

Engaging the Gadfly:
A Process Homilecclesiology for a Digital Age

By

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To @thatguyphill, @ladyvisigburgh, and @lilflosigburgh

I love you to the #moon and back.

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When I started this adventure in academia, I did not see myself as becoming a “technology” expert in homiletics. Other ideas were in mind. But during the last five years, something changed. Ordained but without a traditional pulpit position (save for one year of my program), I began to take my homiletical passion to social media—blog posts, status updates and prayers, and public theologizing on platforms such as WordPress, Twitter, and Facebook. I had no pulpit, but I sure found a platform. But was it preaching? I began to wonder.

Then, in the final stages of this project, a presidential candidate who invested little time or money in traditional platforms—mass media platforms—rose from obscurity and impossibility to actuality. Harnessing the power of social media—especially Twitter—Donald J. Trump shocked the experts (of the old system) as he became the 45th President of the United States of America. Even with his crass and unedited “Twitter finger”¹ millions of Americans found in this candidate someone who spoke their mind, did not politic, and whom they hoped and still hope would take that brash truth telling to D.C. on their behalf.

I had already finished the bulk of this dissertation as the articles were written on mass media’s Internet platforms about the massive shifts in truth, authority, and power created by the culture of social media. I had already begun to tap into what historians of technology, sociologists, and computer scientists were already stating about Web 3.0 and the season of disruptive technological change now underway. But I was not thinking about elections. I was thinking about the endurance of ministry to the Living Word in a digital age. Thank you zeitgeist for adding a sense of fittingness and urgency to this research project and the need for a theological ethic of proclamation and conversation in Web 3.0.

¹ Quote from Gloria Steinem in reference to President Trump, see Ian Schwartz, “Gloria Steinem At Women’s March: Trump Mentally Unstable; ‘No More Asking Daddy,’” *RealClear Politics* (January 21, 2017) http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2017/01/21/gloria_steinem_at_womens_march_trump_mentally_unstable_no_more_asking_daddy.html (accessed January 30, 2017).

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around this project in particular and the call to teach preaching in general. Thank you for reading these pages and offering your wisdom and perspective. I have gained much from our collaboration in these few short months.

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Finally, thank you to my family. Phillip, as cliché as it sounds, you have been my rock in this endeavor. Viola and Lillian, you two first grew within me and then beyond me as I grew into myself as an academic, teacher, and mother. You bring light and joy. You remind me of the hope that is more endearing and enduring than the despair and cynicism of this world. You lure me onto more just and beautiful ways of becoming.

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CHAPTER I.

PULPIT AND PEW: PREACHING CAUGHT IN A BIN(D)NARY

Christianity is a community possessed, according to the Christian faith, with a unique vitality that stems from its animation by the Spirit of the risen Christ. For this reason, the faith and experience and life forms of the New Testament communities, uniquely normative though they may be for future generations, can never be the static pattern for those future generations. As an eschatological reality the church is always coming into being, always new in a radical and sometimes unexpected fashion.²

Setting the Stage

Traditional projects in homiletic theory have taken as their implicit or explicit center the dance/line/space/[fill in the blank here] between pulpit and pew.

It may seem odd to begin a conversation on technology and preaching with a lengthy piece on the paradigm of pulpit and pew. What do these objects—firmly established in most mainline houses of worship—have to do with phones, screens, and other accumulating artifacts in our technological age? Beyond the level of objectification, we also may not consider beginning with the pulpit/pew dynamic because this paradigm is such a given in homiletics. Pulpit and pew are indeed paradigmatic of preaching. The literature in the field contains the phrase over and again: “pulpit and pew.” It is the cornerstone of the study of preaching as we know it. And why wouldn’t it be? On any given Sunday, a preacher in the mainline church steps up to the pulpit to deliver her message to the pews. Even if she does not use the pulpit, or modifies the wooden model with plexiglass or a music stand, the image of the pulpit is present in the architecture of our buildings and the architecture of our minds.

The pulpit has been a herald of Great Awakenings, yes, but in more recent times has fallen into the shadows and into irrelevancy. However, homileticians recently have

²Bernard J. Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacrament: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 58.

sought to transform it into a space of inclusion and conversation where apperception, postcolonial imagination, and other-wise knowing can occur.³

The pew, conversely, has been on the receiving end of the pulpit—at times articulated as the unknowing vessels in need of gospel truth that only an expert can decipher and deliver, the anxious bench on the brink of conversion, the empty space where the faithful once upon a time sat to hear the Good News, or the fellow witnesses to gospel present in the collaborative and conversational process of the preacher.

But the binary of pulpit and pew has met with challenges from the margins. Our advancing technologies enable preaching that is not necessarily local in a physical bodily sense, meaning the preacher need not be standing in a pulpit on the same soil as the ones in the pews to whom she preaches to. Hologram preaching (and preachers) and satellite preaching (and preachers) are but two modes for the sermon that radically alter the preacher and congregation dynamic, as well as the liturgical connections between Word and Table. These technological changes to the place and mode of delivery of sermons in this age of technological change have not been thoroughly scrutinized by homiletic minds. That is where this dissertation enters the conversation.

In order to dig deep into this project, I had to set some parameters. For one, my lens is focused on the Western mainline tradition of the church and of preaching. The pulpit and pew sit firmly in this trajectory, and so, I aim most specifically at this long held orientation for preaching in order to dis-orient it and re-orient preachers in this trajectory beyond the original frame of pulpit and pew. On the margins of the “main” line of preaching are traditions such as the Mennonite and Quaker that have aspects of radical conversationality in proclamation to them. But these rich traditions are not in this project. Second, as a White mainline preacher, pastor, and scholar I do not expand the lens into Black Preaching traditions as sources for challenging the pulpit/pew binary. Many African American preaching traditions honor the movement of “Call and Response”

³ See for example: Ronald J. Allen and O. Wesley Allen Jr., *The Sermon Without End: A Conversational Approach to Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015); Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); John S. McClure, *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001); Leah D. Schade, *Creation-Crisis Preaching: Ecology, Theology, and the Pulpit* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2015); and Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014);

between the pulpit and pew, and offer their own distinct way of inhabiting a troubled binary.⁴

This chapter begins by focusing in on the pulpit/pew binary in the mainline Western tradition—what it means metaphorically and how it shapes the embodiment of preaching in the contemporary church. Homiletics has been organized over the last five decades to help the preacher who steps into the pulpit be an effective communicator of gospel to the persons in pews. This binary was set up well before the advances in technology that have made other possibilities graspable, reinforcing as well as upsetting the power structure within this binary.

Ultimately, we are at a watershed moment for preaching. Changes in technology have introduced to the pastor platforms for preaching that allow for novel means of dialogical preaching unimaginable fifty, even fifteen years ago. Related to these changes in technological tools or artifacts are changes in the ways people know, relate, and communicate. Scholars are suggesting that we are in the foothills of a drastic shift in culture akin to the transition introduced by the printing press over 500 years ago. Just as a shift then from orality to literacy introduced novel platforms and models for preaching, so will this transition period offer to homiletics novelty both in the form of tools and patterns for communication. These novel platforms emerging from our current *kairos*⁵ moment in history revolve around a triad of possibilities for preaching. If practitioners and homileticians are up for the adventure they can imagine and implement: 1) a preaching event no longer constrained to the liturgy, 2) preaching space no longer constrained by architectural limitations, and 3) a form for relationality in preaching no longer constrained by oral-aural media alone. This dissertation speaks to this invitation for the sake of practitioners and theorists in the hopes that it will equip both to practice preaching in ways previously unimaginable by our forebears.

⁴ See for example: Evans Crawford and Thomas H. Troeger, *The Hum: Call and Response in African Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995); Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011); Cleophus James LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016).

⁵ The Ancient Greeks offered two distinct words for the concept of time. We are more familiar with time in the sense of *chronos*, a line of unfolding moments in history. But the sense of *kairos* refers to an opportune moment in the unfolding of chronological time, such as the appointed moment of Jesus' incarnation in Christianity.

But change is not always a welcome guest in the halls of institutional life. Often times, it looms large like an elephant in the room of our guilds and denominations. Or perhaps it is more appropriate to say that the buzzing of change in the halls of institutional life is more like the buzz of the gadfly—more difficult to grasp, quick to dodge the hand or tail that swats at it, and just when you think the one has died, another gadfly just as annoying appears in its place with its buzzing.

Alfred North Whitehead used the image of the gadfly to describe the presence of new ideas, novelty, in the face of institutional structures. He chose the gadfly, or common housefly, because new ideas are always a nuisance that seems small, yet in time their buzzing is “a danger to the existing order.”⁶ The order for preaching, as it existed for centuries in the Western church, has been the pulpit to the pew, which assumes that preaching occurs within the liturgy which logically means the event occurs within the architecture of a house of worship designed in such a way to best host the communication of a spoken word to a group of listeners in the pews below. Now a gadfly appears in the haze of technological change, and its ideas and invitations for preaching and the church are, in the words of Whitehead, “at once gadflies irritating, and beacons luring, the victims among whom they dwell.”⁷ I prefer to promote the notion that the new ideas are not intended to threaten the existing order, doing away with preaching as it exists in most of our churches on Sunday morning entirely. Rather, I do think these new ideas, these gadflies, are beacons luring the field of homiletics and the practice of preaching to novel, creative, and prophetic embodiments ripe for this day and age.

This dissertation dances with—rather than swatting at or ignoring—the gadflies of our digital age. As it does, it invites homiletics to redefine the place, time, and mode of preaching as the ancient practice is envisioned beyond the static substance-oriented categories of pulpit and pew. Ultimately, this digital age, like previous ages of technological change, presents problems as well as possibilities, to the study and practice of preaching. We will explore both in the adventure ahead.

⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 15.

⁷ Whitehead, *Adventures*, 18.

The Pulpit-Pew Binary

The pulpit, firmly rooted in church institutions, and its educational systems, is the starting point in modern homiletic theory. Ask any preacher about their first time approaching the pulpit. Ask her to recall beloved pulpits and intimidating ones. See the seminary student step into the classroom pulpit for her first message. Like the burning bush that led Moses to realize the holiness of the ground beneath his feet before a burning bush, the pulpit is a signifier of the holy humbling call of preaching as much as it is an amplifier of the preacher's voice.

The pulpit is the locus of authority for preaching. Some churches only allow the ordained to step up into the space. Some churches only allow ordained men to step into the space. Some churches only allowed white men to step into the space. As a locus of power the pulpit has been an agent of colonization as well as liberation. It has set up walls around who counts as a prophet of God. It has subversively broken down those walls in the very same churches. It has been used to bring the Kingdom of God into the world but also been used to amplify other kingdoms of our making, not God's—kingdoms of white supremacy and the oppression of women—along with edification of the “gods” like capitalism and democracy. It is a holy space, but it is also a wholly human space.

The pulpit in Reformed traditions is front and center in the architectural landscape of churches. Elevated and ornate, it stands as an amplifier of the Word encountered through the sermon. There are rows and rows of pews, each one like the next. But in the sanctuary, there is only one pulpit.

The pew, on the other hand, is the static location for “the rest of us”; it is the technology that holds the laity still and renders them, as best as it can, an attentive audience before the pulpit.

The oft-repeated phrase, “pulpit and pew,” thus speaks of church as organized and stable. It speaks of seminaries and training centers for clergy that still see Word and Sacrament in these stable buildings as the norm for ordained ministry. It speaks of church buildings established in downtown, town center, suburb, and campus. It speaks of institutions with hierarchy and power, and so of individuals known as preachers who

maintain the hierarchy and are bestowed with the power to vocalize a word from God Sunday to Sunday.

So, one can imagine the disruption that occurs when buildings housing pulpits and pews decay or the confusion about homiletic pedagogy that arises when preaching classes go online. We may cringe at—but not have theological criticism of—churches that decide they cannot afford to have people in the pulpit and so turn to pre-recorded DVDs or audio CDs of popular preachers instead.⁸ The same goes for pulpits that become projections, livecasts, webstreams, and virtual realities. The *pulpit* certainly seems to be in a crisis moment.

However, is *preaching* in crisis, or is the pulpit/pew binary on which the practice has been defined in crisis? Perhaps it is the categories of “pulpit and pew” themselves that are in the shadows and have fallen into irrelevancy. Perhaps preaching has found other homes outside of the inflexible paradigm of pulpit and pew, for good or for ill, when it comes to the spiritual growth of the church. That is the conviction of this project.

Web of Oppressions: Dualistic Frameworks in Western Christian Theology

The pulpit/pew binary in and of itself is mostly a benign issue until one considers its embeddedness in a Western tradition of theological dualisms. Western Christian tradition interprets the binary as “graded differentiations” wherein “one of the two is taken to be superior to the other” and so is assumed to have “the right to rule over” the lesser partner.⁹ This tendency is a central target of critique in many feminist and eco-feminist theologies, in particular the work of Anna Case-Winters. According to Case-Winters, the commonly shared presuppositions of ecofeminism are as follows:

1. That there is a connection between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature
2. That hierarchical dualism has led to a “logic of domination,” which underlies both these (and other) forms of oppression

⁸ See for example the project “A Sermon for Every Sunday” offering small congregations who cannot afford a preacher the chance to buy (\$9.99) or rent (\$4.99) sermons from “America’s best preachers” each week to be played via DVD on a screen in the sanctuary. <http://www.asermonforeverysunday.com/#.VH4Odj7QkWg.twitter> (accessed January 25, 2017).

⁹ Anna Case-Winters, *Reconstructing a Christian Theology of Nature* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 23.

3. That it is this system of domination that must be dismantled for the sake of social justice and ecological responsibility and
4. That in its place should be a “transformative worldview in which reciprocity and mutuality, equality and solidarity, function as the new norms for society”¹⁰

In other words, while many factors come into our current ecological crisis, ecofeminists like Case-Winters argue that “buy in” from Christians plays a large part on our destructive treatment of nature, weaving a “web of oppressions” in which the oppression of women and nature are “inextricably linked.”¹¹ The constructive work from Case-Winters seeks to rethink these dualisms and challenge these perspectives in order to proclaim instead that God is *with* nature, *for* nature, and *in* nature. But first the binary and the web of oppressions must be named.

The originary binary in Western Christian theology, according to Case-Winters, is the “God-world” binary, which removes God from creation, setting God up as its ruler. This simultaneously desacralizes nature, and in the binaries that follow this originary one, sets up the left side in alignment as that which is superior and rules over the right. For example, Case-Winters highlights this core “interconnected dualistic schema of graded differentiations.”¹² In this system are the seeds not only of the ecological crisis, which is Case-Winters’ focus, it also is the system that perpetuates sexism, racism, and a host of other -isms as well. Especially important to note in our context today is how the binary “others” those who do not align neatly in one category or another. Transgender and queer preachers do not fit neatly into the binary and as we have seen, have suffered violence as

+	-
GOD	WORLD
MAN	WOMAN
SOUL	BODY
CULTURE	NATURE
LIGHT	DARKNESS
GOOD	EVIL

Figure 1. Dualistic Schema of Graded Differentiations

¹⁰ Case-Winters, 63.

¹¹ Case-Winters, 2.

¹² Case-Winters, 24, 69.

a result. So long as God rules over the world, and man rules over women, and culture over nature, etc., then the winning side of the binary will be justified in oppressing and exploiting the losing side. Western Christian theology’s schema has caused irreparable damage to creation itself and the delicate web of relationships that hang in the balance.

One may argue that the pulpit-pew binary has not had much of a destructive ripple effect in the ministry of proclamation. Regarding the overall system of binaries, however, Case-Winters reminds us that this “dualistic framework is not to be viewed as a harmless, though false, oversimplification of reality, for in each of its manifestations it leads to a justification of domination of one in the pair over the other.”¹³ It reaches beyond Christian theology and into Western philosophy in the form of subordination of the earth and its resources to the needs of humans and to the violence against women and children. I argue that the pulpit-pew binary is inherently caught up in this trouble. Thus, we need to explore then the repercussions of this binary in the ministry of preaching before we can imagine constructively a theological framework for preaching beyond our traditional (broken) framework. Perhaps then the Word can be liberated from the web of oppressions we have set up for ourselves.

What if we were to set the pulpit-pew binary inside of this large web of dualism that Western Christian theology has taken as largely given for many generations? The pulpit, set up in a binary with the pew, has benefitted from the binary construct in a Western world, which favors the first partner of each pair. The pulpit then is rendered as the exclusive source of proclamation and knowledge over the pews however implicitly or

+	-
GOD	WORLD
MAN	WOMAN
SOUL	BODY
CULTURE	NATURE
LIGHT	DARKNESS
GOOD	EVIL
PULPIT	PEW
CLERGY	LAITY

Figure 2. Inserting the Pulpit and Pew/ Clergy and Laity into the Dualistic Schema¹⁴

¹³ Case-Winters, 24.

¹⁴ Case-Winters, 87. *My additions in bold.*

explicitly this is carried out in various contexts. In the greater dualistic schema then, the pulpit is in affiliation with God, men, light, soul, and mind. The pew associates with the world, bodies, women, and darkness. The pew becomes feminized as the pulpit becomes masculinized. Women in the pews sit submissively to receive the truth from a man in the pulpit. Preaching, caught in this web, is a practice of subduing the sinful bodies in the pews with reasonable and disembodied truth from the pulpit.

Who is fenced out of the pulpit ministry in this dualism? Women and people of color, primarily, as has been the case historically, and as can be seen in the binary itself. Though the church has seen an increase in authorized female preachers over the last fifty years, the binary imposes its biases. The architecture developed in an era of the male-as-preacher remains. Roxanne Mountford compiles case studies, ethnography, and rhetorical studies to explore the deeply gendered nature of preaching spaces. According to Mountford, the pulpit has literally been masculinized in most churches, in order to “anticipate and reinforce” the masculine tradition of preaching.¹⁵ Women frequently complain of having to acquire step stools in order to be seen in the edifice built to elevate the average man. Others feel trapped by the frame of the elevated pulpit, their movement hampered by its place in the sanctuary. So some preach away from it. Or grab that stool. Others are bold enough to redesign the sanctuary itself. But each renovation points at a history of exclusion. Either way, the pulpit and its inherited power get in the way of our empowerment.¹⁶

The Church (laity) itself has been defined or aligned with the feminine in our theological history and within this dualistic framework. What are the risks of doing so? First, there is the assumption that the Church is the body and Christ is the mind that tells the body where to go in a hierarchical manner. Second, there is the implication that the preacher/pastor, as Christ’s representative, must subdue the Church to his understanding of the Way, using the arts of persuasion. This binary can render laity voiceless in ways women have explicitly been rendered voiceless in our tradition. There is no mutuality,

¹⁵ Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 3.

