be preaching. I perceive reconciliation to be a gospel process - that is, a process that is enabled by God's action in Jesus Christ. It is, however, not a straightforward easy process, but one that is forged amid tears and in the memory of blood.

While we as preachers desire to proclaim the grace of God working in all situations, it is difficult to name that grace out loud sometimes, especially in the presence of those who have long felt the absence of good news, and experienced "God's Presence" not as a healing light but as a punitive weapon in the hands of colonial agents. Lurking at the back of our minds is the question that we dare not ask out loud - where was God when all this was going on? Amid "wounds so deep that healing could not happen" where and what is good news?[13] What is good news in light of injustice? What is good news in light of cultural genocide? These questions might seem shockingly unfaithful, yet they signal an acknowledgement of the depth of the trouble caused by human abuse of power. To ask these troubled questions in the development of sermons and in sermons themselves is to wonder aloud what many listeners are already thinking. Acknowledging the experiences of abandonment, punishment, degradation enacted in the name of God is an important step on the path toward reconciliation. The proclamation of grace will need to untangle the actions of humanity from the actions of God, freeing God from colonial entanglement. We proclaim our Creator as the One who calls us away from power abuses and the violent suppression of difference which are not permissible in the household of God. We proclaim God as the one who listens to desolate questions, embraces lament, comforts the broken-hearted. This aims not only at the healing of victims, not only the forgiveness of oppressors, but the restructuring of the relationships among those who exist in a colonized space.

As we preach the gracious act of God in forgiving our sins, it is also necessary to keep in mind that hearing that God forgives the sins of perpetrators may be difficult for victims to hear. Does it sound like good news that God will forgive the vilest offender when you have been damaged by that offender? Forgiveness is Gospel, and we will not stop preaching the good news of forgiveness. However, the proclamation of forgiveness in a postcolonial age requires a commitment to deep theological struggle and to articulating the ambiguity inherent in this kind of 'good news.'

To acknowledge a negative legacy of the church such as residential schools takes humility. This involves not only a true accounting of past wrongs, but also retracting past claims of superiority and arrogance. It is good for us as a Christian community to practice humility. But it may be 'good for us' in the same way that eating broccoli and exercising are good for us. The gospel, the good news, is not preached effortlessly in this situation. The gospel of reconciliation, of equality, of reparation and truth - it is unpalatable for those who have the most to gain from injustice. It may also be unpalatable for those for whom words like "reconciliation" sound like a

[12] Statement made by several Canadian Churches in response to the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Ottawa, June 2, 2015; Available from http://presbyterian.ca/2015/06/11/churches-response-trc/.
[13] Canadian Churches response to final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

call to abandon just anger, or 'get over it', or shake hands with the abuser, or to shut up. According to the Rev. Stan McKay, a residential schools survivor,

> [There must be] a change in perspective about the way in which Aboriginal peoples would be engaged with Canadian society in the quest for reconciliation.... [We cannot] perpetuate the paternalistic concept that only Aboriginal peoples are in need of healing.... The perpetrators are wounded and marked by history in ways that are different from the victims, but both groups require healing.... How can a conversation about reconciliation take place if all involved do not adopt an attitude of humility and respect? ... We all have stories to tell and in order to grow in tolerance and understanding we must listen to the stories of others.[14]

McKay names a repeated refrain of postcolonial theology - that both colonized and colonizer are in need of healing. All have been part of the process of trouble whether as victims, perpetrators, or bystanders, and all are in need of grace. A challenge of preaching in postcolonial mode, however, is finding ways to articulate trouble and grace amid the complexities of woundedness, responsibility and power.

Preaching Trouble and Grace in a Postcolonial Church

Preaching in a postcolonial context calls for a more fluid, ambiguous, contextual view of trouble and grace. Gospel effectually contains both trouble and grace - it convicts us, challenges us, urges change, pries our fingers from beloved possessions, spins us out of our comfort zones, and then it forgives us, reorients us, embraces us, energizes us, recreates us. Trouble and grace, then exist in a dynamic relationship. Paul Wilson characterizes this as a tensive metaphor.[15] "By juxtaposing trouble and grace, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, a third identity is generated, an identity of faith, hope, and love of God and neighbor. The result is far from a static notion of polar opposites, it is a generative postmodern tension. . ." [16]

The space between trouble and grace, then, is dialogical and productive - within this space, God produces something new. This brings to mind the postcolonial concept 'third space.'[17] Elsewhere, I have argued that a postcolonial sermon can function as a third space in which persons affected by colonial processes find space to encounter one another in the presence of the Triune God.[18] Such a space honors the ambiguities of colonial relationship by conceding that there is more to 'truth' than meets the eye. Listeners are given permission to ponder the their own ambiguous location in the midst of empire, and to ponder the ambiguous nature of trouble and grace in their own lives. It is a space in which truth can be negotiated. Thus, in this sense, experiences of trouble and grace can be spoken, modified, discussed, and transformed. When the sermon functions as a third space, we listen more carefully to learn what constitutes trouble, and

---

[14] Stan McKay, "Expanding the Dialogue on Truth and Reconciliation - In a good way," in *Speaking my Truth: Reflections on Reconciliation and Residential Schools. Volume 1: From Truth to Reconciliation*, ed. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 107; available from http://speakingmytruth.ca. Accessed August, 19, 2015.
[15] Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 92.
[16] Ibid., 99.
[17] 'Third space' is a metaphorical concept introduced by postcolonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha. When 'colonized' and 'colonizer' come into proximity, an opportunity arises to challenge assumptions about difference, cultural purity, and power. The encounter is potentially transformative, and the parties involved may be released from historical patterns. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 14.
[18] See Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014).

what constitutes grace in a particular setting. Most importantly, we can test our theological assumptions about what God is doing in the world, ensuring that we are not merely affirming human action and naming it 'grace.'

Preachers, week to week and day to day, want to say something that is true about God and about the world. Postcolonial theology serves to remind preachers that the utterance of truth is complicated. Our utterance of truth is only partial, and more than one thing can be true in relation to any given text or contemporary situation. Modern truth and reconciliation processes demonstrate that multiple truths, even opposing truths, can be spoken simultaneously. As we construct sermons, we can fruitfully wonder where there is space for more than one truth to be spoken. Honoring difference in human experience is a key aspect of postcolonial preaching, and will include an openness to various experiences of trouble and grace. Honoring difference is a necessary stance for preaching toward reconciliation. "Writing and reading in the service of forgiveness and reconciliation require participants willing to risk vulnerability to the unfamiliar and unknown, and involve creating a narrative that forgoes univocal logic for the sake of promoting human renewal and advancement toward new horizons."[19] In the same way, postcolonial preaching invites vulnerability and acknowledgement of diversity, looking toward the horizon of God's future.

Sermons that hold trouble and grace in tension offer several advantages for preaching that respond to colonial and imperial reality. First, these sermons allow for a sustained look at trouble. Rather than skipping over difficult realities in a rush to get to the good news of God's love, these sermons abide, for a long moment, on the pain and suffering. In terms of the Canadian process of reconciliation, it's not about closing a chapter in Canadian history, but rather, holding the book open so that we do not forget. The news is in fact so terrible that we want to glance at it and then shut our eyes to avoid the glare. However, in the postcolonial context, Christians are invited to confess their entanglement in colonial systems, and bear responsibility for the suffering and healing of others. This calls for sustained attention to trouble, especially as our attention is an act of grace toward those who suffer. In addition, a postcolonial sermon will explicitly includes colonialism/imperialism as trouble both in the biblical text, and in the historical and contemporary world. Naming trouble will affirm the experience of those whose lives have been negatively affected, and may educate those who are unaware of their own participation/responsibility.

Second, these sermons offer an opportunity to talk about the very nature of good news. We can challenge prevailing social conceptions of 'good news.' We can acknowledge that we may need time to adjust to good news. The redistribution of resources in pursuit of justice is certainly something advocated by Jesus, and is consistent with Judeo-Christian theological traditions. It is certainly gospel, but it is not good news for those who stand to lose material resources, or power, or even to lose 'face.' Postcolonial preaching involves wrestling 'good news' away from predominant cultural forms. According to the gospel, humility, justice, loss, dying to self- these are all good news. This is a stark contrast to the empire's gospel according to which power, wealth and privilege are worthy goals. Preaching can itself be an experience of gospel - in which listeners experience a sense of forgiveness, a sense of healing, the simple grace of hearing that they are loved both as victims and perpetrators.