¹⁶ For a striking look at how women still struggle in ministry today see Karoline M. Lewis, *She: Five Keys to Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016).

interdependence, nor communal journeying to truth. The pastor/preacher gets complete control as authority alone in his study with his intimate Jesus.

The binary has even plagued the very person set up to benefit from the binary, the preacher, by creating the expectation that the preacher have no physical needs or desires, thus not be limited by his/her body. For men this has at times resulted in the assumption that he can in fact preach without himself getting in the way.¹⁷ For women, this has often meant hiding behind baggy robes, feeling threatened by revealing a changing body during pregnancy, or being fenced out of the pulpit in general. How many scandals result from this paradigm that the pulpit is a place for the great rational head floating on top of the black robe and not a place for the real embodied experience of a preacher—broken and redeemed—to come to the preaching moment?

Of course, there are those who have fought against this binary system for homiletics: usually women, black men, womanists, latinx preachers, and others who refuse to keep neither testimony—the body—nor the world and its brokenness out of the pulpit. In the deep confines of the dualistic system and its graded differentiation, those othered by the system are ontological challenges to the fixed truth of the system. Rather than being embraced for proposing radically novel frames for preaching, or theology for that matter, they are often marginalized as critics of the set system. This leads to another repercussion for preaching in the web of oppressions: the very fixity of the broken binary itself.

Pulpit and Pew as Static, Substance-Oriented Categories

We have discussed the complications from the binary of pulpit-pew in its complicity with a larger schema of dualisms in Western Christian theology. Another inherent issue with this system in general and the pulpit and pew binary in particular, is that, at its core, all arguments hinge upon static, substance-oriented categories as sources for unchanging truth. Process theology, here only briefly summarized, would critique the binary in this way (my additions in bold):¹⁸

¹⁷ See David Buttrick on the negative effects of personal illustrations in *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 141-143.

¹⁸ Case-Winters, 87.

+	-
GOD	WORLD
UNCHANGING	CHANGING
INFLUENCER	INFLUENCED
OMNIPOTENT	DEPENDENT
MAN	WOMAN
SOUL	BODY
CULTURE	NATURE
LIGHT	DARKNESS
GOOD	EVIL
PULPIT	PEW
CLERGY	LAITY

Figure 3. Static, Substance-Oriented Categories

Thus not only is the binary oppressive, by its own design the system of knowing God/Truth is fixed. Challengers are muted and any attempt to share power or challenge unidirectional power faces great obstacles.

Woven into this fixity has been the sermon as an event that happens between pulpit and pew in the context of worship. At first glance, this is not a problem for most of us who preach and teach preachers. But women in our guild have noted how this assumption of fixity has literally written women preaching out of the history of the church and the practice. Homiletics such as Eunjoo Mary Kim, Teresa Fry Brown, Jana Childers, Anna Carter Florence, Mary Donovan Turner, and Mary Lin Hudson have all made great strides in resurfacing sisters who precede us in the ministry of proclamation, but who have been silenced by the dominant paradigms for preaching and preacher.¹⁹

Preaching has not only and always taken place between pulpit and pew, but privileged preaching and preachers have often occupied that space. The pulpit, taken for granted as an ideal locale for preaching, created the material and psychological architecture for the ideal preacher. Less than ideal preachers were prohibited from ever

¹⁹ See Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Woman Proclaiming God's Word* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003); Jana Childers, ed. *Birth of the Sermon: Women Preachers on the Craft of Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001); Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice Through the Ages* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Press, 2009); and Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women's Voice in Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

occupying a pulpit due to their gender, race, or radical beliefs. Not fitting into categories of pulpit and pew, many of these preachers and their bold practices of witnessing were not preserved for prosperity's sake. And yet preaching occurred and gospel was re-presented, whether historians catalogued it or not. Historically speaking, static, substance-oriented categories have created blind spots in the actual story of movers and shakers for the movement of Christianity in general and preaching in particular.

The categories of pulpit and pew, static as they are, limited our homiletic conversation. They limited our historical perception of preaching to those who were accepted as culturally appropriate catalysts for the Word of God. They also limit our homiletic innovation, so that we may only do something new by replacing adverbs and adjectives while the core nouns of our thinking about preaching-preacher-in-a-pulpit-and-people-in-a-pew fail to reflect the novelty and possibility that is our present homiletic reality as it is practiced around the globe. But the pulpit-pew binary and its oppressive trappings limit homiletical horizons. In fact, they still do.

Preaching as Fixed to the Liturgical Event in the Web of Oppressions

Another brief struggle, one that will be addressed later in the project, is for us to imagine preaching beyond the Sunday Liturgical Preaching Event. Once again, even a look back at the history of preaching in the United States 150 years ago reminds us that preaching had a more multivalent presence than that. Today we have an “ecclesiastical edifice” imposed on preaching that was not present in the early years of this country, years of exploration and expansion.²⁰ And this edifice requires the framework for preaching of pulpit and pew. How did preaching become fixed to the weekly event? In our time, much of this fixity can be attributed to the influence within many denominations of the Liturgical renewal movement and the ecumenism of the 20th century. In particular, the emphasis on the Word-Sacrament relationship has had a significant impact on securing preaching to weekly, or liturgical calendar-bound rhythms. What was meant to urge more frequent communion in some protestant traditions has seemed to also tie preaching to the sacrament in a way unnatural to the early church and

²⁰ Dwight E. Stevenson, *Disciples Preaching in the First Generation*, (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1969), 12.

earlier traditions of itinerant preaching.²¹ It also traps preaching in theological arguments regarding real presence and the sacramental in the digital age. If we can argue that communion cannot be done virtually, then, in the unchecked web of dualisms that marry preaching to a communion worship service, preaching must also be prohibited from the virtual/digital realm.²²

The pulpit/pew binary has all too often been overlooked for how it is woven into this “web of oppressions.”²³ Yet, since the dawn of the Academy of Homiletics in 1965, we have as a guild been trying to free preaching from it without a clear understanding of the source of the problem. One critic in particular revealed a major symptom of this troubled schema: Clyde H. Reid. We will begin with him and the stream of scholars who have addressed his challenge to preaching since.

Pulpit/Pew and The Monological Illusion

I say beware of all enterprises that require new clothes
and not a new wearer of the clothes.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden Pond*

In recent years, the academy has pursued more collaborative and reciprocal modes of preaching and being a preacher. The long-arc of this effort is usually traced from the turn to the listener at the close of the 1960s as well as the rise of liberation homileticians, from Justo and Catherine Gonzalez to Christine Smith and their descendants, including the recent efforts of Sarah Travis to decolonize the pulpit.²⁴ Some homileticians argue

²¹ See for example the work of Thomas J. Long, “Reclaiming the Unity of Word and Sacrament in Presbyterian and Reformed Worship,” in *Reformed Liturgy and Music*, XVI, no.1, (Winter, 1982), 12-17.

²² See the work of Pamela Dawn Chesser regarding the United Methodist Church and an official stance on sacraments and virtual reality. “This Virtual Mystery: A Liturgical Theological Argument Against Celebrating Holy Communion on the Internet in the United Methodist Church,” PhD diss., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2014.

²³ Case-Winters, 2.

²⁴ For examples of liberation homiletics and preaching, see Kathy Black, *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996); Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., *Preaching the Just Word* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1997); William Sloane Coffin, *A Passion for the Possible: A Message to U.S. Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995); Justo and Catherine Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980); James Henry Harris, *Preaching Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Christine M. Smith, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992); Christine Marie Smith, ed., *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives*

that these collaborative modes are an organic result of increasing numbers of ordained women in the pulpit ministry.²⁵ Other homileticians, notably the ones we will lift up shortly, have fought to make preaching and preachers more other-wise, empathetic, and conversational. However, these efforts tend to dress up the binary that ultimately keeps preaching confined to a “monological illusion,” a term used by theologian Reuel L. Howe to indicate “the concept that communication is accomplished by telling people what they ought to know.”²⁶ This illusion is one that the church, according to Howe, is all too often operating within. It has ultimately been an enterprise requiring new clothes when what is called for is a new wearer of clothes.

The monological illusion as pertains to preaching is the subject of a short but watershed article from 1963 on the heels of Howe’s work on dialogue. In “Preaching and the Nature of Communication,” Clyde H. Reid claims (years before Craddock and Randolph and others in the New Hermeneutic²⁷), “Something is wrong with our current efforts to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ.”²⁸ This “something” is the communication form of the monologue. Reid states, “Until about 1950, communications researchers thought of communication chiefly as a simple, one-way process.”²⁹ As a form of sacred communication, preaching then was framed as the process of designing the most clear and persuasive message to the people in the pews. But, Reid argued a half century ago, this is no longer the case. As communications studies began to investigate the dialogical nature of communication, preaching remained stuck under the lure of the “monological illusion,” meaning that the transmission and reception of the message takes place in this one moment of one-way delivery. However, studies from the mid 1950s and

(Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998); Philip J. Wogaman, *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

²⁵ See Beverly Zink-Sawyer’s article “A Match Made in Heaven: The Intersection of Gender and Narrative Preaching” in *What’s the Shape of Narrative Preaching?* Mike Graves & David J. Schlafer, eds. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008). During this same time period in the rise of narrative preaching, from roughly the 1960s on, more and more women have entered the seminary. In the interplay of the open-ended, creative, and dialogical aspects definitive of narrative preaching, Zink-Sawyer argues that many women have found a “preaching style” that “fits comfortably with their preaching instincts.” (47).

²⁶ Reuel L. Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1963), 32.

²⁷ Through Fred Craddock is often named as the father of the New Homiletic with his 1971 *As One Without Authority*, it was David Randolph in his 1969 book *The Renewal of Preaching* who coined the term and laid out the foundations.

²⁸ Clyde H. Reid, “Preaching and the Nature of Communication,” in *Pastoral Psychology* 14 (1963), 40.

²⁹ Reid, 41.

early 1960s revealed that communication is more than a moment of contact. The message is truly received and ingrained only through give and take and response of both listener and messenger.³⁰

For Reid preaching, as a form of communication, is subject to the laws of human communication. These laws change over time. It is not beyond reproach from so-called “secular” theories of communication, something this dissertation is in alignment with.³¹ In light of this, preaching, a monological form of communication from pulpit to pew, had reached a watershed moment for Reid in the 1960s. In light of the decline of the church and the lack of faithfulness of Protestants in particular, Reid places blame on the outdated form of communication that is preaching and calls for a total overhaul. Preaching needs to find a way to adapt to this scholarship and become dialogical or risk no longer being capable of communicating the gospel. The answer is not in more or better theology, nor is it in more or better homiletic training. Rather, Reid asks if the mode of communication that is preaching is a valid one any longer. He proposes a need to break free of the monological illusion but ultimately decides it may be a fruitless task.

In this article, Reid rejects the argument that a one-way transmission of messages is the best way to allow information to stick. Rather, communications studies of the late 1950s is discovering that feedback and back-and-forth between speaker and hearer is a far more effective mode of engraining information into the lives of listeners. For Reid this presents a big problem for the pulpit; not simply preaching but ecclesiology as well needs to be revamped to respond to this corollary study. So long as the church is preacher-centric (celebrating the cult of the preacher), no real change will occur in the lives of parishioners, according to Reid. The whole Christian enterprise needs to be shaped in such a way as to allow for multiple voices, for feedback, for the sharing of the gospel as it is known in their lives.

Reid makes some suggestions to the church. The first few are fairly easy to implement into the binary as it stands: informal feedback loops during the preaching

³⁰ Reid cites specifically communications studies of Franklin Fearing, “Social Impact of the Mass Media of Communication,” in 1954 and Melvin L. DeFleur and Otto N. Larsen, *The Flow of Information: An Experiment in Mass Communication* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958).

³¹ In the following chapters, we will engage the shifts taking place in communication, interwoven with changes in technology, and allow these shifts to inform the project of creating a new homiletic for the emerging generation of church.

moment, anticipation of questions, a dialogue sermon between two preachers, pastor in conversation with parishioners, forums after the sermon, the sermon clinic before the sermon, and indirect feedback in small groups. Ultimately, however, “Preaching as an isolated event in itself is an insufficient vehicle for the communication of the gospel.”³²

The wallop at the end of Reid’s essay comes in his section titled “Beyond Preaching.” Here he takes issue with paying professionals to preach. One person selected and paid to be the performer of the bulk of the church’s ministry is, for him, the underlying problem of the church.³³ In a primitivist move, Reid lifts up how “In the early church there was no distinction of status between those who had the gift of preaching and those who had the gift of teaching or healing.”³⁴ In other words, the hierarchy had not been set in place as it is today, with preaching elevated as the most important of the spiritual gifts, the church putting money where the mouth is, so to speak. The problem is that this development prevented shared ministry and created an unsustainable office as well as the preacher-cult. Reid continues, “By turning the preaching ministry over to a paid professional, we are also giving him a job too big for one man alone.”³⁵

Sexist language aside, Reid’s argument is compelling even 53 years later. Preaching, as one moment, is not enough to ingrain the gospel in the lives of the faithful. Spaces are required for processing, feedback, and on-going conversation. This has been the pursuit of many members of the academy since the birth of the guild in 1965, two years after Reid’s essay. Rather than dismantling the preacher-cult paradigm, a clear by-product of the pulpit-pew binary, the academy has implicitly sought to dress the binary of pulpit and pew in dialogical fashion in each decade. What is needed, however, is a new wearer of clothes, a new foundation for preaching not reliant upon the binary in the first place, to be added to the conversation.

Pulpit and Pew in Dialogical Dress

Reid’s “Preaching and the Nature of Communication,” ends pessimistically. He does not see a future for preaching as a practice that leads to vitality and faithfulness in

³² Reid, 47.

³³ Reid, 48.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Reid, 49.

the church. For Reid, preaching is unable to break out of the monological illusion in order to allow proclamation and witness to become truly conversational. In other words, Reid could not see a place for preaching, nor even ecclesiology, beyond the pulpit/pew paradigm. The following exploration into efforts at breaking free of the monological illusion reveals just how right on his concerns were some fifty years later. The whole Christian enterprise will need revision and prophetic imagination to break the mold, but familiar patterns of practice and thought are hard to break and reformat.

Craddock and Inductive Dress

Fred Craddock's book, *As One Without Authority*, begins with a chapter on a pulpit in the shadows, no longer an un-challenged and universally accepted locus of authority and wisdom in American culture. Originally published in 1971, this landmark book in homiletics midwived an inductive method summarized as "the turn to the listener" in the academic world of preaching.³⁶

In the past, Craddock argues, sermons were fitted to a world celebrating the written word, with certainty and logic, clear argument, etc. Preachers were trained to use the best methods in sermon design and flow to transfer the message from the pulpit to the pew.³⁷ Context of those who sat in the pews mattered less than historical context of the scripture, dogmatics of tradition, and the rules of rhetoric. These sermons, according to Craddock, "spoke but did not listen" to the people in the pews.³⁸

This formula for communication did not work for people at the end of the 1960s, who were skeptical of truths spoken from on high down to the people below. Authorities, be it presidents and politicians or pastors, were no longer bestowed with un-questioned authority. Thus, the traditional monologue carefully crafted by the preacher for a present

³⁶ Some have argued that Craddock's dialogical "New Homiletic" is nothing new at all for preaching, particularly in the black church. See for example Dale P. Andrews, "New to Whom?" *Homiletix E-Forum*, Academy of Homiletics (Fall 2006). www.homiletics.org. Andrews states that the practice of turning to the listener, central to Craddock and the New Homiletic, was not new to oral and folk cultures of communication organic to African cultures.

³⁷ Hence the lament of New Homiletic Father David Randolph in *The Renewal of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 21; "It was a fateful day when the venerable John A. Broadus asserted, in the work that was to become the standard in its field for generations, that homiletics was a branch of rhetoric. American homiletics has not yet been completely reconstituted after this stroke which severed the head of preaching from theology and dropped it into the basket of rhetoric held by Aristotle."

³⁸ Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, Fourth Edition (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 26.

congregation hungry for the pastor's wisdom did not fit the culture of America at the end of flower-power and Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream, in the wake of assassinations of political powerhouses and institutional corruption. The pulpit, Craddock claimed, was in the shadows.

The pulpit in the shadows is painted as out of touch with reality and escapist, behind stained glass windows looking out on the world rather than working in it or letting it shape the sermon behind the stained glass. Yet, Craddock maintains that the spoken word is ultimately God's preferred method of communication, and that people still are in the habit of listening to sermons with the hope of hearing from God. The audience, Craddock claims, is *waiting* for life giving language to return to the pulpit.³⁹

Thus, Craddock operates under the assumption that the pulpit-pew binary is a solid foundation, granted one in need of a little renovation. The suggestion Craddock offers is for a preacher to no longer rely on being deductive in his method of preaching, that is acting as an expert on everything and feeding the argument to the congregation in a clean and linear fashion. Rather, a preacher should turn to the listeners, imagine how they hear the scripture passages, and then bring this process of exegesis, of arrival to "aha!" to the structure of the sermon itself. This is inductive preaching.

With the inductive method, Craddock does the dialogical work of Reid, but he does it in his own mind on behalf of the people she ministers to. Granted, Craddock assumes that the preacher is deeply involved in day-to-day ministry, that she is gathering the narratives of her people and bringing them to the preaching task.⁴⁰ But there is no explicit conversation, no official feedback loop. The preacher imagines the dialogue, with guidance from the Spirit, and then designs the sermon based on the imagined conversation of her community with the text.

Craddock does not offer something that transcends the pulpit/pew binary. He in fact is resigned to the binary, even in physical manifestation, as he laments how even the way the building is designed promotes the problem, as the preacher looks down and the people look up.⁴¹ Rather than dissolving the pulpit/pew binary, however, Craddock asks

³⁹ Craddock, 31.

⁴⁰ Craddock, 67.

⁴¹ Craddock, 15.

the preacher in the pulpit to consider a new posture in the pulpit, one that bends down closer to the intended and assumed audience.

For decades, the academy of homiletics has added nuance to this call to inductive preaching, all without challenging or critiquing the pulpit/pew binary. We have designed roundtable pulpits,⁴² decolonized pulpits,⁴³ and liberated pulpits.⁴⁴ Perhaps, not seeing the binary and questioning the binary has prevented us from cultivating homiletic vision and imagination beyond the pulpit. We seem tethered to the pulpit and ministry from it rather than ministry to the living Word in other venues. The following section is not meant to be exhaustive but illustrative of the trouble homiletics has created for itself under the unchecked authority of the pulpit-pew binary.

Weaving the Sermon: Pulpit/Pew in Feminist Dress

Christine Smith was a pioneer in homiletics during the late 1980s and early 1990s who challenged our discourse for all too often dominated by male perspectives, especially patriarchal conceptions and embodiments of authority. This led to understandings of preaching that denied the communal nature of the sermon and the greater interconnectedness of all life. In *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching from a Feminist Perspective*, Smith argues, “for centuries men have primarily defined the authority of the preacher from their own male experience,”⁴⁵ and so authority in preaching resided in the “set-apartness” of the preacher as the one who has been bestowed certain gifts of persuasion and influence over people in the pews.⁴⁶

Although Craddock proposed a method of preaching in which the preacher comes to the pulpit as one without authority, Smith argues that Craddock perpetuates traditional patriarchal authority. The preacher composes the message and delivers the message as

⁴² See John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Preaching and Leadership Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

⁴³ See Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014).

⁴⁴ Justo L. and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980).

⁴⁵ Christine M. Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching from a Feminist Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 43.

⁴⁶ Smith, 46.

one connected to the congregation but, as pointed out before, mostly in the preacher's imagination rather than reality. There is an effort in Craddock to weave text and context, to preach within a particular community. Yet, according to Smith, Craddock fails to rid authority in preaching from a "flavor of separateness."⁴⁷ What, then, is authority if not a power bestowed on someone to speak for and influence a particular community? How can authority be shared, especially in preaching from a pulpit? Smith and many homiletics since wrestle with these questions.

To redefine authority in preaching is to first understand authority from women's perspective. Authority, according to Smith, is not a power bestowed on an individual in one moment and forever onward. Implied in ordination to preaching ministry is the assumption that ordination bestows the preacher with authority for the rest of her career. It is an object attained. Instead Smith argues that for women authority is "a quality of content, a mode of communication, and an authenticity of message," and so only bestowed in accumulative moments of engagement *with* a community.⁴⁸ Inherently partnered to authority in this paradigm is the notion of *intimacy* as opposed to separation and distance.

But authority is littered with historical understandings from male perspectives and Smith struggles to free the term from our associations with it. Ultimately, Smith does not want to use the word authority in her homiletic aesthetic. She hopes for a more liberating term to emerge, but it does not come.⁴⁹ Thus she attempts to describe the preacher as one who tries to share and earn authority within a communal web, but without a clear path to how the sharing of power inherent with authority in preaching occurs in sermon delivery and preparation.

In this important, ground-breaking book, Smith offers a method for preaching that rejects the oppressive binary of pulpit over and against pew. She speaks of mutuality and solidarity. She redefines authority as a sort of with-ness, a power that emerges only if the community allows it to. Ultimately, however, Smith remains trapped in the pulpit-pew binary as it exists in the wider schema of classical Christian theology. She resigns herself

⁴⁷ Smith, 47.

⁴⁸ Smith, 47.

⁴⁹ Smith, 48.

to the word authority in preaching though she wishes there was another expression for what it means to be empowered to preach and minister to the living Word in community. Smith strives to challenge the assumption that the pulpit rules over the pew, but her second-wave feminist framework, still harboring essentializing binaries, is not sturdy enough to expose the deeper source of the problem.

Weaving came at a crucial time in homiletics and is one of the first contributions to the academy beyond the dominant masculine perspective. But Smith does not trouble the theological foundations in Western Christianity that plague homiletic theory and perpetuate definitions of authority as lordship over another. Thus, she could not deconstruct the pulpit-pew binary and could only offer a perspective of the pulpit and pew relationship that is possible in light of the gifts of feminine knowing in corollary disciplines such as pastoral care and psychology. However, second and early third-wave feminist theologies that perpetuate the view that women's ways of knowing are relational and men are not are caught up in the destructive schema of binaries discussed earlier. Men and women both lose complexity in that simplified pattern. Not even calls to "equal valuing," such as Smith's get at the root of the problem for women, minorities, and anyone outside of clean dualistic schema such as gender-non conforming individuals.⁵⁰ Consequently, practices as well as practitioners of preaching that do not conform to binary schema are left on the margins of Smith's project once again.

Roundtable Shaped Pulpits

In the Roundtable discussions of the mid- to late-1990s we begin to get tangible methods for bringing in other voices without simply utilizing Craddock's pastoral imagination or a feminist aesthetic rubric for sermon design. John S. McClure's *Roundtable Pulpit* and Lucy Atkinson Rose's *Sharing the Word* seem to be the future of preaching Clyde Reid hoped for decades before.

Both books imagine and implement preaching preparation that is dialogical in approach.⁵¹ Specifically, McClure offers strategies for pre and post sermon feedback with laity with the aim of bringing as many voices from the church and community into the

⁵⁰ Smith, 30.

⁵¹ Though in execution neither one suggests sermons preached by multiple persons. This has been proposed and practiced in homiletics, however.

content and concern of the pulpit as possible. Doing so, for McClure, leads to more effective leadership beyond the traditional sovereign approach. Beginning with an image of a church shaped pulpit, Rose takes the collaborative preaching of McClure one step farther in its attention to the beloved community in its struggle to be followers and *preachers* of the Word. However, while she insists on a need for more radical, egalitarian forms of conversational preaching among community, she ends her project with a proposal and a question of *how* this preaching occurs rather than a one-size-fits all model to pursue.

Both books landscape the shift from sovereign views and embodiments of preacher and preaching. Like Craddock, these authors struggled with the already imposed binary in the hopes that they could subvert the framework from within. The Roundtable projects shift to collaborative or conversational methodologies in communication and leadership from within the pulpit-pew binary in order to inhabit a troubled space (where Sovereign preaching was long the norm) differently.⁵² In Roundtable methodologies, traditional hierarchy is challenged as preaching's content and conclusion becomes more of a "wager" than a proposition, more of a moment of gathering together voices for communal conversations around the Word and allowing them to sit there than a deduced, clean, proposition from the expert preacher. They reflect a transition to postmodern ways of knowing from the modern philosophies that perpetuate sovereign structures of leadership in the church.

Sovereign modes of preaching, according to McClure:⁵³

1. tend to deny relevance of hearer's experience
2. tend to "preclude communal interpretation of the Word" as preacher has a direct line

⁵² Saba Mahmood, an ethnographer speaking to the experience of the contemporary women's mosque movement in Cairo, Egypt, describes the assertion of a women's space in what on the outside seems to be only a troubled, hegemonic space. She claims that by "inhabiting" hegemonic norms differently and distinctly, these women exercise agency beyond the typical feminist conception of agency as resistance of hegemonic norms. See *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 13. This practice is akin to Michel De Certeau's "tactics" which will be discussed later in this chapter. See *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Third Edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

⁵³ The textbook for the Sovereign way of preaching is John Albert Broadus' *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, originally published in 1903 was the core textbook for preaching until H. Grady Davis' *Design*. Broadus relies on the rules of classical rhetoric to instruct preachers in the way of most effective delivery of a sermon message. The assumption, a very modern one, is that following such rules will guarantee reception of the one clear proposition from the pastor.

3. tend to use an assertive rhetoric that turns coercive
4. tend to set God's Word as fixed and unchanging in changing contexts

McClure, heavily influenced by the work of Emmanuel Levinas, calls for preaching that resists the tendencies of Sovereign preaching. Impacted by Levinas' ethic of the other, McClure proposes preaching that grows out of encounter with others—meaning those human strangers inside and outside of the church who represent also the Holy Other.⁵⁴ This engagement renders the gospel a public gospel, one discovered only through a journey together in the public realm. Truth is emergent, only in *real*, not imagined, face-to-face encounter, rather than settled in the mind of the preacher waiting to be transmitted to and received by a passive audience.

The methodology of McClure pursues “nutritive empowerment, or power *for* others” rather than power over others.⁵⁵ By strategically meeting face-to-face on a weekly basis as a church to discuss the text for worship, “*interactive forms of persuasion*” emerge rather than coercive forms.⁵⁶ Power is shared as the message is shaped by an expanding number of voices rather than the voice of the preacher alone.

McClure calls for boundaries between preacher and congregation, though not in the sovereign sense of gap/distance. True to Levinas, there is fundamental beloved strangeness that prevents preacher and people from knowing one another fully. Difference is the accent that keeps the conversation going and preaching open-ended.⁵⁷ Thus the sermon, our effort to bring forth the Living Word in the preaching ministry, is not over when the preacher leaves the pulpit. Rather, it is only another beginning in which the Word is able to emerge through the lives of the community hearing and participating in the preaching ministry. Ultimately, McClure's method aspires not to a “fusing of horizons” or a “like-minded” or “tolerant” church but a “*learning community of deeply engaged strangers.*”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ McClure and Levinas presuppose strangeness in all others and are wary of assumed likeness. As will be discussed shortly, this is where Rose differs greatly in her project. She seeks collegiality and togetherness while McClure is cautious of assumed togetherness and argues that right relationship must account for the strangeness that is the other.

⁵⁵ John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Preaching and Leadership Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 20.

⁵⁶ McClure, *Roundtable*, 20

⁵⁷ McClure, *Roundtable*, 53.

⁵⁸ McClure, *Roundtable*, 54.

It is important to note that collaborative preaching for McClure does not pursue equality and mutuality because it cannot. Conversation, for McClure, is always in a state of inequality or “asymmetry” though the balance must shift, he argues, so that one partner does not always hold more power over the direction of the conversation.⁵⁹ The challenge to leaders then is to make sure the asymmetry is not habitually over and against someone(s) at or not yet at the table.

While “strangeness” and “otherness” is at the core of McClure’s collaborative preaching, Rose pursues instead the image of “cohort” for the relationship between preacher and people. Connectedness, not sacred distance, is the aim of Rose’s conversational preaching. Rose understands distance between pulpit and pew to be a by-product of the modern male sovereign models of preaching, in which the underlying “assumption seems to be that the preacher and the congregation are different because of the preacher’s superior understanding of truth or the gospel, interpretation of scripture, of faith experience, which—being more biblical, more theologically sound, or perhaps simply more faithful—should be transferred to the congregation.”⁶⁰ This assumption fits into the classical Western theology paradigm in which one side of the binary maintains power over the other side. Strangeness and otherness can, in the unchecked web of damaging dualistic thinking, perpetuate oppressions rather than liberate subjects.

Rose believes that a conversational ethos is powerful enough to upset the balance of power by surrounding the pulpit, “traditionally the source of power,” with preaching and power and authority that is shared.⁶¹ This ethos cultivated over time by conversational preaching traits should organically lead “those who are ordained to resist monopolizing the pulpit” and to instead “reenvision their role as ensuring that preaching,” that is the conversation of the congregational cohort that takes place all week long, “occurs.”⁶² She also believes that cultivating conversational preaching will give way to a nonhierarchical context in which “the term preacher” is no longer “a synonym

⁵⁹ McClure, *Roundtable*, 52.

⁶⁰ Rose, 128.

⁶¹ Rose, 123.

⁶² *Ibid.*

for one who is ordained or for the minister who controls access to the pulpit” but is a term for all people.⁶³

However, as stated earlier, it is unclear as to how the shared preaching Rose describes occurs in real time, in real life. She offers no model. Does the pulpit ministry in the conversational model then mean that in one year we hear sermons from 52 different voices? Is she after a cohort of preachers in this sense?⁶⁴ How do we ever erase the definition attached to preacher as she describes it from the pulpit ministry? Rose does not answer these questions. She admits to not yet knowing “the how-tos” of her wager.⁶⁵ She describes characteristics of conversational preaching—preaching that is communal, nonhierarchical, personal, inclusive, and scriptural—in the hopes that others in the field would join the conversation in the academy with their own proposals and wagers.

Both conversation partners in the Roundtable project offer much to the homiletic field. McClure offers practical strategies for clergy to organize their church around conversation with scripture and one another on a consistent basis. Rose does this as well as offers a stunning overview of homiletic theory that reveals the postmodern impulse to round out the practice of preaching with more voices gathering at the table. Each does Reid proud by really tackling the monological illusion in ways graspable for the church as it exists in the North American mainline today.

But the pulpit/pew binary, and the trappings of the greater system it is embedded in, remains even with these dialogical proposals. McClure offers a *Roundtable Pulpit* after all. And Rose offers a *Roundtable Church*, which one can presume houses a pulpit and pews. The binary is dressed up once again in conversational, collaborative, dialogical dress but the real power represented by the pulpit and the real powerlessness perpetuated by the pew in classic theological models of dualistic frameworks remain. “With-ness” in Rose, as it was in Smith, is feminized rather than freed as category and posture that transcends gender binaries.⁶⁶ The one who speaks in the pulpit still must own up to the power that comes from that place. Speaking as one without authority or as one

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ For a window into what the implementation of consistent testimony from the congregation in Sunday worship could look like, see Lillian Daniel, *Tell It Like It Is: Reclaiming the Practice of Testimony* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

⁶⁵ Rose, 121.

⁶⁶ Rose, 123.

who has spoken to others or as one who has listened to others does not diminish the power of the position in the pulpit. But both suggestions for alternative practices and postures to the sovereign preacher/expert posture do help and are crucial to ministry and church leadership that is more participatory and inclusive.

Twenty years ago, Rose and McClure could not have imagined a culture of communication such as the one we are immersed in today, wherein our individual smartphones are wired to buzz and beep out an ever-flowing stream of conversation, mostly nonhierarchical, 24/7. How might this climate reimagine Roundtable preaching and churches? Unfortunately, we can only imagine Rose's contribution to the dialogue with new media.⁶⁷ McClure has dialogued with new media by approaching it through "mashup" practices in pop music. McClure invites the reader to conceptualize doing theology in similar collaborative and creative ways and offers a case study for how to approach the homiletic process."⁶⁸ But how is the preaching task radically transformed in this climate of mashup, new media, and the like? How does the pulpit/pew binary fit into such a radically nonhierarchical vertical communication system? That remains to be discussed.

The Postcolonial Pulpit

The most recent attempt to break preaching out of an oppressive system comes from homiletician Sarah Travis. *Decolonizing Preaching* concerns itself, "with the way that discourses of power continue" specifically discourses that emerge from the oppressive binary of "colonialism/imperialism."⁶⁹ Although Travis notes how these discourses shape shift into "different guises," amazingly, one of the guises of "colonialism/imperialism" Travis does not stumble upon is the pulpit/pew binary itself.⁷⁰ Thus, though she makes contributions to preaching content that is informed by

⁶⁷ I use the word "unfortunately" due to the fact that Lucy Rose passed away the year *Sharing the Word* was published after a battle with cancer.

⁶⁸ See John S. McClure, *Mashup Religion: Pop Music and Theological Invention* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011).

⁶⁹ Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 3.

⁷⁰ Travis, 3.

postcolonial theory,⁷¹ she does not imagine how preaching could benefit from the work of decolonizing the pulpit.

Focusing then on diagnosing and exposing colonizing discourse, Travis lifts up four key characteristics: “domination, separation, homogenization, and fixedness.”⁷² Fixing identities as static categories guaranteed a hierarchy in which one side of the binary has power over the other. Discourse, for Travis, is a powerful tool in both perpetuating these systems and, as she goes on to argue, dismantling them. Thus the role of the preacher is to search her content and contexts for these marks of colonization for “colonizing discourse disrupts community and threatens the bond of Christian love.”⁷³

For Travis, it is important for the reader to understand that postcolonial theory is not a relational response to an anti-relational system. All systems are relational, including colonialism/imperialism.⁷⁴ Postcolonial theory aims at developing relations that are mutual, egalitarian, and focused on self-giving love. The colonial project constructed a different relation dynamic that “relied on the presentation of a stable and unified worldview rooted in the colonizer’s right to rule and control colonized peoples.”⁷⁵ It was and is a relational system, but one in which power was shifted to one side and not shared between the parties in relation.

Travis does ask a crucial question: “What is the role of the pulpit in disrupting this discourse and participating in the decolonization of the church and society?”⁷⁶ But in the end her answer is not in liberating the pulpit from the colonizing system of classic Western theology. She claims that colonizing discourse “enters sermons through our theologies, our biblical interpretations, and our cultural interpretations,” and so reframes the question as “In what ways might preaching need to be decolonized?”⁷⁷ Thus, the pulpit is able, so long as the one standing in it is sensitive to postcolonial concerns, to carve a third space between it and the pew for decolonizing imagination to be cultivated.

⁷¹ Travis on the term “postcolonial:” “*Postcolonial* does not suggest that empire and colonialism/imperialism are safely located in the past, but suggests we continue to be affected by them.” 33

⁷² Travis, 7.

⁷³ Travis, 38.

⁷⁴ Travis, 23.

⁷⁵ Travis, 28.

⁷⁶ Travis, 38.

⁷⁷ Travis, 44.

The space between preacher and people, pulpit and pew is and will continue to be a “contact zone...space that is both colonized and ripe for renewal.”⁷⁸

Preachers then must come to terms with their own “relative power,” according to Travis, and to bring that awareness into the biblical and contextual exegesis required of preaching. They also must reflect on the relative power of their congregation with other congregations and contexts. In the process, Travis hopes that recognizing power inequalities on multiple levels will seize preacher and people with a desire to repent of the ways in which they unintentionally wield power over others.”⁷⁹

And yet questions remain. How can the pulpit, a structure that maintains boundaries and secures power in clergy and distance between preacher and people, be a platform for discourse “that leads listeners to reimagine home in a new way that is dependent not on the maintenance of boundaries or the securing of power but on self-giving love and openness to an unknown future”?⁸⁰ How can the pulpit, trapped in the monological illusion, imitate the love Travis describes as being “not unidirectional” but given and received multidirectionally?”⁸¹ Perhaps Travis does not feel the need to challenge the pulpit of the church due to a claim made earlier in her argument, that “Christianity is no longer the imperial religion, no longer occupying the center of power, no longer aligned with empire.”⁸² But even if this is now the case—a claim I do not agree with—postcolonial theory and its focus on history should draw our attention back to repent of the ways in which the pulpit funded oppression. We continue to dress a troubled construct in dialogical dress without seeking out a new foundation for our preaching practice.