One of the most profound lessons of the trouble-grace mode of preaching is that human beings are not powerful. God's grace is always what gets us out of trouble. This is significant in

[19] Julie McGonegal, *Imagining Justice: The Politics of Forgiveness of Reconciliation* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2009), 11.

the face of historical and contemporary manifestations of colonialism and imperialism, which reveals repeated attempts of various groups historically to seize power and control over other lands and peoples. Yet according to postcolonial theory, even colonizers are not as powerful as they think they are. All of us, whether we belong to more or less powerful groups, are still colonized by a system that is more powerful than any of us. No matter how faithfully we try to dismantle the imperial machine, history has shown that human community is powerless to extricate itself from the threads of empire. As a preacher, I cannot address or redress the wrongs that have been done to aboriginal communities by generations of Canadians. My membership in the household of God means that I share responsibility even when I am not guilty. But there is nothing I can say or do that will restore what has been lost. In our search for a renewed and reconciled community then, we are thrown back on God's resources. This will not initially sound or feel like good news to people who are seeking control and influence over their own lives. It will not sound like good news for preachers who long to fix what is broken. Following the June 2015 shootings in Charleston SC, homiletician Sam Persons Parkes wrote:

> It is tempting for me to finish the sermon with the modal verbs of trouble-must, should, ought (e.g. "We must work toward reconciliation," or "We ought to do this or that."). These verbs invariable cast us back on our own feeble resources. Instead, employ the verbs of empowerment - can, may, might. What capacity for reconciliation has God opened up in us in light of the cross and resurrection that we could not muster ourselves? There, at that point, rests a gospel that is greater than our own power.[20]

It is appropriate to confess the limited power of the church given its historical inability to avoid entanglement with the powers fuelling colonialism/imperialism. "We" have not been able to prevent or adequately atone for the wrongs that have been, and continue to be. "We" can barely muster the vocabulary to name out loud our own complicity and responsibility. Postcolonial preaching will be most effective when it acknowledges the limitations of human power, and the destruction inherent in relying on human power systems. It is only divine, gracious power that will offer freedom from domination, and release communities for reconciliation. By putting God at the centre of our sermons, we are dislocating the powers of colonialism that have divided communities in countless ways, and reminding ourselves and our listeners that abundant life will come not from misuse of power but from the creative power of Love. Problematizing the firm distinction between trouble and grace will hopefully not result in a murky proclamation, but in good news that is a more adequate and fitting response to trouble. It is the articulation of a gospel that speaks a fuller truth.

[20] Sam Persons Parkes. Facebook. Accessed. June 21, 2015.

One Nation, Two States, and Two Words of God?: The Gospel of Reconciliation and the Theological Tasks of Preaching from a Korean Perspective

Yohan Go
Doctoral Student in Homiletics and Practical Theology
Boston University School of Theology
Boston, Massachusetts
www.bu.edu/sth

Introduction

In search of his unfolding vision of homiletical theology, David Jacobsen offers a profound insight about how homiletics is a particular way of doing theology in relation to practices and theories of preaching, and context. Homiletics does not merely use theologies. Homiletics itself is a place for doing theology in its conversational and rhetorical mode, constructing provisional theological understandings at a moment when traditions no longer speak all that is needed in that moment.[1] This "unfinished" or provisional character of homiletical theology partly comes from the contextual and provisional nature of the gospel itself. While Christian gospel is essentially linked to the past event of Jesus Christ, the gospel as good news is always defined in relation to a context and situation where the gospel unfolds. In Edward Farley's words, preaching the gospel is "to bring to bear a certain past event on a present situation so as to open up the future."[2] To be good news, the gospel must be a response to the bad news in a particular place and time. The gospel cannot be defined acontextually because the bad news not only varies from place to place but it also always keeps changing. In this sense, the gospel cannot simply be identified with some biblical contents or doctrines. It is not a full-blown and unchanging belief system that the church possesses permanently. Rather, as Douglas John Hall argues, the gospel is something that the church has to discover, rediscover, receive and rearticulate ever anew in its worldly context to be the church.[3] Further, the gospel named in a context is always interwoven with culture/context. It is difficult to reflect on the gospel without considering it in a particular context. This profound interwovenness of the gospel with culture/context calls for a critical reflection of approaches to relating the gospel and culture/context for homiletical theology and how they interact with each other. This provisional and contextual character of the gospel requires a holistic approach to the gospel and context.

Therefore, I want to reflect on the gospel in Korean context by examining how the gospel has interacted with the socio-political and religio-cultural context of Korea, shaping and being shaped by each other. I will also name what the gospel is in the contemporary Korean context, namely, the gospel of reconciliation, and offer a reflection on its implications for Korean preaching and North American homiletics. Since the purpose of this paper is not an extensive historical review of how the gospel has unfolded throughout Korean history, I will focus on two

---

[1] David Schnasa Jacobsen, "The Unfinished Task of Homiletical Theology," in *Homiletical Theology: Preaching as Doing Theology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 47-53.
[2] Edward Farley, *Practicing Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 80.
[3] Douglas Hall and Edward Farley share a similar view on gospel as the mystery. Gospel is not fixed and unchanging entity, nor something that we can invent, master or possesses permanently. For Farley, gospel is the mystery of God's salvific action in relation to concrete human context with which we have to continue to struggle to fathom it. For Hall, gospel is something that has been done for us by God and we have to discover and rediscover the gospel in ever-changing context. See. Douglas John Hall, *Waiting for Gospel* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 8-9; Farley, *Practicing Gospel*, 81.

significant historical events that have influenced the formation of enduring patterns of Korean context: Japanese colonialism and the division of the Korea Peninsula. Two primary reasons for the historical review are to examine the relationship of scripture/tradition and culture/context and to uncover "the disguised suppression of the past"[4] in the present situation in order to name the gospel in the contemporary Korean context.[5]

The Gospel Proclaimed and The Gospel Heard in the Time of National Crisis

While the word of the gospel itself is *extra nos*, gospel is always incarnate in context when it is proclaimed. Gospel is always communicated through various religious and cultural mediums such as languages, symbols, and narratives. However, cultural mediums themselves are not neutral. They are deeply entangled with the whole systems of meanings, reflecting distinctive cultural ethos, worldviews, and values. Further, context is not a passive recipient of the gospel. David Jacobsen and Robert Kelly define context as "enduring realities of culture, society, and language that shape our understanding and orient, for good or for ill, the way in which we hear the gospel."[6] In other words, context shapes the interpretive lens through which we understand the world and the Scripture, orienting our ways of hearing the gospel as it shapes and reorients our ways of interpretation. We can neither clearly separate the gospel from the culture/context, nor simply identify the gospel with culture/context. What is at stake is how to define the relationship of the gospel and context. Naming gospel in context as the moment of interaction between scripture/tradition and culture/context can be articulated in various ways in terms of one's understanding of the relationship of them. In this section, I will elaborate on my own position by examining the relationship between the gospel proclaimed by Western missionaries and the gospel heard by early Korean Christians.

The late 19th century and the early 20th century was a time of initial dynamic interaction between scripture/tradition and Korean culture/context which shaped a basic ethos of Korean Protestant Christianity. It was also the period of the national crisis and a socio-political upheaval in Korea caused by the geopolitics of the reign. In short, Korea was in rapid decline in all aspects while surrounding countries, especially Japan, wanted to take control of it for their benefits. Furthermore, Korea became the battlefield of the two wars between rival countries (Sino-Japan War in 1895 and the Russo-Japanese War in 1904) and a prize for the winner. After winning two wars, Japan declared itself a protectorate of Korea in 1905 and annexed Korea in 1910. Koreans suffered from Japanese colonial rule until they were liberated in 1945. It is during this time of national crisis and rapid social change that Western missionaries arrived in Korea, proclaiming the good news since 1884. What was the gospel proclaimed by Western missionaries? Did Koreans hear the glad tidings? How did the gospel interact with the context?

---

[4] Ibid., 39.

[5] In this article, I focus more on the relationship of socio-political context of Korea and the gospel than religio-cultural context for two reasons. First, socio-political situations not only demands urgent responses from the church and calls for homiletical theological reflection on gospel in context, but it also shapes people's way of understanding of the world and the sense of identity like religions shape the worldview of people. Second, the relationship of socio-political context of Korea and the formation of Korean preaching has not been the major subject of research in the field of homiletics, comparing to studies about the influence of traditional religious and cultural traditions on Korean preaching. For studies about the relationship of traditional Korean religious traditions and Korean preaching, see Jung Young Lee, *Korean Preaching: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997). Also see EunJoo Mary Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1999), 15-33.

[6] David Jacobsen and Robert Kelly, *Kairos Preaching: Speaking Gospel to the Situation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 29.