Travis’s use of Jürgen Moltmann, even in dialogue with postcolonial theology, is problematic. First of all, she uses a modern theologian to complete the work she began with postmodern, postcolonial theories. As a result, her constructive turn to the Social Trinity recasts the God/World binary as God-in-Trinity over humanity/creation and is absorbed into the oppressive binary system that perpetuates colonizer/colonized fixity.

⁷⁸ Travis, 77.

⁷⁹ Travis, 98.

⁸⁰ Travis, 43.

⁸¹ Travis, 59.

⁸² Travis, 35.

Travis argues that while postcolonial theory “is able to inform the practice of preaching...it does not offer a theological foundation for Christian identity and ethics.”⁸³ But she could have pursued other postmodern theologies in her project rather than appealing to a modern system and a white European male theologian.

Thus, Travis misses an opportunity to align with and embody postcolonial theology’s pursuit of complicating modern binaries as well as creating liberating and eschatologically imaginative third spaces and identities. By focusing on decolonizing content over performance, she also fails to recognize that the pulpit itself is representative of colonization and has been complicit in colonization. She fails to name how the Western Christian theological binary scheme of God over and against the world has contributed to colonizing those who are on the right side of the binary and the wrong side of history and how the pulpit/pew binary is caught up in it.

The answer to our dilemma, as we will discuss, is not to redefine the space between pulpit and pew, as it stands in our presumed theological schema, for a new era. Before we can decolonize preaching we need to decolonize the pulpit and pew from the binary that perpetuates over-against-ness, distance, homogenization, and fixedness. We need to decolonize preaching from this troubled paradigm altogether. We do this not to do away with preaching from pulpits entirely, for what we are after is less homogenization of preaching and homiletics, not more. Rather we deconstruct the paradigm in order to assert that preaching is a practice that transcends pulpits and pews. It has done this and thankfully will continue to do so.

A Final Attempt: Lose and Postmodern Dress

Before we move on from this review of recent efforts to fix preaching, unaware of how the problem is rooted in the pulpit-pew binary, I want to lift up the work of David Lose in his *Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World—and Our Preaching—Is Changing*. Lose and I observe a similar state of affairs yet pursue proposals from different angles.

⁸³ Travis, 49.

Lose confesses a growing suspicion regarding our homiletic research in particular, that we treat the practice of preaching as a problem to be fixed.”⁸⁴ In every decade, new propositions in homiletics, centered on problem-solution models, emerge. According to Lose, “As long as we’re trying to ‘fix’ preaching, we’ve already concluded that the basic practice and patterns of preaching we’ve employed in recent decades—and, truth be told, for centuries—are essentially sound.”⁸⁵ What are the basic patterns that Lose speaks of?

Lose ultimately claims that we are at a crossroads in preaching requiring us to question the very basic pattern of a practice we have come to rely on for centuries. The real problem for homiletics is that the very context on which we based our earlier “basic practice” of preaching on and from has changed too much. In fact, “the context is no longer recognizable,” meaning “more information not only doesn’t help us but may actually confuse us by inducing us to operate by the rules of the old context rather than take seriously the foreign terrain in which we find ourselves.”⁸⁶ How exactly has our context changed? Lose names three dominant movements developed to describe the change of context: postmodernism, secularism, and pluralism. Channeling the approach of Paul Tillich,⁸⁷ Lose hopes to awaken preacher’s imaginations as they seek to engage the mystery challenging their practice and ministry today by naming the central questions each of these elements raise.

Lose still offers a proposal to address the challenges he clarifies in his project (see how I avoided the words problem and solution, though is this not precisely what he ends up attempting?). Rather than responding to the three aforementioned “isms” with either rigid fundamentalist posturing and “strict” sermons or “loose” “cosmopolitan” liberal messages from the pulpit, Lose suggests a third way that seeks to engage the pew on Sunday but more importantly the people in the pews throughout the rest of the week as participants in proclamation.

⁸⁴ David J. Lose, 4 KINDLE EDITION *Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World—and Our Preaching—Is Changing* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 5.

⁸⁵ Lose, 5.

⁸⁶ Lose, 4.

⁸⁷ Tillich’s writing of world history established movements in time by the quintessential questions of each period, for example, the Middle Ages no longer asking the question of the ancient world about escaping the finality of death to enjoy eternal life, rather “Given original sin, how do we find a merciful God who will overlook our guilt and offer us forgiveness?” Lose, 6. See Tillich’s *The Courage to Be*.

This third way for proclamation is funded in part by the Internet. Lose notes how the Internet, specifically Web 2.0,⁸⁸ reveals a preference for interactive ways of coming to know and construct identity rather than receiving information and identities from authorities. Perhaps, Lose suggests, we could learn from the shift toward open-source Web programs requiring user interaction in our preaching? This would require a shift from what Lose sees as the predominant homiletic—a performative homiletic—to a participatory one.

Whereas the performative homiletic views the preachers as the sole and chief interpreter of Scripture and Christian identity,⁸⁹ the participatory homiletic sees the preacher as a creator of space for the congregation to become fluent interpreters of the Christian faith.⁹⁰ Appealing to shifts in technology over the past two decades from static and consumer driven postures of Web 1.0 to the emerging interactive platforms and postures of Web 2.0, Lose imagines the sermon as a “transport mechanism, the ether through which interactivity [between God’s word and God’s people] happens.”⁹¹ Space is created in the sermon itself for the congregation to interact and participate rather than merely watching the performance of proclamation.

Lose’s “new homiletic” responds to the three-fold challenge to preaching (postmodernism, secularism, and pluralism) with interactive preaching instructed by the desire for a culture of participation on the Internet.⁹² Lose calls this a new homiletic, no doubt in reference to the new homiletic of Craddock and others, that has aged overtime and has yet to “solve” the “problem” of dwindling respect for the pulpit.

Ultimately, the ways in which Lose suggests practicing this participatory homiletic largely relies on practices lifted up by McClure and Rose in their roundtable and round pulpit efforts as well, and so he does not go beyond metaphorical proposals for

⁸⁸ Web 2.0 refers to a shift in approach to the Internet by creators and participants alike. Whereas the first wave of the Internet, Web 1.0, focused on sharing information that can be consumed by people all over the world, Web 2.0 results from the recognition in the late 1990s that users prefer collaborating with data and one another in the *place* the Web creates. Designer Darcy DiNucci is credited with the neologism in 1999 as she described a Web of the future not described as screen with text but rather described as “an ether through which interactivity happens.” Darcy DiNucci, “Fragmented Future,” *Print* 53, no.4 (1999), 32.

⁸⁹ Lose, 105.

⁹⁰ Lose, 107.

⁹¹ Lose, 109.

⁹² Lose, 102, 104.

the practice of preaching. The place for the preaching is still Sunday from a pulpit to a pew. The preacher is called to do a better job of connecting with her congregation in the real world by visiting their place of work. The preacher has guided conversational sermons with congregants in the pulpit. The preacher has a small group come together to reflect on the upcoming text for the week and their voices make it into the sermon. It is preaching in the binary but in dialogical dress.

I think Lose was on the brink of making my argument but too committed to the underlying foundation to speak it aloud: that the pulpit-pew binary has arrested preaching and kept it from dancing with changing contexts and cultures of communication. Preaching, but homiletic research especially, would be better able to embrace the “mystery” Lose speaks of not with a third way of interactive preaching which remains in the pulpit-pew binary. Lose is on to something greater than he may initially have planned when he concludes with this brief nod to Web 2.0 in the final pages of his book. But Web 2.0 is more than a compelling metaphor or anecdote. I believe that the changes in communication ushered in by social media are sourcing movements such as postmodernism, secularism, pluralism, and other -isms in unprecedented ways. The sermon from the pulpit to the pew is a posture of communication inherently counter to these trends of communication. And so we are back once again to Reid’s dilemma: “Preaching as an isolated event in itself”—I would add “as situated in the pulpit-pew binary”—“is an insufficient vehicle for the communication of the gospel.”⁹³

Contra to Lose, I am asking throughout this project what about preaching is not merely flexible but what is transcendent of social, cultural, and intellectual tumults yet always accommodating (on a spectrum depending upon theology of preacher/tradition) to each context. In 2,000 years or so of practice, preaching has met with one general shift in communication in the transition from oral culture to print and textual based culture in the 1500s.⁹⁴ As we will discuss later, sociologists and historians argue that we are now on the brink of a shift in communication as transformative as the invention of the printing press. The goal of naming these essences is not to preserve stability in preaching, nor even the institution of the church which is in reciprocal relationship with it. The goal is to un-fix

⁹³ Reid, 47.

⁹⁴ See Walter J. Ong. *Orality and Literacy 30th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Routledge Press, 2012).

preaching from the pulpit by challenging the ways preaching has become fixed to historical notions of authority, efficiency, and church leadership. In so doing, like Lose, I think preaching specifically and the church in general is more adept to survive the shifts that occur and to discern, when a piece of the infrastructure crumbles, whether or not that piece needed to due to its marriage to something non-essential in time in the first place. We need to reclaim preaching as a practice that transcends our cultural shifts in communication as they come. Preaching transcends the pulpit/pew binary.

As we see, these conversational, postcolonial, postmodern approaches to the pulpit ministry are just that: approaches to the set and settled pulpit ministry caught in the pulpit/pew paradigm. In a way similar to the creative practices described by Michel De Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, in which people restlessly alter and adjust what is given to them within a hegemonic cultural situation, this generation of homileticians have invented “tactics” for dialogically and subversively inhabiting the inherited Sovereign and monological architecture of preaching.⁹⁵ As such, they each make strides in increasing preaching’s purpose and participation yet struggle to escape the confines of the power lines that coincide with preaching in the classic western theological schema. As O. Wesley Allen Jr. highlighted in his conversational approach to preaching, these approaches “are not, in themselves satisfactory solutions” to authentic preaching in a postmodern era, for *the* sermon delivered by *the* preacher from *the* pulpit remains the focus of the conversation.⁹⁶ The monological illusion cannot be dressed up in conversational outfits. In order to collaborate with the adventure now presented in this digital age, the monological illusion and the architecture of the pulpit-pew binary needs to be challenged from the ground up. Until this takes place, any forms of preaching that are not the sermon in a worship service on Sunday will be discounted as vital components to ministries of proclamation.

⁹⁵ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Third Edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

⁹⁶ O. Wesley Allen Jr. *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 38.

The New Margins, The New Measures

Novel means of preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ have surfaced in every generation but the novelty of our time removes the very bodies once present physically in pulpit and pew from proximity thanks to technological advances. There are churches without pews and in the place of the one pulpit are three, four, or more screens upon which a preacher—from some external geographical location—is delivering the good news to a site church. There are churches with buildings only on the Internet where a congregation of avatars show up to hear a word from the preacher avatar. These are the sole and central means for thousands of Christians to hear the Word preached each week.

On the other end of the technological spectrum, there are house churches, dinner churches, again devoid of pews, where a preacher shares a brief meditation followed by upwards of an hour of shared homiletical conversation around gospel.⁹⁷ There are bars where churches host open mic nights where the gospel is shared by a handful of brave souls who—through song, poetry, and dance—witness to the encounter they have had with God through the words of Scripture and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Are such practices preaching? And if so how do we even sort out whether it is good preaching practice or detrimental practice? Are these novelties of concern to homiletics or do we just hope they are a passing fad? Perhaps in a calcified disciplinary categorization of pulpit and pew they are not worthy of our time and attention. They are instead categorized as “para-homiletics” or brushed aside as interesting experiments in the realm of theological expression but are not actual homiletic practices.⁹⁸ I fear that with such thinking the discipline of homiletics may become as inflexible and crumbling as so many church buildings in Western Christianity.

The pulpit maintains power in many parts of the church. But it also is losing and has lost the authority it held unchallenged for so long. Preaching, as a *practice*, need not

⁹⁷ See Mike Graves forthcoming book on early communion practices and how they relate to the dinner church movement, working title *Eating and Talking in Church*.

⁹⁸ See John S. McClure, “Para-homiletics and Video Games,” Mashup Religion Blog, entry posted March 2, 2012, <http://mashupreligion.blogspot.com/2012/03/para-homiletics-and-video-games.html> (accessed January 25, 2017). This term “para-homiletics” was co-invented in a Homiletics seminar led by McClure at Vanderbilt University in 2012. I was in that seminar, along with my colleague Nathan Dannison. In this blog entry, McClure also cites an essay by Ilona Nord in *Homiletic* which speaks to potential adventures for homiletics in virtual worlds. See Ilona Nord, “Experiment with Freedom Every Day: Regarding the Virtual Dimension of Homiletics,” *Homiletic* 36, no. 2 (2011).

be caught up in the crumbling church structures. Our categories of pulpit/pew need not be the sole categories upon which the practice of preaching is located and defined. We can do more than implement tactics for making the order we have inherited more tolerable for a new generation of pastors and congregants.

*Preaching as Theo-rhetorical Practice*⁹⁹

In recent years, theologians have reengaged practices as being fundamental to our theologizing and our formation as Christians.¹⁰⁰ Embracing preaching as a collection of living and historical practices is one step toward process philosophy and the nature of change and its inevitability as well as essences and recognizability over time. It is also one challenge to the pulpit/pew binary and preaching's fixity within it.

Theologian Craig Dykstra observes a problem with the way contemporary theology conceives of practices, such as preaching. These practices tend, in the clerical paradigm¹⁰¹, to be conceived of as individual, ahistorical, and abstract, performed especially by a clergyperson and so off limits for lay people.¹⁰² One can see how the classic binary schema has funded the clerical paradigm. In its worst mode, the aim of

⁹⁹ I borrow this language from my mentor at Saint Paul School of Theology, Mike Graves. For him, preaching is a theological and rhetorical practice. Theology takes precedence but without rhetorical strategy, preaching will be less efficient than it could and should be.

¹⁰⁰ This is a very cursory introduction to practices conversations. For a deeper understanding of how the practices conversation has challenged traditional misplaced concreteness around the role of practices in the theological curriculum, theological systems, and church, I suggest reading Dorothy C. Bass, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997); Ellen Ott Marshall, ed., *Choosing Peace Through Daily Practices* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005); Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds. *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008); Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012).

¹⁰¹ The 'clerical paradigm' was a diagnosis from Edward Farley's work that theology has been deconstructed as a unifying aim at seeking to know God into specialized silos of knowing aimed at the know-how of professional clergy only, rather than general knowing of God. See *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001) as well as his "Four Pedagogical Mistakes: A Mea Culpa" in *Teaching Theology and Religion*, ISSN 1368-4868, vol. 8, no. 4, (2005), 200-203. For a counter argument read Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The 'Clerical Paradigm': A Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness?" in *International Journal of Practical Theology* 11, no. 2 (2007), 19-38.

¹⁰² Craig Dykstra. "Reconceiving Practice," In Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley, eds., *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), pp. 35-66. Republished in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Nancy Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1997), 36.

theological education is to offer secret tools to clergy who are set above and over the laity as holders of knowledge of God and maintainers of tradition without input from below.

In our teaching of preachers in the clerical paradigm, especially as credits allotted for preaching and worship shrink, we focus so much on techniques to get people functioning at a basic level in the pulpit as soon as possible that we leave out the historical and larger social contexts of the practice we are in a long line of collaboration with.¹⁰³ When these assumptions about a practice go unchecked, we all too easily lift up the practice as it is now rendered as being the orthodox form of the practice and all other possibilities as being heresy. Then the only good theory for the practice is theory that helps the practice (as it is now conceived by the majority) to be more effective. Where, Dykstra asks, is there room for moral questions beyond cause and effect?¹⁰⁴ Where, I ask, can we even step out of the paradigm of the pulpit/pew binary to offer a challenge or alternative?

As part of the corrective to abstract, ahistorical conceptions of practice in theological education, Dykstra turns to a definition of practice from Alasdair MacIntyre from *After Virtue*. As a moral philosopher, MacIntyre put practices on the map as objects worthy of study in the early 1980s. Key to Dykstra is that practices, according to MacIntyre, are recognized as complex and inherently corporate in nature, first and foremost.¹⁰⁵ This is not to imply that doing something together as a group necessarily renders a complex practice. Rather, it implies that a practice has been formed over time and thus includes participants historically as well as beyond the present event where the practice occurs. The form of the practice has been socially established and will continue to be so, defined by shared ideals across time and space. For this reason, Dykstra argues that one needs to know the history of a practice in order to participate in it intellectually.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Dykstra, 37.

¹⁰⁴ Dykstra, 39.

¹⁰⁵ Dykstra, 42.

¹⁰⁶ Dykstra, 44.

Tactics and Subversive Means of Inhabiting the Pulpit/Pew Paradigm

As I have already suggested, rather than faulting our forebears in homiletics who have pursued dialogical means of preaching in recent years, it is helpful to reframe their attempts at conversationally re-dressing the inherited monological binary as artful means of “making-do” with what they had, finding freedom, agency, and subversion of norms from within the troubled system.