Due to the theological and denominational diversity of early missionaries, it is difficult to find a monolithic understanding of the gospel. However, there were common threads that unified missionaries' differences, namely, Puritanic zeal, pietistic faith, and nineteenth-century Evangelicalism.[7] Depending on the denomination, a certain type of faith is more prominent than the other two like Presbyterians for puritanistic faith and Methodist for pietistic faith. Nevertheless, missionaries shared common features of all three types of faith. In this perspective, the general characteristics of missionaries' faith were a belief in the absolute authority of the Bible, Christocentric faith, and an emphasis on individual salvation by faith and the importance of personal moral living. Further, the separation between the church and the nation was missionaries' basic stance on the church-state relationship, keeping the church away from political affairs.[8] These characteristics of missionaries' faith influenced their understandings of the gospel that were reflected in their preaching. Jangmyeon Jung analyzes missionaries' sermons, which were published in journals of three denominations, Presbyterian, Methodist, and the Holiness churches, during Japanese colonialism. He identifies common characteristics of missionaries preaching as follows: First, denominational differences were not clearly represented in sermons. Sermons commonly reflect evangelical theology emphasizing personal salvation through Jesus Christ by faith and highlight strict moral living for Christians. Second, doctrines are the main content of sermons, particularly, Christology, and the sermon form, in general, was deductive-topical preaching. Third, no sermon dealt with social and political issues. Sermons focus on individual moral transformation, not social transformation.[9] From these characteristics of missionaries' faith and sermons, we can surmise missionaries' general understanding of the gospel as truth for individual salvation through Jesus Christ by faith in the Bible. Although missionaries had to adopt cultural mediums to communicate the gospel, Christological focus and a high view of the Bible as the word of God created an asymmetrical relationship of scripture/tradition and culture/context in understanding the gospel. The primary task of preaching is to interpret and explicate the Bible in terms of traditions and doctrines for the life-giving message of salvation.[10] Thus, missionaries' theological orientations determined the message of the gospel for preaching. Further, missionaries' policy of separating the church from politics made the gospel silent on socio-political situations of Korea.

Did Koreans hear the gospel from missionaries' preaching? Yes. Koreans heard the gospel. However, the gospel Koreans heard was not identical to the gospel missionaries proclaimed. Arthur J. Brown, a missionary and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in the early 20th century, described that "He [Koreans] came to Christianity out of deeper sorrows than the self-confident Chinese and the masterful Japanese… The oppressed, despairing, impoverished, emotional Korean approach Christ from a different angle than the

[7] Dukju Yi, "Chogi Nehan Sugyosadulye Sinanggw Sinhak(Early Missionaries' Faith and Theology)," *gidokgy uksayunguso(The Institute of the History of Christianity in Korea)* 30, no. 64 (1997.2): 50-58.
[8] Sebastian C. H. Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 90.
[9] Jangmyeon Jung, "Chogi Sungyosadulyeo Sulgyoye Gwanhan Yeongu (A Study On Early Missionaries' Sermons," *The Gospel and Praxis* 20 (2009/Fall): 310-311.
[10] Missionaries' understandings of preaching in three denominations commonly emphasize the centrality of the Bible for preaching. Although some missionaries acknowledged the significance of the context for preaching, context is always secondary for the task of preaching. See. Jangmyeon Jung, 289, 296, 302. Also see. Sunggu Jung, "Han'guk Gyohye Sulgyosacho I (A History of Preaching in Korean Protestant Church I)," *Sinhakjinam (Journal of Theology)* 192 (Fall 1981): 179-183.

proud, ambitious, and all conquering Japanese."[11] Unlike missionaries, it was the urgent socio-political situation that determined Koreans' way of hearing the gospel, not doctrinal frameworks. Crises in the late 19th century and the early 20th century were not merely political crises, but more profoundly an identity crisis. Traditionally, China was 'the significant other' in the formation of Korean national identity culturally and politically. Confucianism from China provided a religious and theoretical foundation for Korean social order and ethics in which loyalty to the king and filial piety to parents constituted the two pillars of the basic social relationship. Kinship and the social relationship determined individual identity in Confucian society. De-centering of China and the destruction of the old Korean kingdom Chosun at the hands of Japan not only destroyed a traditional 'Sino-centered' political order and the sovereignty of Korea, but it also dismantled the Confucian social structure in Korea that was the basis for ethics and Korean identity. This crisis of Korean identity attracted many Koreans to Christianity.[12]

Koreans approached Christianity with their own socio-political concerns which determined the initial direction of dialogue between the gospel and context as well as the whole process of interpretation of the gospel. This does not mean that the Bible or the gospel proclaimed by missionaries was a mere resource for the interpretation. Rather, they were active dialogue partners. The Bible and missionaries' preaching provided their own understandings of the gospel from their own perspectives and reoriented the initial direction of the dialogue by posing new questions to context. For example, missionaries' understanding of the gospel as personal salvation through Jesus Christ by faith challenged a traditional notion of self in Korean society, introducing a new way of understanding of self as individuals. In traditional Confucian society, the sense of self was derived from a community and individuals existed only as part of the community. A community is prior to a person and submission to social norms is the way to reach the utmost level of sacredness such as the will of heaven.[13] Missionaries' emphasis on the active role of the individual in conversion and the importance of personal responsibility for faith and moral living reversed the priority between the community and the person, offering a new sense of self derived from one's personal relationship with God. Thus, the gospel proclaimed by missionaries altered early Korean Christians' traditional understanding of human beings, which was based on Confucian philosophy, and influenced their way of seeking a solution to the crisis of Korean identity. The gospel heard by Korean Christians emerged through a mutual dialogue between the gospel proclaimed by missionaries and particular concerns for socio-political crises. In the interaction between the gospel and Koreans' socio-political experience, something new arose, namely, the gospel of liberation through the moral renewal of individuals. While the gospel proclaimed by missionaries was apolitical messages of spiritual salvation and personal transformation, the gospel heard by Korean Christians was the glad tidings of personal salvation, social transformation and political liberation through personal moral renewal that became the resource for resisting Japanese colonial rule. When the gospel was heard, it enlightened people and awakened the national spirit of liberty. The gospel heard by early Korean Christians was both spiritual and political. Unlike missionaries, early Korean Protestant leaders frequently preached about the independence of Korea through personal moral renewal, contributing to the

[11] Arthur Judson Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East the Story of Korea's Transformation and Japan's Rise to Supremacy in the Orient* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 539.
[12] Sebastian C. H. Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 79-81.
[13] Kyong Ju Kim, *The Development of Modern South Korea: State Formation, Capitalist Development and National Identity* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 52.

formation of Korean nationalism and the March First Independence Movement in 1919. Thus, the gospel influenced the transformation of the context while the context also expanded the scope of the gospel, embracing socio-political dimensions of the good news.

Unfortunately, the March First Independence Movement failed due to the violent suppression of the Japanese government, and the Korean Protestant church became a main target of that suppression and surveillance. As a result, the majority of Korean Protestant Christians withdrew from political involvement in the independence movement and pursued a purely religious path, separating Christian faith from politics. Furthermore, the suppression under Japan also influenced the consolidation of some features of Korean Protestant popular religiosity that are "ethical-theological conservatism," "faith seeking blessings," and premillennial eschatological orientation.[14] Although these characteristics of Korean Protestant religiosity emerged as a response to the particular socio-political situation of oppression, this religiosity has profoundly oriented, for good or for ill, the way of hearing the gospel for subsequent generations of Korean Protestants. What is necessary is to rediscover and rearticulate the gospel in relation to the contemporary context, expanding the narrowly articulated understanding of the gospel during the Japanese colonial period and recovering socio-political dimensions of the good news.

The Deep Scar on the Korean Peninsula and the Gospel of Reconciliation

In search of the meanings of Korean history, Sok Hon Ham, the philosopher, historian, and social activist in Korea, contends the basic thrust of Korean history is suffering.[15] The geopolitical location of Korea made it "the Queen of Suffering."[16] As a relatively small country in the midst of powerful countries, Korea has continuously experienced numerous foreign invasions by surrounding countries throughout its history. Korea often became the battlefield between rival countries and was occupied by the winner, Japan, for 36 years. Although Korea was liberated in 1945, it was divided by two global superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Korea soon became another battlefield between two competing ideological parties that devastated the entire peninsula. Thus, the pain of suffering and sorrow has been deeply engraved in the life of Koreans. According to Andrew Sung Park, these traumatic experiences of foreign invasions, wars, political oppressions, and unjust sufferings over many generations create collective unconscious *han*, the critical wound of the heart. H*an* of the past has been transmitted from generation to generation through the framework of ethnic ethos, tradition and culture, still impacting the present lives of Koreans.[17] The Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) which runs across the Korean Peninsula most vividly visualizes the collective experience of *han* and a deep scar in the heart of every Korean. No one would oppose reading the contemporary socio-political situation of Korea as a wound that demands a response of change. If the gospel is to be the good news, it must, in the first place, respond to the *han* of the people and heal the deepest wounds in their hearts. The first step for the positive disintegration of *han* is awakening: recognition of the reality of *han* and identification of the cause of *han*.[18] Since I have demonstrated the reality of *han* in a Korean context, I will begin with identifying the cause of *han* in divided Korea in order to name the gospel as the response to *han*.

---

[14] Sebastian C. H. Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 139-143.
[15] Ham Sok Hon, *Queen of Suffering: A Spiritual History of Korea*, ed. J.A. Sullivan, trans. E. Sang Yu (Philadelphia: Friends World Committee for Consultation, 1985), 19.
[16] Ibid., 22-24.
[17] Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 38-41.
[18] Ibid., 138.

On the surface, the division of Korea caused by two foreign powers and the enduring division of Korea for seventy years is the root cause of *han*. However, the real cause of *han* is what has made this reality of division of Korea perpetuating. To identify the cause of *han* in relation to the task of preaching the gospel, we need to frame the complex contemporary socio-political situation of Korea to a manageable size. Mary McClintock Fulkerson provides valuable insights for this task. In framing a situation by using a postmodern theory of place, Fulkerson defines place as "a gathering of meanings that endures through practices."[19] Place has a unity, holding diverse elements together in a particular configuration that creates some kind of unified reality, and its enduring pattern sustained by ongoing practices.[20] From this perspective, we need to consider the following: First, how various elements such as power and memory relating to North Korea have been ordered in a particular configuration, creating a kind of unified reality; and second, what practices sustain this enduring pattern of reality, namely, the division of North and South Korea. Preaching the gospel may not change the situation itself, but it can alter some core practices that sustain the persisting pattern of division.

The traumatic experience of the Korean War and the prolonged military tension between the two Koreas has profoundly shaped political discourse and practices. Although the Cold War ended long ago, the dominant political framework and the image of North Korea as the primary enemy are still entrenched in the Cold War era. In the unstable political situation of the divided Korea, national security has always been of the utmost importance which unites various socio-political elements in a particular configuration. Inner social and political conflicts between parties or different social groups always decrease as the tension between North and South Korea mounts. However, security and insecurity is a political imagination in response to external circumstances rather than a reality. The North and South Korean states monopolize all aspects of security and strictly control cross-border relations. Due to the absence of face-to-face relationship of ordinary citizens between North and South Korea, the two states construct and reproduce the particular image of the other Korea as a threat to national security, evoking old memories of the war and provoking fear toward one another. States construct a kind of unified social and political reality through national security practices. Further, states' imaginative political construction of reality has profoundly shaped Korean identity. People derive their identity from various sources such as family, religion and ethnicity. However, the Cold War and the experience of the Korean War have made ideological identification as the prevailing factor over all others for Korean identity.[21] In other words, the dominant factor that determines Korean identity is one's ideological identification either with communism or capitalism. In this sense, Ronal Bleiker argues, "identity in Korea is essentially constructed in negative terms; that is, in direct opposition to the other side of the divided nation."[22] He also points out that antagonistic identity practices by states are the main source of tension between North and South Korea.[23] The North and South Korean states have not only controlled individuals' images of the socio-political reality, but it also shaped Korean identity. This exclusive and antagonistic identity construction becomes a source of oppression and discrimination against all "others" who do not belong to the in-group. The difference is often regarded as a threat to the unity of the society. What becomes

[19] Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 36.
[20] Ibid., 28, 32.
[21] Roland Bleiker, *Divided Korea: Toward a Culture of Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 10.
[22] Roland Bleiker, "Identity and Security in Korea", *The Pacific Review* 14, no. 1 (2001): 126.
[23] Roland Bleiker, *Divided Korea*, 18.

clear is that the cause of *han* perpetuating the division of Korea is rooted in the socio-political construction and reproduction of antagonistic identities by the states in the name of national security.

Unfortunately, except for a few progressive Protestant churches, most conservative Korean Protestant churches internalized the antagonistic identity imposed by the state. Instead of being an agent of reconciliation, Korean Protestant churches became institutions that reproduce anti-communist identity, stimulating fear and hatred toward North Korea. The primary reason that has made Korean Protestant churches vulnerable to the state's manipulation is the principle of separation of church and state, keeping political affairs apart from the church and the pulpit. Due to the strong influence of missionaries on the Korean Protestant church's understanding of the church-state relationship and the Japanese suppression of the church, Korean Protestant churches separated spiritual matters from political matters. Consequently, Korean Protestant church unconsciously accepted an imaginative binary socio-political construction of reality by the states and internalized an antagonistic identity that has profoundly shaped Korean Christian's way of hearing the gospel. Due to the internalization of the exclusive system of identity, Korean Protestant churches have gotten "the Korean disease."[24] Korean Protestant churches have a strong tendency of dualistic and antagonistic ways of reasoning that leads to the division of Korean churches. Korean Protestant churches have often labeled those who have different interpretations of the scripture as heretics or less pure churches. Dualistic and antagonistic ways of thinking hinders Korean Protestant churches from working together for the reconciliation of Korea. Another reason that hinders Korean Protestant churches to be an agent of reconciliation is the prevailing influence of Korean Protestant popular religiosity that has shaped Korean Protestant Christians' way of hearing the gospel. This does not mean that Korean Protestant popular religiosity is entirely negative. Korean Protestant popular religiosity is the outcome of a sincere religious quest for the Christian faith in response to a particular cultural and socio-political situation of suppression and suffering under the Japanese colonial rule. In short, Korean Protestant popular religiosity contributes to the formation of the conservative ethos of Korean Protestant churches seeking for *status quo*, a faith of seeking this-worldly blessing and other-worldly salvation. The gospel is often narrowly understood as the good news about personal spiritual salvation by faith or material and spiritual blessings in Korean Protestant popular religiosity. Hence, Korean Protestant churches have lost a prophetic voice for the society. A theological task of preaching is a critical reflection on Korean Protestant popular religiosity and its ways of understanding the gospel, discerning its positive and negative contributions for preaching the gospel. If it is necessary, preaching as the theological act has to deconstruct the popular understanding of the gospel and propose a new way of understanding the gospel. In other words, an essential theological task of preaching is to articulate a provisional theology of the gospel in relation to the contemporary Korean context. What is the gospel in the contemporary socio-political situation of divided Korea? It is the gospel of reconciliation.

As I have delineated, one of the main causes of *han* that perpetuates divided Korea is the state's imaginative construction of antagonistic identity toward the other Korea. To be good news, in the first place, the gospel must be a response to this wound in the Korean situation. Preaching the gospel of reconciliation has both deconstructive and constructive tasks: revealing a

[24] The Korean disease refers to some negative characteristic of Koreans society such as "extreme clannishness, stubborn regionalism, excessive loyalty to the alumni network, fanatical sectarianism, pretentious classism and deep-seated patriarchy." See. Anselm Kyonsuk Min, "The Division and Reunification of a Nation," in *Christianity in Korea*, eds. R.E. Buswell and T.S. Lee (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 269.

disguised oppressive structure of contemporary identity politics in Korea, and offering alternative ways of identity construction rooted in the Christian story that contribute to the formation of a culture of reconciliation and the peaceful unification of the Korean peninsula. This does not mean that the gospel of reconciliation always has to deal with the socio-political issues of the reconciliation of divided Korea. Rather the good news is that who we are is ultimately defined by how God relates to us. Although the experience and memory of the past, the way we relate to ourselves, and the way others relate to us do shape our identity, a Christian believes that our identity is fundamentally defined in relation to God who loves us, creates us, relates to us and calls us into communion with God. Thus, the gospel tells us who we truly are.

However, different cultural and socio-political accounts of identity are competing in Korean society. A particularly prominent political account of Korean identity is not being communist. Accepting the Christian account of who we are does not preclude other accounts of identity, nor does it seek a monolithic identity; rather, it take a critical distance from them. Instead of giving ideology an absolute authority to determine our identity, we can discern and make a judgment against evil in dominant socio-political identity construction by accepting the good news that we are fundamentally who we are because of God. In this sense, the gospel of reconciliation is a new lens through which we reinterpret diverse elements such as memory and narratives that constitute our identity.

While antagonistic Korean identity is built on painful memories of the Korean War and politically constructed narratives of North Korea as a threat to national security, the gospel of reconciliation is based on the passion narrative of Jesus Christ, the story of reconciliation between God and human beings. With the keen awareness of "the scandal of the cross,"[25] Miroslav Volf places the cross at the center of Christian identity. He points out two dimensions of the cross: "self-giving love which overcomes human enmity and the creation of space in himself to receive estranged humanity."[26] God embraces hostile humanity into divine communion with God on the cross through self-giving love. God's will to embrace us through self-giving love is prior to our repentance. This is the good news because God already loves us before we change. Through faith, we can open ourselves to God's self-giving love that transforms us and gives us a new identity. The way God relates to us is also a model for how we ought to relate to others. "Will to give ourselves to others and "welcome" them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others."[27] As Triune God relates to us with the will to embrace us, the will to embrace others is prior to any other elements in relating to others including North Korea. Instead of coercing others to be changed, we must have the will to readjust our identity to make space for them so that they can come to us as they are. In this sense, Christian identity is not a fixed or exclusive identity. Rather it is more fluid and open to change in relation to others. From this perspective, we cannot passively accept an antagonistic identity that is built on the will to exclude others. The gospel of reconciliation based on the passion of Christ challenges antagonistic identity practices by states. The good news calls us to repent of enmity toward others and change ourselves, inviting us to be agents of reconciliation.