The concept of “making-do” is what French Jesuit sociologist Michel de Certeau calls *bricolage* and *la perruque*. *Bricolage* is a French word that translates into English as “fiddling” or “tinkering.” *La perruque* translate easily into English as “wig.” Conceptually, de Certeau explains that to practice *bricolage* and *la perruque* is for the employed to make personal use of the employer’s equipment.¹⁰⁷ In other words, it is for one to creatively and subversively make-do with the status quo from within inherited systems of power. This is done in order to create for oneself “a space in which” one “can find *ways of using* the constraining order” without abandoning the “the place where” one may have “no choice but to live.”¹⁰⁸ For years the preacher, on the whole, has had no choice but to live out her vocation within the pulpit. As the preacher inhabits that architecture, the pulpit/pew binary strategizes within the Western dualistic schema to separate preacher from people, to render the laity dependent upon the power of the preacher, and to maintain one-way power from the top of the church down. But, as de Certeau reminds us, everyday people living within these imposed strategies adapt tactics in order to oppose those strategies. Craddock, Smith, Travis, Rose, McClure, and Lose offered subversive tactics for preachers to practice preaching in the pulpit/pew environment not as Sovereign, All-Knowing Authorities, but as emphatic, in touch, compassionate, and conversational pastors. We are forever grateful for the ways in which they offered homiletics alternative ways for using the constraining order for preaching that are more in tune with liberation theologies of the church.

Removed from the complexity of a past historical moment or of a cultural reality that is other-than one’s own social location, it is all too easy to overlook the power and presence of agency embodied by those operating within the constraints of a particular

¹⁰⁷ De Certeau, 29.

¹⁰⁸ De Certeau, 30. *Emphasis his.*

system or location or culture. This is what the ethnographic work of Saba Mahmood unveils within her study of pietistic contemporary Muslim women in Cairo, Egypt. These women do not resist the orthodoxy inherited of their tradition. Rather, they inhabit their religious environment distinctly, with nuance perhaps only clear from within the religious environment and moment. In so doing, the orthodox system is impacted. Thus Mahmood names agency as “a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create,” suggesting that “agentive capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms, but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms.”¹⁰⁹ Held up against external norms emerging from Western feminism, these Muslim women may not appear to exercise any agency, if the term “agency” is analogous to “resistance.” But Mahmood as well as de Certeau do not constrain agency conceptually by equating it with resistance and overthrow of systems and strategies that exist. Instead, they invite us to look deeper to see how within a given environment agency can be embodied in varied ways. Looking within homiletics and ecclesiology over the past fifty years, the scholars lifted up in the previous section indeed embody agency in homiletics as they inhabit the pulpit ministry distinctly.

For Dykstra, as well as de Certeau and Mahmood, it is necessary to remember that a practice is never created *ex nihilo*. Individuals cannot create a practice from scratch without influence from forces before. Rather we participate in practices, at times drastically reshaping them, overtime. In other words, we can claim that practice is always in process, even the practice of preaching. So when we talk about innovation in preaching in this technological age, we first must agree to the standard that we are not reinventing the wheel. Nor is the lure for new means of embodying the practice of preaching a slap in the face to dialogical preaching that came before. Nor are we betraying the heritage of those who have gone before when we claim that preaching as a practice shape-shifts over time, whether we mean to or not. As an embodied act, and social-communal act, it cannot help but incarnate with distinct particularity in any different time or place.

The challenge comes in recognizing diverse practices of preaching as being under the umbrella of some stated rubric for the practice preaching or of a sermon. For

¹⁰⁹ Saba Mahmood, “Agency, Performativity, and The Feminist Subject,” in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, edited by Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 180.

homiletician Ted Smith, this is where MacIntyre's understanding of practice may need to be challenged. If preaching, a practice, is defined by one set of ideals or "internal goods" unique to that one practice, then it may be all too easy to marginalize preaching that may occur on the margins of the hegemonic ideal. For example, says Smith, suggesting that "A second-century preacher in Alexandria and a twenty-first-century preacher in a gentrifying Atlanta neighborhood...share in a single, continuous practice...papers over the deep ruptures and discontinuities between the two."¹¹⁰ Yes, it matters that we juxtapose and think on the two settings for the ideal practice but it matters how we juxtapose. It matters that defining a practice by Platonic ideals seemingly free from enculturation "renders invisible the important strategies, actions, personae, and techniques that they shared with contemporaries who did not share their conscious ends."¹¹¹ After all, MacIntyre pursued the renewal of virtue ethics via a reclamation of theory pre-Enlightenment and found it in Aristotle (as if his ideals were not impacted by his historical moment and the moments which led up to that moment).

Returning to Dykstra, we realize that the church does not merely make and participate in the practices—of preaching, of worship, of pastoral care, of prayer—rather "communal life is constituted by practices...in a sense they are practices."¹¹² The church is the enfleshment of the Word proclaimed throughout the world—its content as well as its method of delivery. The church, ecclesiology, is the practice of homiletics over time made visible.

Perhaps our efforts at freeing preaching from the clerical paradigm fall short because of our inability to look at preaching beyond the pulpit/pew binary of the clerical paradigm and to ask hard questions about what sort of church is created by the binary and how it is juxtaposed with the church simultaneously caught up in other practices of education and communication beyond the church as institution.¹¹³ Or perhaps it is the

¹¹⁰ Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 27.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Dykstra, 47.

¹¹³ At this point, I want to briefly mention the binary alongside the work of Paulo Friere and bell hooks. The binary mainline preaching operated within perpetuates a banking model for theological education. It all too easily renders the laity as less informed, less responsible for the development of theological knowledge. Being dependent upon clergy to give direct answers to their lives laity struggle to think for themselves and clergy miss out on being truly impacted by the theologizing of the laity. Perhaps this is why energy swells

case that our forebears had no choice but to offer tactics of liberative and relational inhabiting of the pulpit/pew paradigm until the time was ripe for novel means of dialogical preaching and ecclesiology to be embodied.

This project addresses emerging communication technologies and practices apart from preaching, understanding that all forms of communication are tangled up in the historical realities of their time.¹¹⁴ This is why we ultimately need a theo-ethic in order to reflect what kind of communities are being formed by the kind of practices, especially preaching, they participate in. New tactics will need to be implemented in order for Christians to inhabit the technoculture prophetically. This is why we approach historical forms of preaching without explicit desire to reclaim those ancient models as ideal (timeless) forms for renewing preaching today. We look back to remember the multiplicity of formats under the umbrella of preaching, not to seek one line of right and true practice. There never was a pure ideal for preaching handed down to us from Jesus, nor the disciples, nor, in disagreement with C.H. Dodd¹¹⁵ and others, the Apostle Paul. We do not need to spend our creative energies protecting some pure form of preaching from the corruption of this age of technological change. So what are we to do with our energies instead?

Conclusion

Since the beginning, academics in the field of homiletics have struggled to fix preaching in a variety of ways, depending on their generation, without examining

around house churches and religious commitment on the streets in liberation movements rather than in institutional churches and their pulpits/pews. A generation of followers of Christ want to do more than listen to and be subservient to a talking clerical head. No matter how round we make that pulpit, we seem to fall short of liberative and empowering preaching practices.

¹¹⁴ As a student of Ted Smith, I am indebted to him for awakening me to the historical entanglement of practices such as preaching and the challenge to approach these manifestations of the practice in eras and locales of the church both with awe and familiarity rather than judgment and primitivist simplicity. His work on Charles Finney and the New Measures of preaching on the American frontier is a brilliantly assembled example of how a Christian practice accumulates, responds to, aligns with, and subverts 'secular' attitudes and 'secular' practices of its time as well as how tradition bearers of a practice react to technological change of said practice. See Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹¹⁵ See C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963) and James I. H. McDonald, *Kerygma and Didache: The Articulation and Structure of the Earliest Christian Message* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980). A discussion of this particular primitivist homiletic proposal follows in chapter 2.

significant issues posed by the pulpit/pew binary. But we propose that preaching is a theo-rhetorical practice that permeates and transcends pulpits and that it needs to be liberated and reimagined. Our guild formed on the dawn of a postmodern era but it has not freed itself from modern trappings—trust in static ontological categories, systems, and institutions, even the institution of the mainline church itself. As the mainline declines, we feel a pressure leaning on us to fix something, anything, to bring back the Living Word—inductive methods, feminist perspective, collaborative methods, conversational methods, postcolonial methods, and postmodern methods for the pulpit and the pew. These appear as struggles to fix preaching, and as symptoms of perhaps deeper issues associated with an idealized binary. In order to take the next step, we must it seems return to some basics. It is, after all, preaching, faithfulness to the ministry of preaching as both theological and rhetorical in nature, not the salvation of the pulpit, that we are after.

Preaching is what we are after. It happens in pulpits to pews. It happens on streets to passersby. It happens in homes, in a conversational give and take between seminary-trained theologians and lay theologians. It happens beyond our paradigms for it.

Preaching as a theo-rhetorical practice is inherently integrative and relational. That said, it can create oppressive power dynamics of relation as well as create mutual dynamics of relation. At best, it is the art of re-incarnating the Word into our world, our contexts, our congregations and our ways of communication. At worst, preaching is an instrument used against God in the perpetuation of static powers and principalities in this world. It really matters to God and to the Kingdom we are called to collaborate in creating here on earth not only that we preach but also *how* we preach.

This call to deconstruct the pulpit-pew binary for the sake of preaching is not to say that we need to stop preaching from the pulpit altogether. This is still a vital facet of our ministry at this historical moment as we do ministry on the precipice of the next revolution in communication and culture. Oral culture was not erased by the rise of the written word. The written word will not be erased by the Tweeted word. But the pulpit is but one platform for preaching, one developed out of the technologies of its day. My fear is that our imaginations are bottlenecked by the binary and in so doing Christian

proclamation is boxed into an institution crumbling in many parts of the church—the church building, the Sunday worship service of Word and Sacrament.

There remains a need for some in the web to be experts of preaching, not just in service to the pulpit/pew binary but in service to preaching the gospel in new and ancient ways. We need now to construct a homiletic that is not reliant upon static, substance-oriented categories and the institutions, hierarchies, and structures that protect them. We need a homiletic that can collaborate with actualities that no longer constrain the time for preaching to the liturgy alone, nor the space for preaching to the architecture of the house of worship alone. In order to construct such a radically dialogical homiletic, a foundation must be established beyond the constraints of the Western binary schema. Let us then return to the fourth shared presupposition of ecofeminism from Case-Winters mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: That in place of the system of domination there should be a “transformative worldview in which reciprocity and mutuality, equality and solidarity, function as the new norms for society”¹¹⁶ This will be the aim of the project as it unfolds in following chapters: to claim a transformative homiletic for a time such as this, in which reciprocity and mutuality, equality, and solidarity function as new norms for preaching emerge from a radical shift in our technoculture. In order to do this, we turn to process theology and the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and its capacity and excitement concerning engagement with the gadfly.

¹¹⁶ Case-Winters, 63.

CHAPTER II.

PREACHING IN PROCESS: EMERGING FROM STASIS

There is no ‘absolute’ core to the Christian faith that endures through time unchanged. It does not consist of a husk underneath which lies a kernel that, after we have dug it out, can serve as the locus of absolute authority for our day.¹¹⁷

Whatever is found in ‘practice’ must lie within the scope of the metaphysical description. When the description fails to include the ‘practice’ the metaphysics is inadequate and requires revision.¹¹⁸

Introduction

We can surmise from the previous chapter that preaching, locked into the pulpit/pew binary, has three specific detrimental impacts on ministry to the Living Word of God. First of all, it reinforces boundaries that have been set in place regarding who is the proper preacher in the pulpit, to the detriment of women, people of color, and those who transgress gender binaries of male/female. Second, the binary is caught up in an abusive power regime, one in which the pulpit implicitly is the one with power over the pew. This means that those who occupy pulpits all too often are given authority unchecked and absolute authority for the duration of their work. In the web of dualisms and oppressions, this perpetuates Reid’s monological illusion and is the underlying stumbling block to truly conversational and decolonized preaching. Finally, as concerns this project, the binary locks preaching into a Sunday liturgical event and creates a blind spot for homiletics. Preaching practices in non-traditional churches that do not adhere to building-based once a week liturgical settings for worship and gathering, are rendered invisible to our metaphysic exclusively focused on pulpit and pew.

Most of the last chapter exposed the way in which homileticians from Fred Craddock to Sarah Travis have attempted to fix preaching’s monological essence—solidified in the pulpit/pew binary—with dialogical postures and tactics that resist the strategy imposed by the binary of keeping the preacher set apart from and over the pew.

¹¹⁷ Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen, *A Credible and Timely Word* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1991), 42-3.

¹¹⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Corrected Edition eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 13.

Turning to the listener,¹¹⁹ weaving the sermon, hosting roundtables, conversational aesthetics, decolonizing the pulpit, and appealing to postmodern concerns have yet to liberate preaching from the limits of a pulpit/pew binary.

Western Christian theology has been dominated by systematic, substance-oriented theology and categories that perpetuate binaries and prevent theoretical innovation even as practices are innovated. Even some postmodern theologies that critique the binaries struggle to construct a formulation that transcends and truly dismantles them. Thus a new foundation is called for, one that troubles the binaries and introduces novelty by virtue of its fluidity. It is to process theology, and the call to expose fallacies of misplaced concreteness in philosophy, which may lead to inorganic stasis, that we turn for this task for the sake of homiletics as a field of inquiry. In so doing, we seek “to recover the totality obscured by the selection,”¹²⁰ in this case of pulpit and pew.

Concrete, or concretizing is not the enemy in process thought. “Concrecence,” according to process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, “is the name for the process in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity.”¹²¹ Thus the concrete is not the enemy of the new or novel. It is indeed vital to process philosophy. The enemy of the new or novel concretion is misplacing a concretized reality on a plane seemingly dependent from relation with other entities that will, in reality, impact the unending becoming of the entity (person or practice). The enemy of process is stasis. As we discussed in chapter one, stasis on the side of God is one troubling byproduct of the traditional binary schema. But the totality of preaching and the church is an organic one made up of relations to other organic entities, not static. There is no one detached, static, and pure form of church nor preaching. And yet, as we will discuss throughout this project, preaching, as a theo-rhetorical practice, continues to concretize itself in ways that set it apart as a distinct genre of communication.

¹¹⁹ One may notice at this point that the previous chapter made no mention of the *Listening to Listeners* project. This Lilly endowed project, with many collaborators in the field of homiletics including Dale P. Andrews, John S. McClure, Ronald J. Allen and others, sought to gather data from congregants in the pews about how sermons are heard. In general, sermons are heard through the person of the preacher and how she lives as well as through Aristotle’s three categories: ethos, pathos, and logos. Of course, this project and its case studies rely upon the binary, cultivating the skills of ethnography in local congregations in order to improve the reception of the message from the pulpit. See *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004).

¹²⁰ Whitehead, *P&R*, 15.

¹²¹ Whitehead, *P&R*, 211.

A Historical Jaunt-Preaching in Process

Preaching emerged from the influence of Jewish practice. In the synagogue, the reading and interpreting of The Law was the “centre of gravity” of the service.¹²² Jesus’ first recorded sermon in the Gospel According to Luke is an example of this form of preaching, as he opens to Isaiah 61:1-2, reads aloud from the front of the gathering, returns to his seat amongst the gathering and proclaims “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”¹²³ In the Acts of the Apostles, we see examples of missionary preaching and proclamation from wandering, itinerant preachers. We cannot find evidence of liturgical preaching as we know it until the middle of the second century.¹²⁴ Eventually, the synagogal gathering around the reading and interpretation of the word synthesized with the ritual meal into the liturgy we recognize today.¹²⁵ Even after the synthesis of Word and Table became established in the institutional church, preaching as a practice continued beyond the confines of the pew through wandering prophets and priests.

How did preaching become so exclusively yoked to the Sunday worship event in recent memory? Surprisingly, liturgical renewal may be to blame, along with accompanying cultural forces of mainline decline and secularization of Western society.

In the early 1980s, the “Hippolytus force” in worship and preaching was heavily influencing Protestant American churches.¹²⁶ This force, so termed by Thomas Long, refers to the desire to reclaim primitive forms of worship, as found in the Great Thanksgiving of Hippolytus, to refocus contemporary liturgies. It was initiated in the Roman Catholic Church in the early 1960s with Vatican II reforms, specifically the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, with “aftershocks” throughout mainline Protestantism. Along with this turn to recovery in worship and the desire for ecumenical

¹²² Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 68.

¹²³ Luke 4:21. *The HarperCollins Study Bible, Student Edition, New Revised Standard Version* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 1769.

¹²⁴ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 35.

¹²⁵ Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 54.

¹²⁶ Thomas G. Long, *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 4.

consensus came the use of a common lectionary as well as the impulse to “reclaim the unity of word and sacrament.”¹²⁷

This particular desire for reclaimed unity of word and sacrament is the focus of Long’s 1982 essay by the same name for the journal *Reformed Liturgy and Music*. A member of the Presbyterian Church, Long laments the infrequent practice of communion. Using the Emmaus text (Luke 24), Long offers a theological and scriptural “why” for the link between word and sacrament to be reestablished so that, no matter the practice, the Lord’s Supper is not seen as “peripheral” to the Word. Christ’s epiphany is recognized in and through Word and sacrament. Long argues convincingly that the Emmaus text actually presents the liturgical tradition of the Lukan community, as these ordinary disciples set out on a journey on the first Easter along with a present but hidden risen Christ who preaches to them, shares a meal with them and then whose presence is revealed in the breaking of the bread. It contains the community, setting, and dimensions of worship. Traditions that practiced frequent communion were also impacted. In my tradition, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Colbert S. Cartwright was guided by the Hippolytus force to reorder worship so that churches who were celebrating communion before the sermon would see the theological heritage in responding to the sermon at the Table.¹²⁸

These impulses to recover and reconnect to ancient worship practices were not meant to yoke preaching exclusively to the liturgy. They were meant to yoke the Table to the liturgy after years of infrequent participation and to explore theological depths of the order. However, the move toward unity has reinforced the idea that preaching must be tied to liturgical settings and has restricted the ministry imaginations of a generation regarding when and how to preach the Word of God. Textbooks have been designed in this era of unified Word and Table around preparation of the once a week sermonic worship event.

Another look back into the history of preaching, including Protestant preaching, reminds us that preaching was once more commonplace than a weekly event. Writing

¹²⁷Thomas G. Long, “Reclaiming the Unity of Word and Sacrament in Presbyterian and Reformed Worship,” in *Reformed Liturgy and Music*, XVI, no.1, (Winter, 1982), 12-17.