[25] Although Volf acknowledges diverse critiques on the idea of the divine self-donation on the cross, he still values the idea of God's self-giving love on the cross as a theological resource for Christian identity and social ethics in the violent world. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 26-27.
[26] Ibid., 127.
[27] Ibid., 29.

Robert Schreiter points out the significance of healing memory and of hope for social reconciliation.[28] Because memory continuously shapes our past and present identity, without healing traumatic memory of the past such as the Korean War, there can be no reconciliation between North and South Korea. Further, reconciliation is a long and even nonfinal process. Therefore, we cannot continue to work for reconciliation without hope. In this sense, we need to redeem the traumatic memories of the Korean War and the narrations of the memories that continuously shape the collective identity of Koreans, and retain our hope that the reconciliation and the unification of the Korean peninsula is possible. The gospel of reconciliation can guide this process. Although the gospel of reconciliation closely relates to the passion narrative of Jesus Christ, it is essentially linked to the broad Christian story, namely, creation, redemption and final consummation. By placing our painful memories of the Korean War into this broader Christian narrative and memory, new connections between the traumatic memory of the war and the sacred memory of God are made from which new meanings of the past memories and a new vision for the future can gradually emerge.[29] Further, Christian narrative provides a theological ground of hope for the reconciliation. This hope is not based on blind optimism, but on the eschatological vision for the final reconciliation. The final reconciliation is God's work, not our work, so it is grace. However, the gospel of reconciliation also calls people to work for "a nonfinal reconciliation based on a vision of reconciliation that cannot be undone."[30] Preaching the gospel of reconciliation is a moment of reenactment of the sacred memories of the past, the communal memory of the Passion, and the memory of the future, that is, the vision of eschatological reconciliation. By drawing hearers from the present into this sacred moment of encountering with God, preaching the gospel of reconciliation as a prophetic preaching can "nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us,"[31] resisting states' imposition of an antagonistic identity and finding a radically inclusive, fluid Christian identity rooted in the Christian story.

Implications for Korean Preaching and North American Homiletic

Due to the strong influence of western missionaries in the early period of the Korean Protestant church and the persisting effect of Korean Protestant popular religiosity, salient characteristics of Korean preaching are an emphasis on a personal spiritual salvation, exclusive commitment to Christianity, and seeking for this worldly-blessing and other-worldy salvation. Its message is very apolitical and acontextual. As I have delineated in this article, these features of Korean preaching, as well as dominant Korean Protestant churches' understanding of the gospel, developed as a response to particular religio-cultural and socio-political situations throughout history. However, the gospel articulated in the past is not always the good news in the present. Sometimes, it makes us oblivious of evil in a new context. Therefore, the gospel named in the present not only challenges a hidden reality of the evil in the world, but it also expands the scope of the gospel articulated in the past. The gospel of reconciliation is social and political by nature. It challenges Korean Protestant churches' apolitical articulation of the gospel and makes them

[28] Robert Schreiter, "Establishing a Shared Identity: The Role of the Healing of Memories and of Narrative," in *Peace and Reconciliation: In Search of Shared Identity*, eds. S. Kim, P. Kollontai, and G. Hoyland (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008), 13.

[29] Robert Schreiter and Miroslav Volf propose a similar argument about the relationship of healing memory and the sacred memory of communities. See. Robert Schreiter, 18-19, Also See. Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 96-102.

[30] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 110.

[31] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.

reconsider the church's blind acceptance of the political construction of reality and identity by states. The boundary between church and state or between spiritual matters and political matters is not clear. In fact, both theology and politics are "disciplined imaginations of space and time"[32] in different ways. Hence, we cannot simply separate church and politics. What is necessary is to recover socio-political aspects of the gospel as the early Korean Christians recognized. Instead of only focusing on personal and spiritual salvation, Korean preaching needs to recover a prophetic voice and enter into the public sphere in order to contribute to the creation of a culture of reconciliation and a shared identity.

Preaching the gospel of reconciliation is postcolonial preaching in a Korean context. Kwok Pui-lan, a postcolonial feminist theologian, defines postcolonial preaching as "a locally rooted and globally conscious performance that seeks to create a Third Space so that the faith community can imagine new ways of being in the world and encountering God's salvific action for the oppressed and marginalized."[33] A Third Space is the 'in-between space' where different cultures and identities meet and a new hybrid identity is forged. It transgresses clear boundaries that sustain the separation between self and other, challenging the tyranny of binary logic and exclusive identity politics. Antagonistic identity politics in divided Korea is a residue of the Cold War that ideologically colonized Korea after the liberation from Japan. The gospel of reconciliation seeks to create a Third Space where the binary and antagonistic construction of Korean identity becomes blurred and a shared or a hybrid identity beyond anti-community and anti-capitalist Korean identities can be forged. By accepting that our identity is ultimately defined by God, we can take a critical distance from where we belong and create space for others and embrace them as part of our own identity. Instead of seeking a homogeneous identity, preaching the gospel of reconciliation aims to destabilize hearers from the common sense of antagonistic identity by exposing the hidden reality of identity constructions by states.

By deconstructing a rigid and exclusive system of identity, the gospel of reconciliation not only aims to contribute to the reconciliation of North and South Korea, but it also reveals structural evils within Korean society such as racism, sexism and the oppression of LGBTQ communities. Due to excessive emphasis on a univocal Korean identity based on a closed partisan system of identity, those who do not fit into traditional systems of identity such as immigrants, mixed race children, and LGBTQ persons are discriminated against and even regarded as inferior to those who belong to the dominant group. The gospel of reconciliation acknowledges that all people are children of God and regards differences and otherness as God's gift rather than as a threat. The will to embrace others is fundamental for Christian identity. In this sense, preaching the gospel of reconciliation does not seek to establish a univocal identity, but an open-ended and fluid Christian identity in the face of Others.

What does all this mean to North American preaching? The gospel of reconciliation in Korea not only challenges the identity politics of Korean states, but it also questions the United States' identity politics. Similar to Korea, national security is the main rhetoric that the U.S. government often uses for identity construction. North Korea has been labeled as the axis of evil since 2002. The United States is a "significant other" in forming Korean national identity and the U.S. relationship with North Korea has affected the relationship between North and South Korea.[34] In other words, the United States' international policy and identity politics are

[32] William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (New York: T&T Clark, 2002), 1-3.
[33] Kwok Pui-lan, "Postcolonial Preaching in Intercultural Contexts," *Homiletic* 40, no. 1 (2015): 10.
[34] Gi-Wook Shin, *One Alliance, Two Lenses: U.S.-Korea Relations in a New Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 8-11.

constitutive elements of the contemporary Korean situation. The interrelatedness between the three countries calls North American preachers to take this theological and ethical issue seriously. Instead of blindly accepting politically constructed identity, preachers in the United States need to reconsider who they really are in relation to God and how they should response to those who are regarded as the axis of evil.

"Gospel as Transfiguring Promise: The Unfinished Task of Homiletical Theology in a Context of Disestablishment, Empire, and Race"

David Schnasa Jacobsen, Ph.D.
Professor of the Practice of Homiletics and Director of the Homiletical Theology Project
Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA, www.bu.edu/sth

In her important work on practical theology Mary McClintock Fulkerson argues that theology begins with a wound.[1] The trouble with wounds, however, is that left long enough they bring new troubles in their train. The site of a wound can become the locus of secondary infections, unforeseen complications, and even if healing starts, scar tissue. I extend McClintock Fulkerson's metaphor about theology for a specific reason. If the central task of homiletical theology, and of the practice of preaching that embodies its theological task, is the naming of the gospel, this work is done not in some once-and-for-all state, but with the complications, secondary infections, and scars as they emerge over time. Theology begins with a wound. But homiletical theology is always just getting started—it has unfinished gospel business.[2]

But the task of naming the gospel in context features a further complication: context itself. We might agree that part of the tentativeness that accompanies our work in naming gospel is tempered by the "mystery" of the gospel. Edward Farley himself notes that gospel cannot be named in some simple formula or phrase.[3] Here, however, it may become important to note that we bump up against mystery in context as well. A corollary of the hermeneutic of suspicion should rightly be that contexts (whether in terms of the Freudian unconscious, Marxist economic interest or the Nietzschean will-to-power) are not always readily graspable to the inquiring subject(s). In this sense, contexts are "mysterious" because they are in an age of suspicion profoundly subject to an occluding mystification. More than that, however, contexts are also the place where wounds *compound and complicate* for persons caught up in them, whether as a result of self-interest, oppression, or both. This is to say that contexts are themselves frequently mystifications which end up occluding the true mystery, the mystery that is God. In his book *Race: A Theological* Account J. Kameron Carter point out that the wound is where the suffering is—and where the place of suffering is, there is that strange mystery of God.[4] To approach context in this way is not simply to re-inscribe the dilemma so often lamented that too much attention to "problem" leads to a an inadequate or unfaithful gospel "solution."[5] To approach context as the wound where theology begins its work is to name both the mystifications and the Mystery in *conversation* with gospel.

---

[1] Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*: *Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12ff.

[2] David Schnasa Jacobsen, "Preaching as the Unfinished Task of Theology: Grief, Trauma, and Early Christian Texts in Homiletical Interpretation," *Theology Today* 70:4 (January, 2014), 407-16.

[3] Edward Farley, "Preaching the Bible and Preaching the Gospel," in *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 80.

[4] J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 374.

[5] Charles Campbell criticizes soterialogically focused preaching models that operate from a problem/solution orientation as Christologically inadequate to a faithful rendering of the Biblical narrative of Jesus in *Preaching Jesus*: *New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 221-22. Paul Wilson tries to distinguish his vision of trouble/grace preaching from problem/solution thinking in *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004), 98.

For me the starting point of homiletical theology is discerning some provisional sense of gospel as promise, perhaps what my colleague André Resner elsewhere calls a "working gospel" that is operative whether in preaching from a Biblical text or speaking to a situation.[6] For this project, however, we are all trying to realize how important context already is for discerning gospel in any given time and place. My initial thought in this essay was to pursue with greater depth a contextual issue surfaced by Douglas John Hall. He argues that the challenge of liberation theology for a mainline Protestantism in the process of being culturally disestablished is not to adopt liberation theology consumeristically, but to truly contextualize its own theology—an anti-triumphalistic vision that Hall pursues both in *Has the Church a Future* and even more poignantly in *The Cross in Our Context*.[7] Yet as I write these words in the summer of 2015, I find the gospel *keeps dislocating me*, and thereby calls me even deeper into context.[8] This happened in the first stage of this essay's drafting earlier this year. I realized that I would need to acknowledge how postcolonial theology pushes even Hall's trenchant analysis to a deeper realization of the ways in which a disestablished mainline Protestantism fails to name gospel in terms of its own neo-colonial identity. Here, as Sarah Tavis and Pablo Jimenez have demonstrated, we are even now coming to see how a postcolonial context impacts and complexifies the ways we relate gospel to matters of identity and power in the presence of empire.[9] Over the course of the year, however, even this complexification had to make way for ever deeper analyses of the role of race in a white mainline Protestant context. As I wrote this essay, I found it difficult, in other words, to keep thinking about gospel apart from the appalling events of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Walter Scott in North Charleston, Eric Garner in New York, and Sandra Bland in Texas among far too many other names. It has become clearer to me that to talk about gospel and context also requires understanding what any preacher and any community "notices" and is otherwise "oblivious to"—including precisely those elements of context I have yet to grapple with fully.[10] Can the gospel name g(race) without race in the North American white Protestant church? Homiletical theology, a grasping together of gospel and context, is about bringing Christ to bear in the present so as to open a new future.[11] Yet in the presence of such cultural, colonial, and racial wounds, it is provisional, fragile, *unfinished* theological work.

---

[6] For a more detailed treatment of gospel as promise, see David Schnasa Jacobsen and Robert Allen Kelly, *Kairos Preaching: Speaking Gospel to the Situation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 25-28. André Resner's notion of "working gospel" came from his insightful article, "Reading the Bible for Preaching the Gospel," *Collected Papers of the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics*, 223.

[7] Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 13-14.

[8] For a similar notion, see Charles Campbell and Johan Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), 102.

[9] Pablo Jiménez, "Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic: Justo L. González's Contribution to Hispanic Preaching," in Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo L. González (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 159-67 and "The Troublemaker's Friend: From Text to Sermon in a Postcolonial Context," in *Apuntes* 34:3 (Fall, 2014), 84-90 and Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).

[10] My analysis here depends in part on the very insightful work on obliviousness in the work of Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "A Place to Appear: Ecclesiology as if Bodies Matter," *Theology Today*, vol. 67 (2007), 159-171.

[11] Farley, *Practicing Gospel*, 80.

Toward a Theology of the Gospel in Context

This essay endeavors to show how this central task of homiletical theology is done in deep relationship to context. At the same time, because of the nature of the gospel in context *and* the complicating feature of wounds, homiletical theology needs to acknowledge that the gospel it names is ever mystery--that its contexts sometimes escape our ideological notice, and that situations can intrude even on the obliviousness of privilege to demand further homiletical reflection on the gospel itself. In all these respects, the task of homiletical theology is indeed unfinished—even as it seeks to name gospel clearly. In particular, this paper will carry forward the argument from my article in *Theology Today*, "Preaching as the Unfinished Task of Theology: Grief, Trauma, and Early Christian Texts in Homiletical Interpretation." While in that article the focus is on the unfinished theological work of the scriptures, here in this essay the focus will shift more explicitly to context and situation: the dynamics of each as they shape the homiletical-theological task—even in the presence of wounds, complications, and scars. And yet the task is opened profoundly in faith—the risen One *is* the crucified One, as even Hall would confess. Such a path toward naming gospel is troubled, but it is nonetheless profoundly gracious.

In what follows I intend to show that the context for naming gospel in the white mainline church is sufficiently complicated to revisit key elements of a theology of the gospel. It begins with the struggle of coming to terms with identity in relationship to the gospel/culture dynamic. It turns ultimately to this struggle's unique relation to promise, both in the sense of the promise's presence of Christology, and promise's eschatological invitation to communion. Throughout I will draw in particular on the work of postcolonial theorists as well as theologians of race like J. Kameron Carter and Willie Jennings. As we do so, we will retrace a wound deep within the memorial tradition as it was formed under empire and re-opened in terms of race. In this way we will be taking up the unfinished theological task of the largely white, mainline Protestant church in North America in order to name gospel in its midst.

A Diptych of the Wound: Alexamenos meets Titus' Arch for a Gospel Forum

The task for a theology of the gospel was set up strikingly in Charles Campbell and Johan Cilliers' *Preaching Fools*. Using the well-known graffito of Alexamenos on Palatine Hill in Rome, Campbell and Cilliers make a powerful claim for a vision of the gospel understood as foolishness.[12] Within the scheme of Roman power and knowledge, the crucified donkey bears witness to the foolish claim that is the Christian gospel. From this second-century CE inscription we can see the foolish core of that message. It is, to my mind, a stunning pre-Constantinian ironic mockery of the gospel which now disestablished mainline Protestants can embrace in a post-Constantinian context. In the face of Roman power, the gospel is foolishness. Alexamenos "worships his god," indeed!

If one, however, were to continue wandering from Palatine Hill through the Forum in Rome, one would come across yet another important, this time official, inscription from the Roman imperial period. To commemorate the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple during the Jewish War, Titus commissioned an arch for the event of the victory parade through Rome. On this late first-century CE arch you can see a picture of a menorah, a symbol of the spoils of war and the humiliation of the community it represents. It is this traumatic event, of course, that drives the production of so much of the New Testament after Paul. And the conflict that this

[12] Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools*, 2ff.

destruction sets loose for an early Christian movement still within Judaism is profoundly formative.

Within a short historical time span, and even a shorter distance in the inscribed and monumental spaces of the city of Rome, you can see these two icons that function for us as contextual-theological bookends to the struggle of the early church. Whatever the message of the Christians is in all its foolish opposition to Roman power, it is also tied deeply to the Jewish context of Temple destruction and historical grief in which that gospel arose. Thus, the diptych reminds us that the early Christian message is related to an identity being formed in relation both to Rome and with respect to a Jewish community undergoing cultural redefinition. The gospel is formed, I would suggest, in relation to Rome and the trauma of the destruction of the Second Temple.

Revisiting the Wound: Gospel in Identity and Culture Today

Contemporary preaching happens in the space between preachers and hearers in the world. It is an intrinsically contextual activity. This requires preachers to be able to reflect not just theologically on the content of preaching—as important as that is—but to think theologically about the context that connects pulpit to pew and church to the world. This contextual space has generated, of course, several ways of thinking about the nature of the gospel in preaching and its relationship to culture. With the rising awareness of the cultural disestablishment of the Protestant mainline and the eclipsing of its privileged role as a kind of chaplain to power, many practitioners have begun to articulate a gospel witness that goes beyond liberal formulations to postliberal ones. That is as it should be. And yet coming to terms with the church's disestablishment and an embrace of its post-Constantinian status may be only part of the issue. We have already noted how theologian Douglas John Hall argues that the theological challenge of the mainline Protestant church in North America is its need to *contextualize itself.* I am convinced, however, that an embrace of what Hall argues is a non-triumphalist role for the mainline Protestant church may not be sufficient for a re-articulation of the gospel in our present context. To contextualize for the sake of the gospel, I would like to argue, we need to go deeper. We need not just to recognize that the mainline white church is being disestablished, but "decolonized," too.[13]

This may sound like a strange claim. In order to describe this phenomenon and why it might be important for today, I need to proceed in two steps. First, we need to rehearse how we got here—how the disestablishment of a largely white, mainline North American Protestantism led to new ways of thinking about context, culture, and the church's role in the world. In a second step, I want to explore how postcolonial theory and theology can aid the mainline Protestant church in rediscovering its sense of gospel in light of the postcolonial context.