¹²⁸Colbert S. Cartwright, *Candles of Grace: Disciples Worship in Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1992).

about the early years of preaching in the Stone-Campbell movement Dwight E. Stevenson claims that our forefathers “preached so often as to astonish us,” with two or three different sermons on Sunday along with daily sermons in some Reformed communities.¹²⁹ Luther in Wittenberg was preaching at least three times on Sunday, one sermon on the epistle around sunrise, the gospel around nine in the morning, and a third in the afternoon from the Hebrew Bible.¹³⁰

John Wesley in his journal from 1739 documents a typical week in the life of a frontier preacher. In the morning preaching in one town then in the evening reading another scripture and preaching on it in another.¹³¹ Each day, another town, another sermon. Such was field-preaching in Europe and the colonies almost 300 years ago. Wesley followed this pattern for fifty years of his ministry, only cutting down to one sermon a day when his sight began to decline.¹³²

The gospel accounts describe preaching as a public practice on the whole, with a mix of on the street communication, formal monologues (though of course the sermon on the mount is a compilation of various sayings attributed to Jesus), and sermons inspired simply by encounters Jesus had with particular people in particular places.

Only Jesus’ so-called first sermon, found in Luke 4:16-30, occurs in the synagogue, the formal gathering of Jewish people. Other than that, Jesus is portrayed in the gospels as one who preaches in the everydayness of life, in homes and on the streets he shared messages of varying length, messages interrupted by activity and questioning. Out of the chaos of day-to-day life, Jesus spoke and new possibilities emerged.

It is indeed difficult to imagine how to teach preachers to be ready for that kind of lifestyle. It is far easier to plan and organize around weekly speaking commitments in the context of worship, with perhaps funerals and weddings interrupting on occasion. As Marjorie Suchocki described in *The Whispered Word*, “Our structures, no matter how inclusive their original intent, tend to harden toward their own preservation and

¹²⁹ Dwight E. Stevenson, *Disciples Preaching in the First Generation* (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1969), 19.

¹³⁰ Stevenson, 19.

¹³¹ N. Curnock, ed., *Wesley’s Journal* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 72.

¹³² Curnock, 415.

perpetuation, rather than to be continuously open to the needs of inclusive well-being.”¹³³ Our pedagogical and theological structures are set up to perpetuate the need for trained clergy to speak from a pulpit. While this is indeed important we also need to instill in students flexibility to be fluent with changing times. Whitehead also names this paradox when he says,

The paradox which wrecks so many promising theories of education is that the training which produces skill is so very apt to stifle imaginative zest. Skill demands repetition, and imaginative zest is tinged with impulse.¹³⁴

It is hard to imagine possibilities for preaching that transcend the stasis placed around the role of preacher as the speaker from pulpit to pews and the stasis this perpetuates for novel concretions in preaching. But we need to if we hope to be prophetic and faithful to the Living Word as structures crumble and platforms for communication emerge and shift. This project pushes would-be-preachers to consider how communication beyond the Sunday sermon event is also preaching ministry. Process theology resists and ruptures the settled givens we establish in our philosophies for the sake of innovation. As we will discuss in future chapters, the lure of our present moment in history will propose to preaching avenues for collaboration beyond the pulpit in the context of the liturgy.

We have promoted stasis through the binary of pulpit and pew set in the classic Western dualistic schema. The stasis this perpetuates prevents ministry to the Living Word from “concrecence” that would allow for the “production of novel togetherness” which would lead to an intensifying of forms for preaching.¹³⁵ Although process theology has collaborated with homiletics in recent years, these collaborations have focused on dismantling the binary schema of traditional theology in the content of preaching rather than in its mediation and conceptualization. This means that the power of the preacher continues to be defined under the monological illusion—i.e. power to influence and shape unilaterally with our message—as opposed to power as reconceived in process thought.

The totality obscured by the selection of pulpit and pew, without digging into the wider schema it finds itself in, is preaching as a practice and ministry beyond Sunday

¹³³ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Whispered Word: A Theology of Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 141.

¹³⁴ Whitehead, *P&R*, 338.

¹³⁵ Whitehead, *P&R*, 21.

worship. Step back from that isolated binary to look at the wider web of power in the classic dualistic schema and the groups that are violently obscured are women, transgender and queer, people of color, and creation itself. Thus, the process proposals that follow could impact so much more than how preaching relates to technological innovation.

Dismantling the Binary-Process in Action

Recall from the previous chapter Anna Case-Winter’s discussion of the binary schema. In this schema, the subjects on the left become the inherent keepers of those on the right. The power of relationality in the schema is not shared but swayed to the left side and out of reach of the right.

+	-
GOD	WORLD
MAN	WOMAN
SOUL	BODY
CULTURE	NATURE
LIGHT	DARKNESS
GOOD	EVIL
PULPIT	PEW

Figure 4. Inserting the Pulpit and Pew/ Clergy and Laity into the Dualistic Schema¹³⁶

Case-Winters goes on to argue that the God-World frame tends to create the following opposition:¹³⁷

<i>God is...</i>	<i>The World is...</i>
necessary	contingent
eternal	temporal
unchanging	changing
absolute	relative

Figure 5. Power Dynamics in the Dualistic Schema

¹³⁶ Case-Winters, 24, 69. *My additions in bold.*

¹³⁷ Case-Winters, 87.

With pulpit and pew set in this schema, the pulpit is set apart from the bodies flowing in and out of the pews. The pulpit-pew binary also is protected, as the pulpit becomes necessary to the ministry to the Word, eternally and without need of change.

According to Whitehead, “The notion of God as the ‘unmoved mover’ is derived from Aristotle,” and combined with Christianity’s “notion of God as ‘eminently real’” the result has been the perpetuation of “the doctrine of an aboriginal, eminently real, transcendent creator, at whose fiat the world came into being, and whose imposed will it obeys.”¹³⁸ With this doctrine as the ground for other pieces of the system, it has been all too easy for those in religious and political power to name who or what God is for or against. Whitehead goes so far as to say that this “is the fallacy which has infused tragedy into the histories of Christianity and of Mahometanism.”¹³⁹ The understanding of God as apart from and over the world infuses history with violence and over-againstness. It is not enough, for Whitehead and other liberationists, to alter the characteristics of the God who is sovereign and distant from the world. One must understand first and foremost that God is intimately a part of the world.

Feminist theologians, like the eco-feminist Anna Case-Winters, who seek “to dismantle oppressive dualisms,” have found that “process thought contributes analytical tools that account for distinctions without resorting to oppositional dichotomies.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, Whitehead and his followers have been criticized for being esoteric, but part of the core of process is that there is great danger in simple, clean, systems of thought. Feminist process theologian Lucinda Huffaker cautions that whenever “dualistic thinking functions to make life simpler, diversity becomes a problem to be solved.”¹⁴¹ Such thinking is counter to process thought, which sees diversity as a means to better knowing God and narrowness the greatest hindrance to that knowing.

¹³⁸ Whitehead, *P&R*, 342.

¹³⁹ Whitehead, *P&R*, 342. Note that the term “Mahometanism” was a term for followers of Islam at the time of Whitehead’s work.

¹⁴⁰ Lucinda A. Huffaker, “Feminist Theology in Process Perspective” in *Handbook of Process Theology* Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman, eds. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 181.

¹⁴¹ Huffaker, 182.

Another illustration from the world of preaching may shine light on Whitehead's concept of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, the preservation and stasis it seeks after for the sake of actual occasions, and how it applies to our work as researchers and teachers of preaching. In the quest for biblical preaching as a rubric for what preaching is and how it is identified, C.H. Dodd's kerygmatic model conveys what Whitehead would deem the error of metaphysics through the Enlightenment and into the 20th century. Dodd's quest for *the timeless* rubric in the writings of Paul and then his proposal to *transfer* this uncovered rubric into the present tense as *the* formula for preaching is closely akin to classic notions of pure forms, or ideal forms, that are static and unchanging foundations for what a thing is and should be.¹⁴² That is to say, Dodd argues that gospel preaching really and eternally is this unchanging formula.¹⁴³ Preaching is conveying the facts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the resulting door to salvation opened by his atoning act. There is no cultural accumulation to these pure facts, therefore a rational person will agree to the facts and be converted. Anything else proposed that is other than the formula is corrupted by the changing culture.

Even postliberal preaching walks this line in the assumption that we can preach Jesus as an unchanging narrative character for whom the flux of history has been locked into the stasis of the biblical narrative, not impacted by his historical context, whom we can know and be saved by, regardless of the ways in which we are prone to change.¹⁴⁴ Here again is the impact of the classic Western dualism. God is pure, static, unmoved and

¹⁴² Dodd, 12. The formula is the listing of facts: the death and resurrection of Jesus.

¹⁴³ The critique and claim for Dodd: "Much of our preaching in Church at the present day would not have been recognized by the early Christians as *kerygma*. It is teaching, or exhortation (*paraklesis*), or it is what they call *homilia*, that is, the more or less informal discussion of various aspects of Christian life and thought, addressed to a congregation already established in the faith" (7-8). Whitehead, I believe, celebrates the very unrecognizability of preaching as evidence of its creative advance, rather than lament with Dodd.

¹⁴⁴ See Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: The New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Wipf & Stock, 2006). This new direction is derived from a Barthian sense of a pure Word, Jesus, and a fallen broken world that has no hope apart from the revelation of God's Word, Jesus Christ, and no contact with God apart from God's gracious and unprovoked reaching into reality. The preacher is presumed to be able to get out of the way of delivering this pure Word, not letting her flesh get in the way. Salvation, gospel, is in the encounter with the Word, not in the world. This tradition dramatizes the binary of God over and apart from world and so in the preaching out of this tradition, little concern is on contextual work. Homileticians continue to bridge this gap in the postliberal homiletic by turning to other sources but the gap remains. See also Lance B. Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say: Ricoeur and the Possibility of Postliberal Preaching*, (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2013).

unchanged; truth is as well; gospel is as well; the world is impure, malleable, ever changing. The church upholds tradition and in so doing reflects God's unchanging nature. With pulpit and pew situated in the binary system, pulpit on the side of God and all things constant, the rubric for preaching is safe from the tarnish of the world and its changes. The form, kerygma or postliberal preaching of Jesus as fact, saves the people from the world of change. People need to bend to the form and fact. Preaching does not evolve with the world, for its blueprint—in form and fact—transcends the world.

In C.H. Dodd, therefore, Whitehead would call out the error of his homiletic as being the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. A unique moment in history that led to the development of a distinct mode for preaching Dodd seeks to isolate, transfer, and apply to a novel period in time. It is an inorganic move initiated by a desire to preserve some pure form for preaching. When preaching is defined by the kerygma formula and facts, everything that does not present those facts in that form is not “real” preaching. It is another genre. Thankfully scholars have challenged and moved beyond the misplaced concreteness of kerygma and primitive preaching, for the most part. However, we have some stasis now applied to other seeming givens of fact and form in preaching, as is natural for those of us who desire order and predictability in our lives and work.

According to Whitehead, the role of the scholar is not to uncover truth as a noun or fact, static and unchanged. Scholars are consistently in pursuit of what is being revealed in the becoming of institutions, people, fields, practices, etc. Thus, I am not meaning to construct a new binary, wherein a new homiletic theory is set up to oppose a dying patriarchal paradigm. Rather, process scholars shine light on what is known in the meeting of events and in the cross-pollination of encounters in order to reveal how what once was only an interesting proposition could now in this moment be a distinct possibility, a novel concretion. Scholars attempt to be agile and not hold any truths too dear, for fallacies of misplaced concreteness leads only to the ossification of knowledge and thought that may blind us to actual practice in all its intensity and plurality. It is, again, the proposal of this project that for dialogical preaching, an opportune moment has arrived for novel means of preaching beyond previous constraints of the pulpit and pew. We will become more familiar with this opportunity in the following chapters.

The good news for we who are scholars is that this “adventure in the clarification of thought” is “progressive and never final.”¹⁴⁵ Our work is always work in process. Our guild strives to carry on a conversation that will outlive each of us as individuals. At the same time, every thing that *is* emerges from *what has been*. Thus, “it is an adventure in which every partial success has importance.”¹⁴⁶ Searching for new concrescence in homiletics does not brush aside the work that has been done before. Nor will a new proposal be the final say.

While it may be more comforting to remain in the foundational Western schema, wherein God has all control and power and people do not, justice—God’s desire for the world—lures us to abandon it for the sake of those pigeonholed into power and submissiveness. We may start this journey with process thought “in its form of panentheism and its concept of dual transcendence.”¹⁴⁷ For Case-Winters and others God’s dipolar and integrated nature “offers a way of conceiving the God-world relation that does not fall into dualism/opposition on the one hand or identification on the other.”¹⁴⁸ Thus process theology overturns the myth of God’s stasis, perhaps the most offensive aspect of Whitehead’s proposal to those adherents to the classic Western schema.

Meeting Whitehead-An Introduction to Process Theology

Mention process theology and you are sure to get mostly contorted expressions and eye rolls, revealing the challenge of reading, let alone processing, the work of Alfred North Whitehead.¹⁴⁹ Whitehead’s work birthed the process movement in theological and philosophical thinking. He wrote as a mathematician primarily, not a theologian, yet his system and metaphors for conceiving of reality pursued holistic knowing that resists boundaries between hard and soft sciences. His concluding pages of *Process and Reality*

¹⁴⁵ Whitehead, *P&R*, 9.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Case-Winters, 88.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ As much as feminism and process have in common, one critique of process from feminists is its tendency to be overly abstract and elitist, thus rendering it inaccessible to those on the margins of the academy and church. See Lucinda A. Huffaker, *Ibid.*, 186.

ruminate on the relationship of God with the world as a window into the realities observed in geometry, measurement, even consciousness.

Though he may not be a household name, Whitehead's proposals are woven into a great many authors today who are more approachable: Diana Butler Bass and her horizontal grounded theology for example, which has taken off in evangelical and mainline areas,¹⁵⁰ and organic church models that focus on the local and particular rather than general institutional church programs.¹⁵¹ If one is drawn to relational, interdependent categories for God and the world, they just might be a process theologian in the making.

The primary difference between process thought and classic western thought resides in an overly simplified phrase: *becoming*, not being. In other words, Whitehead "thawed out the metaphysical tradition of the West," as it was—frozen into eternal ontological categories and facts—thereby "melting the unchanging" categories of substance and subject "into the turbulent flow of an endless Becoming."¹⁵² According to Whitehead, no beings are ever static entities independent of the other non-static entities, or realities, or situations, or moments, that they emerge from. Our identities are mutually in flux and captured only in accumulating moments of life as we interact with other subjects, moment to moment, day to day. We never stop becoming, so long as we are living. We are human becomings, not merely human beings. Caught up in this is an understanding that all things and persons flow and change.

It is not natural for organisms to remain static. Organisms are not merely biological creatures either. Institutions and systems are organisms as well. It is not natural for them to remain static. Thus the knowing of an actuality or a person or a community must involve a careful look at how it is that one is becoming in order to get a glimpse of

¹⁵⁰ See Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World—A Spiritual Revolution* (New York: HarperOne, 2015).

¹⁵¹ See for example: Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); Stephen Ingram, *Organic Student Ministry: Trash the Pre-Packaged Programs and Transform Your Youth Group* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2015); Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book: Rediscover the Dynamic, Organic, Relational, Viral Community Jesus Started* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2009); Tim Suttle, *Shrink: Faithful Ministry in a Church-Growth Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

¹⁵² Catherine Keller, "Introduction: The Process of Difference, the Difference of Process," in *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, Keller and Anne Daniell, eds. (Albany, NY: State University New York Press, 2002), 10.

that entity's identity. This applies to humans but also to communities, traditions, and practices.

The most difficult concept to grasp and the one that simultaneously disrupts the Western schema highlighted in chapter one, is that this philosophy of becoming is not merely true for humans and the world. It is true for God as well, who is response-able, adaptable, empathetic, and endlessly creative. According to Whitehead, systems and institutions tend to stifle the organic evolution of reality with static, substance-oriented metaphysics and categories in order to make truth graspable and dissectible. Doing so, as we will discuss later, is counter to the creative advance that is natural to the organic world, even and especially God, who is Organism Par Excellence. Hence, most of our metaphysics and metaphysical language are fallible, but erroneously self-perpetuate themselves as faultless.

God's Posture-God in World/World in God

In the first place, God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification... In this aspect, he is not *before* all creation, but *with* all creation.¹⁵³

Process thought radically challenges tried and true theological systems that uphold an everlasting and unchanging God set apart from an ever-changing world. God, in process thought, is indeed *primordial*, meaning God was present in the beginnings of creation in some sort of basic way but not as a static and disconnected base. In a beginning, God interacted with the waters of chaos and out of that interaction, creation occurs over and over again. But God's identity is not completed with this eternal/primordial aspect of God's nature. God also has a "consequent nature," that is a part of Godself feels and is impacted by the events of the world as it becomes from that beginning and on into this moment in which you are reading these words.¹⁵⁴ God before, God present, God ahead. *I am what I am and I will be what I will be*, as God told Moses

¹⁵³ Whitehead, *P&R*, 343.

¹⁵⁴ Whitehead, *P&R*, 31, 345.

from the burning bush.¹⁵⁵ But the *will be* aspect of God's nature depends upon our being, our actions, our events in this world. This entanglement of primordial and consequent natures is what makes God "dipolar" in nature.¹⁵⁶

For Whitehead, *all* becoming is dipolar, meaning all that *is* feels what has been and from that meeting enacts what will be through choice and action.¹⁵⁷ Dipolar nature disrupts static substance oriented categories. Herein lies the source of liberation for preaching, for church, for women, for creation from the oppressive schema of classic Western theology. God is not an unmoved mover exercising dominion over the world. God is caught up in the world's becoming, and the world is caught up in God's adaptive and creative engagement with the world in its becoming. Therefore, there is no gap, no eternal divide, set up at the earth's foundations, between God and world, men and women, soul and body, pulpit and pew.