1. The Changing Shape of Gospel, Context, and Identity in the Mainline Church

Classical liberal theologies tended to occlude matters of context because of their commitment to universal individualism. On the part of preachers, this meant that the particulars of identity were left largely off the table. At the level of the hearer (and the choice of the "singular" here is significant), distinctions and differences among hearers and their

[13] I try here to link the idea of "being" disestablished with "being" decolonized. These processes in the life of the mainline Protestant church have only just begun in piecemeal and fragmentary ways.

positionalities were largely left out of the conversation. The frequent result was a gospel spoken to the universal individual with very little sense of context and particularity.

In response to the pretensions of liberal universalism, postliberalism sought to advance the cultural particularity of the *ecclesia* while also addressing the problem of cultural disestablishment among the North American mainline churches. Early on, advocates of a postliberal view like Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon sought to reconfigure the way the church thought of itself relative to culture. The church for them was a particular community with a peculiar identity. Its preaching was not a universal word for everybody, but a specific word for the community of faith. The vision was not tied to some universal vision or field of action. The program of the church, they argued, was to *be* the church as a kind of alternative *politeia* or *colonia*.[14] For many figures from this perspective, the identity of the church was not to be elided with any universal liberal views, but was instead to be established through a close relationship with the church's scriptures. The scriptures provided an identity, even a *culture* or *grammar*, by which a unique, counter-cultural Christian identity could be received.[15] In this view, the gospel would be a performance or living out of an ecclesial culture shaped profoundly by its scriptures. While this postliberal view went a long way toward embracing the particularities of the church's identity, it did so in part by backing away from dialogue with the culture at large. The postliberal church was satisfied with being "exiles" as way of being like the pre-Constantinian church in a now post-Constantinian, disestablished North American context.

The postliberal critique was, I believe, a necessary moment in thinking about the mainline church's gospel vision in light of its culture and identity after its long, liberal enmeshment in modernity. Its embrace of particularity over liberal universality opened the door to thinking more clearly about what the gospel sounds like today. I suspect that church and world may no longer need a default, invisible culture and identity cloaked in the language of liberal universalism. However, the embrace of particularity in postliberalism, by virtue of its counter-cultural stance, sometimes makes it harder for us to engage a religiously diverse and even non-religious public square. Here there is a further need to proceed to an even deeper contextual analysis. Perhaps the problem is that the mainline Protestant church is not just being "disestablished," but thereby also being decolonized—even if in bits and pieces, fits and starts. Because of the inherent intercultural focus of postcolonial theory and theology, however, the question of disestablishment now becomes entwined with vestigial and pervasive elements of privilege in mainline ecclesial life, including matters of race and cultural power.

2. The Promise of a Postcolonial View of Gospel, Context, and Identity

I am convinced that a familiarity with postcolonial theory and theology can help loosen up the ways in which the mainline Protestant church can think about its understanding of the gospel in relation to its identity and relationship to culture. There is, I believe, a space beyond the acultural gospel of cloaked identity in liberal universalism and the purely counter-cultural approach of a disestablished, "circle the wagons" view of a postliberal church as *politeia* or *colonia*. This "third space" may just be a promising postcolonial way of thinking about the mainline Protestant church

[14] Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).

[15] This particular notion is carried forward in the work of George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal* Age (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1984.

Postcolonial theory can be traced back to the work of such thinkers as Homi Bhabha, Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.[16] One of the first things to recognize in terms of definitions is that the "post" in postcolonial does not mean "after." In fact what postcolonial theory tends to recognize is that the yielding of colonies by European and North American powers has really resulted in *a neo-colonial* context—where power and control over other countries and cultures is wielded more indirectly than directly, as under colonial rule.[17] It is precisely in this awareness of the pervasiveness of oppressive power and control exercised through new means of military threat and economic influence that requires the mainline Protestant church to become more self-reflexive about its position and how that impacts its prophetic witness in disestablishment and decolonization. While disestablishment has meant that whatever is left of the church's prophetic witness under liberalism can no longer plausibly function on the basis of its prized position in the culture, the mainline Protestant church still stands in a complex relationship with the powers that be and the wider world it finds itself in. There are, I suspect, still vestigial elements of privilege that shape the life of the mainline church. We mainliners may be "exiles" in this culture, but we also still benefit from some vestigial benefits of the power. We mainliners still have some presumption of cultural authority, a degree of access to power that other cultural and religious groups don't have (privilege), and even our denominational pension plans! The romanticism of being "exiles," a separate *politeia* or heavenly *colonia* may sound nice, but we still have it *relatively* good—and that includes mainline Protestant academics like me.

Such a postcolonial shift in self-reflexivity does more than simply modify our identity or our relationship of gospel to culture. It also means that, as the disestablished church also *decolonizes* it also becomes aware that its identity is not some glorious self-possession—whether viewed in terms of liberal universality or a romantic counter-cultural particularity. Our identity as mainliners is, as I would call it, "given and riven." It is "given" in the sense that it is not a self-possession, something we "have" apart from others. Whether in the Enlightenment mastery of the universal individual or in the hermetically sealed counter-cultural identity of the pre-Constantinian church, we are accustomed to thinking of identity as something we possess. Identity in postcolonial theory and theology is something that is more fluid, porous, and, yes, given in interaction with others. The complexity of relationships shaped by colonial histories is such that identities are not simply "fixed" or "possessed" but received in interactions interculturally. To claim that identities are "riven" is to acknowledge that since they are not fixed, we always stand in a negotiated space that acknowledges how power divides but sees that even the powerful need to be decolonized. This "riven" identity where we stand both in relation to power and *deformed by it* opens up a different way of seeing ourselves beyond the old liberal/postliberal binary.

The positive implication of revising identity in a church being disestablished *and* decolonized is that it begins to see identity in a more profound relationship of openness to others. Instead of seeing identity as a form of cultural purity to be protected, whether in universalist or counter-cultural form, a "given and riven" view of identity presupposes that intercultural interaction is the nature of life itself. One Canadian cultural critic, Andrew Potter, argues that

---

[16] For a helpful introductory summary that places some of the above named figures in the context of the literature, one may wish to read Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (2nd Ed.; London: Routledge, 2005).

[17] Thanks to my colleague Dr. Adam Hearlson, who pointed out in personal correspondence with me on October 12, 2015, the similarity of this claim to Michelle Alexander's argument in *The New Jim Crow* (2nd ed.; New York: The New Press, 2012).

cultures are not systems to be kept romantically pure in opposition to others, but more like immune systems that *require* interaction with others to be strong, healthy, and related.[18] Imagine how a postcolonial imagination of culture and identity might affect the way we think about the mainline church's relative privilege, its use of power *in connection with others*, and the way it talks about the world.

Some important homileticians have already begun to bring such insights to bear to the church's task in preaching. Pablo Jiménez has begun to explore the relationship of preaching and postcolonial theory in ways both particular and practical.[19] Canadian Sarah Travis has tried to unpack what a decolonized pulpit might look like in deep connection with others through a powerful interactive and perichoretic vision of the social Trinity.[20] In a recent publication postcolonial theologian Kwok Pui-lan has creatively envisioned a performative vision of preaching that sees its work not solely as that of the preacher, but the preacher in relation to the congregation—all of whom seek in a kind of "third space" of the preaching moment to forge new identities and new ways of being in the presence of God and others beyond the univocal identities which colonialism presupposes and polices.[21] These visions for a postcolonial preaching could have a profound influence on a mainline church struggling to understand its own identity after disestablishment and the way it might relate gospel to culture, one not bound to a cloaked identity through universalism or a pure, counter-cultural identity through postliberalism.

Tending to the Wound

I contend that with postcolonial theology we have the opportunity to take up the unfinished theological work around gospel, culture, and identity—even in these troubling times of coming to terms with our own struggles with race and the legacy of white supremacy. It is our chance to tend to the wound. In many ways the relation of the gospel to the crisis of the Temple's destruction set loose a dynamic with which we still live today—every time Christians speak of the Jews as identity foils and struggle in naming gospel in light of Roman colonial power.[22] The postliberals are correct in seeing the particularities of identity as a central issue. Context affects us deeply both by the situation we know and think we understand (disestablishment) and in light of that part of the context that emerges in troubled interaction with others (postcolonialism and racism). Both may call forth grief in mainline church. Both call us to go deeper into the gospel and go deeper into context by which gospel is discerned and named.

Theologians Willie Jennings and J. Kameron Carter contend that the focal point of this wound in the tradition is a supersessionist Christology. Carter in particular argues that there is a deep connection between a Christology born of a struggle with Judaism that eventually discards the oriental Jesus at the dawn of modernity and thus helps make possible an elision of Christianity's essence with whiteness:

---

[18] Andrew Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax: How We Get Lost Finding Ourselves* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2010), 203.

[19] Pablo Jiménez, "Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic: Justo L. González's Contribution to Hispanic Preaching," in Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo L. González (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 159-67 and "The Troublemaker's Friend: From Text to Sermon in a Postcolonial Context," in *Apuntes* 34:3 (Fall, 2014), 84-90.

[20] Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).

[21] Kwok Pui-lan, "Postcolonial Preaching in Intercultural Context," *Homiletic* 40:1 (Summer 2015), 8-21.

[22] John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (New York: HarperOne, 2004).

> …Christianity's central figure, Jesus Christ, came to be racialized ultimately as a figure of the Occident, though as regards his bodily status he was deemed to be not of the West. As regards his flesh he was of the Orient, an oriental Jew. Reconceived as an occidental (rational) religion, Christianity was transformed into the cultural property of the West. Christian civilization became Western civilization, and vice versa. Thus, embedded within the social imaginary of the civilizations of the West is the theological problem of the *Rassenfrage*…. Modernity/coloniality *is* quintessentially the product of an ideological usage of Jesus.[23] (emphasis author)

In an interview with Adam McInturf, Carter goes on to summarize the issue—and in relation to the crisis of a now disestablished Christianity with the crisis of whiteness and colonial hegemony. Carter argues that what the theological world witnesses in the kind of turn to tradition and *resourcement* seen in post-liberalism and radical orthodoxy is actually characterized by a malaise he calls "post-colonial melancholy."[24]

Carter then offers us a different tradition for reading Christology that undoes the de-linking of Jesus with his Jewishness in the name of subsequent colonial and racial claims—and in a way that helps us live with the wound toward healing:

> To account oneself a Christian who is, in theological terms, a Gentile, that is, a non-Jew, but nevertheless accounts their salvation as coming from the Jew who is Jesus, who himself is the culmination of the story of Israel's relationships with their God, and therefore is the Messiah of Israel, is, in many ways, an *interracial claim*. What this means in effect is that as a Gentile, I am in the position of Ruth in the Bible, where my family of commitment is in a people who are not my people but who received me, and that is my salvation. What is a Gentile Christian? A Gentile Christian is one who echoes the promises of Yahweh to the people of Israel, which have redounded to the whole world. Now, in the racial terms of modernity, that sounds like *mulatto* existence.[25]

A non-supersessionist Christology that works through the wounds of the gospel's first articulation in context is important not just for dealing with the tradition, but for the accompanying complications brought about through colonial and racist overlays. It does not purify or absolve the tradition, but allows us to live in "differentiated proximity" with them and with others, too.[26]

This way of living critically with the tradition in the name of the gospel to which the tradition witnesses in all of its contextual pain and struggle requires another theological move, this one owing a great debt to Willie Jennings. In his book *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the*

---

[23] Carter, *Race*, 372.
[24] Adam McInturf, "Race: A Theological Account: An Interview with J. Kameron Carter," *Cultural Encounters* 5:2 (Summer 2009), 83.
[25] Ibid., 84.
[26] Jacobsen, "Preaching as the Unfinished Task of Theology," 415.

Origins of Race, Jennings envisions a telos of *communion*, one that is capable of holding memories of not just race, but space, a common life not built on pure racial identities and economies of sameness built on white supremacy and ordered by colonial appropriations of space. Jennings writes:

> For some, my account of Jesus-space and of communion will seem idealistic, a denial of Christian failure…. If my account of space looks like an idealist account, it is precisely because it is an account held in contrast to the utter inversion of the Israel/Gentile relation. If my account of communion looks like an ideologically naïve ideation, it is because the very fragments of memory of Gentile existence have been altered and reconfigured to make room for other identity-facilitating realities. In the remade world born of the colonialist moment, Christian possibilities of communion and cultural intimacy have been subverted to draw all people toward an existence marked by a reversal of its telos.[27]

The reorientation is one away from the dividing up of space and the use of the categorizing power of race to organize the world through whiteness to a communion which in Jesus-space, marked by his body. Jennings' vision focuses on the relationship of Jews and Gentiles and the problem of racism as intertwined around issues of place/identity/and in light of the new belonging that Jesus offers in a communion in his body to the God of Israel.

Transfiguring the Wound

The goal here is not the repristinating healing of the (now closed and forgotten) wound that so troubles the Christian tradition and the texture of the common life of mainline Protestant churches in relation to other cultural-theological traditions.[28] We have been laying hold of the idea that even a theology of the gospel begins with a wound, both in McClintock Fulkerson's sense and in the surprising notion of J. Kameron Carter's linking of mysterious divine presence to suffering. Reconciliation, healing, closure, are all beautiful but inadequate for the moment. Here we build on the work of the philosopher Richard Kearney whose reflections on transfiguration and its relation to Aristotelian notions of tragic catharsis lead us not just to wound at the beginning, but promise at the end.

In his article on the place of wounds and trauma in Father/Son relations in the narrative works of Homer, Shakespeare, and Joyce, Kearney notes two features about catharsis that help us understand its power. First, in the cathartic moment pity and fear are *transfigured* into pleasure. What happens with the wound recognized (e.g., Ulysses) in narrative is not a detoxification or getting rid of. Indeed, Kearney writes of narrative as,

---

[27] Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 288.

[28] This concern seems in part to drive the research into the "refiguring" of wounds into scars in my colleague Shelly Rambo's important contribution "*Refiguring Wounds in the Afterlife (of Trauma),* in *Carnal Hermeneutics* (R. Kearney and B. Treanor, eds.; New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 263-278. While Rambo also uses the notion of transfiguring wounds, she does so with a view to seeing them transformed or "refigured" into a scar or otherwise "faint" trace. I intend to use the term here differently in that I want to get at the unresolved struggle that in the tradition and though later complications continues to haunt the naming of the gospel and thus *remains* wound--even in resurrection narratives where that eschatological gospel is proclaimed.

> "…impossible story: storytelling which forever fails to *cure* trauma but never fails to try to *heal* it. And in this very effort itself there is pleasure: the pleasurable purgation of pity and fear."[29]

As I like to point out, in Revelation tears are not absent, but they are wiped away. The sea may be "no more," but salty tears may just be the wounded locus of the kind of cathartic transfiguration of "rewriting" that Kearney imagines. Second, narrative is not simply about closure, but openness. The tragic, wounded overlay that runs from Homer (by means of Shakespeare's tragedies) through Joyce is a process of rewriting and creative failure. Kearney points out, "we need to think about the genuinely cathartic role of trauma stories as requiring open narratives that never end, rather than closed narratives that presume to wish away *wounds* rather than working through *scars*."[30] It is this that we bear gospel witness to as preachers in taking up the unfinished theological task of our NT scriptures somewhere between Titus' Arch and the graffiti of Alexamenos. In preaching we take up our beautiful and wounded tradition in the midst of our contexts, known and even now intruding on our obliviousness, and "hand it over" yet again, and even more, bring its transfigured telos of identity and differentiated communion to gospel speech.

The nature of that gospel, for me, is eschatological promise. And here Kearney helps to move us forward as well.[31] Once again, Kearney uses the notion of transfiguration, but here in the biblical-narrative sense of the burning bush of Exod 3:14, the mountain of Mark 9, among others. For Kearney, transfiguration is a place of onto-eschatological crossing. On the one hand, it is a place where we meet the divine, traversing presence of God: not the God who *is*, nor the God who *will be*, but the God who *may be.* On the other hand, this promising God of possibility also empowers us to engage in the midst of troubled memory by prying opened closed actualities. This God who may be depends on us, but not without possibilizing our present. Again, this does not obliterate the wound, let alone "close" it. Yet the promise is the means by which the wound is being transfigured, re-written, and taken up into the unfinished task of a theology of the gospel in context—even a context of establishment, empire, and white supremacy.

---

29 Richard Kearney, "Writing Trauma: Catharsis in Joyce, Shakespeare and Homer," ABC Religion & Ethics, http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/07/19/3549000.htm. Accessed September 28, 2015.

30 Ibid.

31 What follows is a brief summary of two key notions from Richard Kearney treated in much greater detail in his book, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2001), 20-52.