However, God, and only God, is luring all of creation on to ideal modes of becoming in every event large or small, in every place, through every person.¹⁵⁸ This is not only true in process theology, but has been named in the process philosophy of Whitehead from the start as the initial aim. Some have claimed that process, without a traditional sovereign God at the helm, is a system that does not need God. Whitehead and other theologians and philosophers, would disagree. God's power is the power to hold the intensity of contrasts without folding and forcing a simpler and hegemonic way of being people, communities, civilizations, and Christians. In other words, "That God's power is greater than ours and therefore 'godly' is due to the inclusivity or 'size' of God" rather than merely God's ability to coerce and subdue diversity.¹⁵⁹ This is a power exponentially greater than ours, for our tendency is to decrease intensity and increase homogeneity. God does not use power to coerce intensity and plurality into likeness, rather God uses

¹⁵⁵ Exodus 3:14 (NRSV), the phrase in Hebrew may be translated in more than one tense, invoking the mystery of God's nature.

¹⁵⁶ Whitehead, *P&R*, 345.

¹⁵⁷ I paraphrase from this quote in Whitehead, *P&R*, 45: "Thus the process of becoming is dipolar, (i) by reason of its qualification by the determinateness of the actual world, and (ii) by its conceptual prehensions of the indeterminateness of eternal objects. The process is constituted by the influx of eternal objects into novel determinateness of feeling which absorbs the actual world into a novel actuality."

¹⁵⁸ Whitehead, *P&R*, 344.

¹⁵⁹ Huffaker, 180.

power to hold the contrasts together with equal value in pursuit that not one thing be lost in its particularity.

Whitehead closes out his *Process and Reality* with a litany of sorts, whose refrain is infused throughout his proposal:

It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent,
as that the World is permanent and God is fluent.
It is as true to say that God is one and the World many,
as that the World is one and God many.
It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently,
as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently.
It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God,
as that God is immanent in the World.
It is as true to say that God transcends the World,
as that the World transcends God.
It is as true to say that God creates the World,
as that the World creates God.¹⁶⁰

Read this over again, for surely it will provoke in most a feeling of tension, which only highlights how given the notion of God as unmoved mover apart from the world is today. This litany does not lend itself to the binary system and its simple structure of separation and oppression. Our God-talk is profoundly complicated when it comes to platitudinal language in times of suffering (“God wanted another angel”) as well as blessing (“God must have given you that money for all the good stuff you’ve done”). Our world, our God, our church, and our ministry are complex, intense, interwoven, and interdependent.

In practice as preachers, do we not see this litany at work in actuality? It is as true to say that the congregation creates pastoral identity as that the pastoral identity creates the congregation. It is as true to say that preaching forms the church as it is to say that the church forms the preaching. We are in reality dipolar in nature, though our inability to embrace multiplicity is what leads to promotion of binary schemes and systems that enable relational power over rather than power with. In dualistic schema, creative advance is approached as a problem, a gadfly harassing the system, rather than opportunity for adventure.

¹⁶⁰ Whitehead, *P&R*, 348.

Before we can move on to proposals for preaching from a process paradigm interwoven with our digital age, we must use process to redefine two interrelated aspects attributed to preachers and preaching—power/authority and transcendence—that are fundamentally different from the traditional paradigm. The reasons for this are evidenced in the attempts made by homileticians such as Christine Smith in the previous chapter. Our understandings of power and authority are so steeped in the traditional Sovereign pattern of one-way influence that we struggle to imagine any other form of being an authority and of sharing power in truly collaborative ways. Related to this is the transcendence that has long been secured through God’s established vertical set-apartness in the traditional schema. As we engage ways of being and communicating in our world today that resist hierarchy and top-down relations, we need to have theological bases outside of the Sovereign model that process can offer.

God’s Power Under the Traditional Schema-Capacity to Impact

The binary schema promotes the idea that God’s power resides in the fact that God cannot be touched but is entirely transcendent and over that which can be touched and can be moved. With preaching in the schema, the role of preacher has been infected with a notion that our power and authority are derived in like manner—that we are able to influence the body/laity without being swayed/touched/changed. If God’s power is not derived from God’s separation from the chaos of this world and the capacity for God to reach in and manipulate the world without being impacted, then what is God’s power?

The reason we have such a difficult time defining power outside of “linear power” is that it has been the dominant conception of power in our lives and history.¹⁶¹ Process theologian Bernard Loomer is perhaps best known for his contributions to conceptualizing power in process thought. According to Loomer, this linear or unidirectional power is the capacity of someone to influence and shape an other “to advance one’s purposes...while being minimally influenced by the other.”¹⁶² In the classic Western theological schema,¹⁶³ linear power dominates. The schema is in fact held up on

¹⁶¹ Bernard Loomer, “Two Conceptions of Power,” in *Process Studies*, pp. 5-32, Vol. 6, Number 1, Spring, 1976. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2359> (accessed July 19, 2016).

¹⁶² Loomer, *ibid.*

¹⁶³ What Loomer cites Charles Hartshorne for calling the “traditional Catholic conception of God.”

the notion that God will use God's influence to shape the world and advance His purposes, construed in His mind to be the best ones with little or no input from creation. In the extension of the schema into other corresponding sets of binaries, it is this power that is bestowed on humanity to subdue creation, on men to subdue women, on pastors to subdue laity. The claims of the other in the binary are inherently in opposition to the claims of the one in power who has a greater understanding of the greater good or aim.

Under the linear conception of power, every gain in power of one means a loss of power and identity of another. This is how diversity becomes and remains a problem to fix or stop. Simplicity and narrowness are preferred to ambiguity, for ambiguity is more difficult to control. Power is competition; one's size and sense of worth is reliant upon the measure of strength over another. In this game, only the winning side's self-worth is given space to be.

This linear power is the power that, according to Loomer, allows the rich to become richer while the poor become poorer. It is the power of humanity to subdue creation, not caving in to the side effects the abuse of power on natural resources has on global climate and wellbeing. It is the power of one racial group to control and manipulate other "subgroups."¹⁶⁴ Any attempt for one side of the binary to gain a piece of self-worth or power is a threat to the dominant group. And who has the power to stop the threat? The one in power. Power cannot be shared in the schema. People therefore either fight for power/value, or submit to the linear force.

In this conception of power, the aim is self-sufficiency. Loomer notes that this linear power "is grounded on a nonrelational or noncommunal view of the self." The self pursues freedom from others with her power and only moves toward others in the attempt to control them in the pursuit of her own needs and goals. Others become objects, their subjectivity erased in the quest for a greater expression of the self on the dominant side of the power equation.

¹⁶⁴ As I write this in the midst of the 2016 Republican National Convention the problem of linear power as the dominant conception of power is rearing its ugly head. Republican Iowa Congressman Steve King recently asked what nonwhites, "sub-groups," have done for civilization, vocalizing precisely the illusion that is perpetuated in the binary schema: only the dominant side is of value. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/19/us/politics/steve-king-nonwhite-subgroups.html?_r=1 (accessed July 30, 2016)

The result of history becoming comfortable with one conception of power is that vulnerability, interdependence, dependence, and collaboration are viewed as weak and powerless postures. Therefore, God is cast as one with strength derived completely from Godself and apart from any others.

We cannot brush off how this dominant conception of power continues to infect the ministry of preaching today. For one, our congregants may in fact perpetuate the belief that for their pastor to be in power they need not show any signs of vulnerability. If the pastor seems to seek collaboration with congregants too much, the church might question whether or not the pastor is strong enough to lead the church. This is especially the case for women in ministry, and others who find themselves on the losing side of the binary schema in various areas of social location. God, called a She, sounds and feels wrong to the Christian who has built their theological system in the binary schema, for a God who is strong and in control must be a He and not a submissive She. The implications of the dominance of this paradigm are everywhere.

God's Power Redefined-Capacity to be Impacted and to Impact

There is an alternative to the linear conception of power that dominates Western history—politics, religion, and society. This is what Loomer simply calls “relational power.” It is the power to both “influence and be influenced by others,” to give as well as to receive.¹⁶⁵ Loomer insists that this is not a feminine conception in contrast to a masculine conception. Again, the binary that casts masculine qualities against feminine is a construct of the traditional schema. Rather, this is a trans-sexual conception of power, one that transcends our limited binaries.

The power to be influenced is the power to “absorb an influence” from another rather than ignore it.¹⁶⁶ It is not mere “passivity,” rather it is “an active openness” as we receive the feelings and values of another “without losing our identity.”¹⁶⁷ Our strength and size begins to grow in measure by how we actively receive another’s influence while maintaining our self-worth and qualities that make us distinct and contribute to the

¹⁶⁵ Loomer, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Loomer, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Loomer, *ibid.*

growth in size of another. Diversity then becomes not a problem to solve, but a means to growth. Another is not a means to an end, but her own end. The other is not threatening to our worth. The whole of our self is constitutive, based on the web of relations we operate in daily. We are empowered by “the capacity to sustain a mutually internal relationship,” in which we mutually give and receive and thereby further the relationship.¹⁶⁸

Unfortunately, such an understanding of power is still a whisper in the shouting match on the global stage for linear power. It is hard to imagine a presidential candidate standing on the stage at a national convention with a relational conception of power ever receiving much backing. This only demonstrates how much harder it is to unravel the narrative we have constructed that power is dominance, that it is best given to a limited number of people, and that shared power is suspicious and prone to render us vulnerable to attack.

And so, to say that God’s power is a power to be vulnerable is harder to say than that God ordered Jesus to be a substitutionary atonement for the sins of the world. For some Christians, a powerful and apathetic God of strength and punishment is more appealing than a feeling and collaborative God. But this is precisely how process conceives of God.

God’s power, in process thought, is relational power. God has the capacity to influence *and be influenced* by every single event and occasion taking place throughout the world, and throughout time. Divine power in process thought is God’s power to be tender hearted enough to feel *everything*, every event however miniscule or massive, and to be informed by and through that feeling. Powerlessness is derived from apathy, i.e. the loss of feeling that humanity is so prone to. We are prone to apathy because only God is strong enough to be tender to all the events—good and bad—in the world without succumbing to numbness. We are empowered through God to feel with and for the world.

How can God feel all of this, all of us, and not be overcome? Now we understand a marked difference between us and God, one that is impossible to imitate and so, contra to some critics of Whitehead, firmly roots a need for God in the systems of this world and cosmos. God’s omniconpassion is the source of our living more justly and lovingly.

¹⁶⁸ Loomer, *ibid.*

Praying for a sense of God's tender heart can be a source of healing in a world plagued by self-indulgent actions of stone hearts.

Omnicompassion renders God open to change and growth. If the world is ever increasing in diversity, then God is ever growing with each novelty and luring each emerging novelty in its growth.¹⁶⁹ Whitehead offers an image for this "operative growth of God's nature...that of a tender care that nothing be lost...a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved."¹⁷⁰ In other words, God does not succumb to narrow and static frames for realities in all their complexity in the ways we are so prone to do.

Transcendence was linked to the traditional notion of God's power as a sovereign power not to be touched. Transcendence, in the schema, was on God's side and immanence the world's. Jesus was always caught in this tension in the schema as One who came from God yet grappled with the flesh. This tension is more aligned with how transcendence is redefined in process philosophy. In process thought, transcendence is taken to its etymological roots, focusing on God's ability to "cross over" and "link" rather than God's power to separate.¹⁷¹ What better example of God's power to cross over and link than Jesus? And looking at the ministry of Jesus, do we not see the power he had to cross over cultural barriers in pursuit of the Kin-dom of God?

Power then is redefined as empowerment to cross over the barriers that keep people separate from each other *only in abstraction*, for in reality there is no such separation. Power is the capacity to disrupt the abstract binary schema and its stasis for the sake of the growth of a tender and vulnerable web of creation.

Preachers, then, do not have a special power that is only attributed to God and those agents aligned on God's side of the schema. Our power to influence others with our words is not a power that sets us apart in a way to guarantee minimal impact from another. What does set us apart—in varying ways across various traditions—is the anointing to do this ministry of the Living Word with all of our being. Some are set apart to serve as the mouth piece of the church, devote lives to study and service so that the whole wide church is equipped to take part in God's lure to transcend boundaries that

¹⁶⁹ Whitehead, *P&R*, 344.

¹⁷⁰ Whitehead, *P&R*, 346.

¹⁷¹ Huffaker, 180.

separate us. Some are especially set apart to create the environment that allows for the greater number of people to grow in size and stature by influencing and being influenced by each other.

Power grows through mutual internal relationships with God and each other, not competition and hoarding. We have to seek the whispering Word and seek the luring Spirit as individuals and communities. God cannot manipulate us. God is not merely omnipotent, trying to exercise power over every event. This would not exemplify love. God can only *lure* us—not force us—toward more loving and just decisions. We must do the rest.¹⁷² God can comprehend and anticipate the far-reaching impact of our actions and moves in the world. Thus, turning to God in prayer and discernment is an exercise in opening our hearts wider to the good of the world beyond our narrow view. Jesus, then, becomes humanity’s model for this deep abiding, revealing the impact of collaborating with God and every moment as one who was primordial Word made consequent flesh.

In sum, “process theology and philosophy... asserts that interdependence is the primary reality within whom our lives emerge and to which our lives contribute.”¹⁷³ This is as true for us as it is for God. The work of healing in this world requires collaboration and cooperation rather than submission. God is truly, universally, and in all particularity a personal God—the fellow sufferer who understands and who is changed by our changing.¹⁷⁴ But God is simultaneously universal, with the capacity to be personal to and with all events and realities without manipulation. This is God’s power: a power of with-ness. As one process theologian has put it, “S – I – Z – E is the Measure” of God’s power and our maturity.¹⁷⁵ Size, written out intentionally as Loomer did above, is the stature of a person’s soul and her capacity for deep relationship, without losing that which is uniquely you. God models this. Taking on the good and bad of the world, God is not corrupted into a negative collaborator, changing from a heart for justice to one of division

¹⁷² Bruce Epperly, in *Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark International, A Continuum Imprint, 2011) consistently uses a graspable image for the contrast between God in process thought and God in classic western Christianity: Rick Warren’s *Purpose Driven God*. Warren asserts: “God has planned every detail of your life *without your input*.” Process is completely counter to this revealing an “Adventurous God” ever-collaborating with us in our lives, rather than “Purpose Driven” God who punished us for not going with His plan (41ff).

¹⁷³ Epperly, 22.

¹⁷⁴ Epperly, 49.

¹⁷⁵ Loomer, *ibid*.

and war. Through God’s omncompassion, we are inspired “to create our lives and communities in partnership with God’s creative wisdom.”¹⁷⁶

Jesus-Model of Growth in S – I – Z – E and Stature

Jesus as the Word made flesh modeled both a process understanding of omncompassion and transcendence. But for humanity, he modeled another core concept in a process paradigm: size and stature.

This phrase is based on a brief verse summarizing Jesus’ non-canonized years in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus increased in wisdom and years, as the NRSV translates the Greek¹⁷⁷ He was not born then as a perfectly all-knowing deity, as one would expect the Word made flesh to be in the traditional schema of God’s perfect knowledge. The logos was not born perfect in this sense, but perfect in another—the capacity to grow in wisdom without losing his particularity not erasing the particularity of others. Even Jesus had ‘a-ha’ moments. And process believes even God can as well.

In the traditional schema, divine perfection is defined as the capacity to know the actuality of the future and for God’s vision to trump our reality.¹⁷⁸ Because we have already established that the schema sets God apart from the world and that the world is in the realm of time in which everything changes, God is set up as the perfection static outside of time. We change. God is changeless. If a bad thing happens it is because God willed it and has promised that, in the end, it is in service to the timeline God has already set for all of creation from the beginning.

Theodicy has challenged this notion of a perfect God who wills all the horrible tragedies large and small in service of His greater plan. But scripture also complicates this. Two episodes in the life of Jesus shine light on the process notion of God’s capacity to grow in size and stature.

¹⁷⁶ Epperly, 87.

¹⁷⁷ Luke 2:52 (NRSV).

¹⁷⁸ Donna Bowman, “God for Us: A Process View of the Divine-Human Relationship,” in *Handbook of Process Theology* Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman, eds. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 22.

Mark 7:24-37-A Theological Exploration

Jesus was tired. He entered the predominately Gentile city of Tyre for a bit of respite with hopes that news would not break that he was hiding out in a home there. But of course, his plan was thwarted. There may not have been as many Jews in the region but we soon discover that even Gentiles have heard of the work of Jesus and were curious.

She appears on hand and foot. A woman, but not just any woman. A Gentile woman, but not just a Gentile woman. She was of Syrophenician/Greek origin, Hellenized and likely from a privileged household in comparison to the household of the rural Jewish man from the other side of the Sea of Galilee.¹⁷⁹

The woman arrives at the house, throwing herself in desperation before Jesus.¹⁸⁰ Knowing Jesus as we know him in maturity we expect him to respond lovingly, graciously, immediately. After all, Jairus, a Galilean father of the synagogue, had approached Jesus in the same manner on behalf of his sick daughter (5:22). And Jesus not only healed the son, he got up and travelled with Jairus to heal the child in person. Knowing the works of Paul that would come decades after this event, we expect Jesus to embody the truth that in his eyes there is no longer Jew or Greek, male or female (Gal. 3:28).

But our expectations are not met. Not only does Jesus not grant the Greek woman's request to heal her demon-possessed child, he responds with an ethnic slur, calling her a 'dog' right there in front of his disciples.¹⁸¹ So what is it about this woman and all the particularities that she embodies that makes Jesus turn away? Scholar Sharon Ringe believes it may be that the woman comes from a wealthy Greek region known to

¹⁷⁹ Jennifer A. Glancy, "Jesus, the Syrophenician Woman, and Other First Century Bodies," in *Biblical Interpretation 18* (2010), 352.

¹⁸⁰ In Matthew's telling of this incident the woman, a Canaanite, prostrates (*proskuneō*) herself in an act of worship, after Jesus rejects her initial petition (10:25), doing more theological interpretation for us than Mark's report of 'falling bodies' throughout his Gospel. See Glancy, 353ff.

¹⁸¹ Even worse, Jesus calls her 'a little dog,' basically 'a little bitch,' insulting not only her ethnicity but her gender in one fell swoop. See T.Alec Burkill, "The Historical Development of the Story of the Syrophenician Woman," in *Novum Testamentum 57* (1967), 172-73.

have exploited Jews of Galilee.¹⁸² Or is it that she is a woman? Her pagan religion? Unfortunately we cannot know for sure.

In the midst of the miracle and healing work in Mark's narrative, what are we to do with this episode when we pause here? It seems as if, in this moment, Jesus is embodying a message that his mission is for the children of Israel and not for the Gentile, the Greek, nor anyone else outside of the Law of Moses. This is a pivotal moment in Jesus' development and the development of the Way. Will mission remain centered on Israel or will this become a trans-ethnic religion? Will Christianity grow in size and stature crossing over into unfamiliar territory?

Transcendence is embodied here. This episode demonstrates Jesus' capacity to 'cross-over' from the place of familiarity (in this case, ethnic belonging on the western and predominately Jewish side of The Sea of Galilee) to the place of the stranger (the eastern and predominately Gentile side of The Sea).¹⁸³ But also note the capacity for transcendence embodied by the Syrophenician woman! Her willingness to cross over class, religious, gender, and ethnic lines for the sake of her daughter initiates the scene. She is the one who entered the house of a stranger in order to meet with the foreign man for the sake of her daughter.¹⁸⁴ In the meeting, the stranger becomes the catalyst for Jesus' growth in size and stature. Jesus is still on a mission, healing and drawing people to God. Only now this includes more than his fellow Jew.

This episode breaks open the path that is the arc of the New Testament, especially of Luke-Acts: the Way of Jesus is opened up to Gentiles. It is a Way that transcends the ethnic boundaries that divide people from one another. We see continued growth in the hinge moment of Acts 10 between Cornelius and Peter. We see it in Paul's frustration with Jewish followers of Jesus who were questioning the faithfulness and orthodoxy of the Gentile Christians at Galatia. Growth is a central reality in the scriptures but one that we tend to overlook for insight into how we live as Christians today.

¹⁸² Sharon H. Rigne, "A Gentile Woman's Story Revisited: Rereading Mark 7:24-31," in *A Feminist Companion to Mark*, Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff, eds. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 88.

¹⁸³ Julien C.H. Smith, "The Construction of Identity in Mark 7:24-30: The Syrophenician Woman and the Problem of Ethnicity," in *Biblical Interpretation 20* (2012): 467.

¹⁸⁴ C.H. Smith, 476.

Size and Stature in the Body of Christ as Resurrection Reality

In human life, growth is essential to well-being and maturity. Persons, institutions, or corporations that never change are labeled dysfunctional or irrelevant, and will likely, at least in the case of institutions and corporations, eventually cease to exist...In a world in which all things flow, ongoing creative transformation is not only healthy, but necessary for survival. Even Jesus underwent change and growth.¹⁸⁵

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

John 14:12

Though Jesus, the individual middle-eastern man who lived 2,000 years ago, physically died, he in resurrection lives and continues to grow in size and stature. Indeed, as Jesus told his anxious followers in the gospel of John, his return to God only opened the path to greater works to be done in his name and through his earthly body.

One of Jesus' own parables may be used to convey this resurrection reality. "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."¹⁸⁶ The body of Christ is no longer one individual body; rather it is composed of many bodies beyond the limits of geography and chronology. Christ has continued to grow in consequent nature as he has responded to novel situations and needs in the Body. The wisdom of Christ has not remained static, though the canon of scriptures settled around the year 400 CE for most Christians. In the words of the United Christian Church, "God is still speaking," though process thinkers would add that God is also still adapting, growing, and responding.

If God is viewed as sovereign, the body is viewed as being in need of a rational head to keep it from sinning. The gap remains. In process thought, again, we do not give to God attributes that belong "exclusively unto Caesar."¹⁸⁷ That is, that God is sovereign over submissive subjects with nothing to contribute to God. For Whitehead, Jesus is a counter model of this dominating King God. The problem is the historical accumulation that covers over "the Galilean origin of Christianity."¹⁸⁸ Here is what Whitehead has to say about this origin for process thought found in Jesus:

¹⁸⁵ Epperly, 33.

¹⁸⁶ John 12:24 (NRSV).

¹⁸⁷ Whitehead, *P&R*, 342.

¹⁸⁸ Whitehead, *P&R*, 343.

It does not emphasize the ruling Caesar, or the ruthless moralist, or the unmoved mover. It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love; and it finds purpose in the present immediacy of a kingdom not of this world. Love neither rules, nor is it unmoved; also it is a little oblivious as to morals. It does not look to the future; for it finds its own reward in the immediate present.¹⁸⁹

Jesus, according to process, reveals to us God's satisfaction with human process and desire to interact with creation. If God would have sent the Word made flesh as a fully grown and static adult male, we would have a different picture and support for a unilateral conceptualization of power. But, Jesus grew in cells and structures within Mary's womb. Jesus grew in ability to speak and communicate, from babbles of infancy to world-changing proclamations on mountaintops. But Jesus "increased in wisdom and in years" (Luke 2:52). Even the story of Jesus encountering a Canaanite/Syrophoenician woman reveals for process thinkers God's and Jesus' ability to change mind and heart, challenging notions of Jesus as being perfect because he was born perfect. Perfection does not equal changelessness. Rather, it too is a matter of process and growth.

If Jesus' divinity and holiness are rooted in the response-ability of his love, then what great responsibility we who proclaim the Living Word have to make sure that we are clear in this radical proclamation and careful about the tropes of an unchanging and unmovable God that settle in our theological vocabulary. As Whitehead reminds us, "Neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty. Either of them, God and the World, is the instrument of novelty for the other."¹⁹⁰ The gospel is not complete, not a static reality we aspire to enter someday when our bodies leave this earth. It is a dynamic reality ever working its way into creation. Even the mediation of this reality is dynamic, or rather needs to be in order to survive.

True to process philosophy, "What we describe as Christ or Logos, the embodiment of God's creative transformation in Jesus of Nazareth, takes on different nuances in different cultural settings, and may be understood in a variety of ways,

¹⁸⁹ Whitehead, *P&R*, 343.

¹⁹⁰ Whitehead, *P&R*, 349.

depending on culture and context.”¹⁹¹ The role of the preacher is to be open to this creative process—both to the Spirit of God and the Spirit of the context. The role of the church is to collaborate with God in the ever-flowing events of the world. Thus, at the core of process spirituality is deep discernment and prayer so as to render our persons sensitive to the whispers of the Spirit and the needs of one another.

The world—its people its cultures its creativity—provokes God’s creativity. May it be so with us. But this relationship is not without limits from the Christian perspective. There is a norm of appropriateness that guides the adventure in the posture of our teacher Jesus Christ. Recall that growth in size and stature means a capacity to know and be impacted by others *without losing your own particularity that is uniquely yours*. Christianity has a unique particularity that is Christ. Christ, as dynamic reality, is our norm of appropriateness in ministry and discipleship, as well as preaching and proclamation. It is this norm that we develop in the fourth chapter.

God’s Desire for Creation: Greater Intensity, Not Preservation

The primordial appetitions which jointly constitute God’s purposes are seeking intensity, and not preservation.¹⁹²

In the world there is nothing static. But there is reproduction; and hence the permanence which is the result of order, and the cause of it. And yet there is always change; for time is cumulative as well as reproductive, and the cumulation of the many is not their reproduction as many.¹⁹³

As keepers of the tradition of preaching in and for the church it is easy to assume that our task is preservation rather than innovation. We often speak in terms of God as sustainer, and so we think of God as the upholder of tradition as well. God is the great preserver of tradition and people and church. But in process thought, God does not seek preservation for the sake of permanence. Rather, God aims at greater intensity “in the creative advance,” seeking and inspiring novel ways of becoming human, becoming citizen, and becoming church in the march of time.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Epperly, 123.

¹⁹² Whitehead, *P&R*, 105.

¹⁹³ Whitehead, *P&R*, 238.

¹⁹⁴ Whitehead, *P&R*, 105.

What is intensity? Perhaps it is known in its contrast, which is narrowness. Narrowness is the “lowest category” in Whitehead’s metaphysic, for it lacks contrast and so lacks width. The desire to increase a hegemonic vision for being human, citizen, and church is a threat to God’s aim for intensity. In theological language, it is a sin—missing the mark and lure of God’s initial aim. God and the creative advance aim at intensity, instead, that is greater and greater contrasts and patterns as novelty—which may promote or destroy order for better or worse—emerges into creation.¹⁹⁵

Intensity is not a terminal instance toward which God is steering all of creation. God is not fixated on God’s version of a future story. Intensity is the reality that all organic process “involves the emergence of novelty” for creaturely existence “brings new experiences to God” but also back “to the creaturely world.”¹⁹⁶ In this system a set future cannot be. Rather, the future is “open and surprising for us and also for God.”¹⁹⁷ God’s power in this system is the power to be entirely present in the impact of a moment and the actions and decisions made or not made there. The future evolves from every decision made and becoming enacted in the accumulation of moments. Thus creative advance is an advance that only becomes identifiable in its becoming. There is not set linear path that we either get on board with or miss. It is a dipolar path that takes into consideration what has been as it is and becomes. It just is. We will, in other words, never cease to progress with God.¹⁹⁸

The living and interdependent philosophy of organism “abolishes the detached mind,” as it abolishes the detached God.¹⁹⁹ God is not the unchanging mind we turn to as an encyclopedia or roadmap for life as it changes. Freed from the classical Western schema of God as an unmoved mover, we reevaluate what it looks like to follow a dynamic God. God’s wisdom is whispering to all of creation in every moment as it responds and reacts to our particular wisdom and actions in every moment. To live is to grow. God is living. Jesus is a Living Word. So it too grows in size and stature and lures us to join the adventure.

¹⁹⁵ Whitehead, *P&R*, 187.

¹⁹⁶ Epperly, 21.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Whitehead, *P&R*, 111.

¹⁹⁹ Whitehead, *P&R*, 56.

Growth in size and stature, growth in wisdom and capacity to hold contrasts without losing your identity, is the way of flourishing. The pursuit of narrowness and homogeneity is the way of death. We see this in biology (variance increases the survival of species, homogeneity means one bug or virus can wipe a species out). We see this in racism (the energies of white supremacy to dominate and subordinate and in some cases eliminate black and brown humans). We see this in thin and narrow theologies that are not deep enough to hold the complexity of life (Christians leaving churches that cannot explain why bad things happen to good people outside of simple and violent answers that the person must not have really been all good or that God wanted the evil to happen as some form of satisfaction or punishment).

At this point, we have broadly sketched the novel theological worldview proposed by Alfred North Whitehead. The foundation for this framework is the notion of a reality always in the process of becoming. This reality is as true of creation and history as it is of God who is the chief exemplar of all organisms. To live is to change; to remain static is to die. Thus we are invited to listen for the lure of God throughout life as we risk collaborating in adventures made possible only in the ripeness of particular moments in time. Along the way, diversity and plurality evidence the advance of creation, not as problems to be solved but as reflections of a divine aesthetic telos for all of creation.

Process and Preaching: A Summary at This Point of the Partnership

Many preachers over the last century have preached from process perspectives, their content radically impacted by this relational theology. Homiletics has been gifted by the work of three scholars in particular as regards the possibilities for preaching in light of process theology. It is to these scholars, Ronald J. Allen and his collaboration with Clark M. Williamson, and Marjorie Suchocki, that we now turn.

The Adventures of Ronald J. Allen

No other homiletician has probed as deeply into the potentialities of process thought for our field than Ron Allen. For over two decades, Allen has been engaged in the potentialities of process theology for the practice of preaching and Christian worship.

In his first formal foray into process, *A Credible and Timely Word*, Allen and colleague Clark M. Williamson see in process-relational theology specific application for how the preacher approaches text and context as dynamic and interrelated realities. With relationships at the core of this homiletic, the book pushes the reader away from the God of classical theism—who is immutable and distant—and toward an affectionate God—who loves and relates with *all* of creation.²⁰⁰ The aim of process preaching then is Christian living reflecting the character of God, and rooted in tangible acts of love and justice—a stance of interdependence in the world rather than independence from the world.²⁰¹ For Allen and Williamson, preaching is the task of teaching the Christian faith, especially what it means to engage social issues as thinking Christians.²⁰² Practically speaking, Williamson and Allen lay out guidelines from a process perspective on hermeneutics, interpretation of scripture, and issues of systemic injustice.

Credible opens with a brief but convincing proposition: an “Unmoved Mover” of a God renders churches apathetic to or incapable of engaging in the realities of systemic injustice. Yet, the concept of God as “Unmoved Mover” is the bedrock of traditional theism and classic Christian theology. The authors enumerate the consequences of the binary schema in which God is set up as being apart from and unconcerned with the broken world: silence in the pulpit on the suffering of the nonhuman world; a Christian focus on “otherworldliness and escapism;”²⁰³ models for a “strong, male” God who is “wholly active, controlling, independent, unemotional, inflexible, and utterly devoid of receptiveness, responsiveness, or sympathy.”²⁰⁴ Made in the image of that unmoved God, the church has distanced itself and so distanced God from the systemic brokenness of the world. Preaching in traditional Western theological systems focused its function on

²⁰⁰ Williamson and Allen, *Credible*, 2.

²⁰¹ Before Allen and Williamson’s book on preaching and process, a group of process oriented biblical scholars did publish a book on biblical preaching from a process perspective. See David J. Lull and William A. Beardslee, eds. *Biblical Preaching on the Death of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989). This book emerges from a particular SBL conversation on process and hermeneutics. “The Death of Jesus” is the frame of reference centering the exegetical work through Mark and Paul’s letters, with two sample sermons. Overall, I do not find it a helpful aid to preaching in general nor to process theology and preaching, and process hermeneutics. Perhaps this is a result of the multi-author blend and tug of war, resulting in a lack of directional voice and lack of definition work around what trajectory of process philosophy is used as the norm of appropriateness in preaching.

²⁰² Williamson and Allen, *Credible*, 5.

²⁰³ Williamson and Allen, *Credible*, 29.

²⁰⁴ Williamson and Allen, *Credible* 26.

“comfort of the distressed” while they dwell in the realm of change via assurance of otherworldly liberation and healing, rather than healing and liberation now in this world.²⁰⁵ Allen and Williamson also note that these classical oppositional models settle for substantive ways of thinking and therefore fall prey inorganic stasis. That is, these ideas establish limits to knowledge by maintaining that their facts need not be challenged or changed for these ideas rest on an unchanging God.

In their next project, *Adventures*, Allen and Williamson expand the foundations of process theology into worship. Setting up the distinctions between process theology and the classic Western schema, Allen and Williamson argue that process emphasizes on relationality and interdependence are “nuisances,” for substance-oriented theology.²⁰⁶ Nuisance or not, “relations are primary” in process theology.²⁰⁷ Process emphasis on a relational and compassionate God paints the portrait of an *Imago Dei* requiring of humans care and compassion for the whole world, which is God’s own body.²⁰⁸ The world is God’s body and God is the mind that parents us lovingly and savingly—feeling both our success at caring for one another and our failures.²⁰⁹ As a result, the authors call for a “norm of appropriateness” in preaching from a process perspective, which centers on the love of God for all creation and our call to work in partnership with God toward the well-being of all creation.²¹⁰ Our ethic of and in preaching is derived from the knowledge that the self, the stranger, and the earth’s elements are all in God equally, thus

²⁰⁵ Williamson and Allen, *Credible*, 41.

²⁰⁶ Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen, *Adventures of the Spirit: A Guide to Worship from the Perspective of Process Theology* (New York: University Press of America, 1997), 53.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ Ron Allen and Clark Williamson as well as Anna Case-Winters were influenced by Sallie McFague in this book, though she herself is not labeled a process theologian, her work is certainly process-like in its emphases on relationality and panentheism. For influence in Allen and Williamson, see *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) and *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); For influence in Case-Winters see also *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) and *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (London: SCM, 1997).

²⁰⁹ It may seem at first that this perpetuates the binary of mind over body. However, in Whitehead and process the mind is not ever divorced from body. They are not two distinct entities independent of one another. Hence the metaphor of God’s body being the world under the frame of panentheism claims the mind is the unifying wisdom which connects all parts of the body and strives to coordinate the movements of the body to the best of its ability. The mind must be receptive to the limits and strengths of the parts and cannot unilaterally possess any part, thereby erasing the make-up of its particularity. In other words, it is as true to say mind over matter as it is to say matter over mind.

²¹⁰ Williamson and Allen, *Credible*, 76.

requiring us to tangibly love each of them as we have been “loved, affirmed, and accepted by God.”²¹¹

In sermon preparation and delivery, the corresponding quality for the process preacher is that of conversation and relationality. She is always ever in conversation with the text, as it was and has been used, the context, where her community has been and is, as well as with God, being sensitive to the pull and presence of the companioning Spirit in every given moment. Williamson and Allen highlight the “deep roots” of conversational postures in preaching in the world “homily” itself: “a transliteration of a Greek term for conversation.”²¹² Preaching then, and homiletics as well, has embedded within it the notion of “companionship.”²¹³ The preacher and congregation are companions on a journey of discipleship that has no predetermined roadmap but an ever-present Guide.

While Williamson and Allen offer excellent strategies for conceiving sermons and the preaching life in a process-like way, and offer strategies to name God in ways that dismantle systems of oppression and injustice caused by the classical theistic schema, they, like those noted in the previous chapter, are limited to innovating within the concretized pulpit/pew binary to explore how process could reconceive of preaching beyond that concretized frame and moment in the life of the church. We will return to this issue after a look at the contributions of Marjorie Suchocki.

The Whispered Word of Marjorie Suchocki

Unlike Allen, Suchocki is not a teacher of preaching. Rather, her focus has been on systematic and practical theology as a process theologian. She is deeply involved in the Center for Process Studies at Claremont and has applied her process theology to ecclesiology in *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* and to preaching in *The Whispered Word: A Theology of Preaching*. Like Allen and Williamson, the core of Suchocki’s theology is a non-static, dynamic God, revealed in the growth of Christ in his moment in time. God is omnicompassionate, present in every occasion’s

²¹¹ Williamson and Allen, *Credible*, 9.

²¹² Williamson and Allen, *Adventures*, 143.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

becoming, but in a non-preferential way. All events and actualities are of equal value in God's whisper.

Suchocki's theology of preaching presents itself more as a theopoetic piece than a methodology. It is more descriptive than prescriptive. She artfully paints the picture of a world saturated in God's Word—whispered, proclaimed, and received.

The Whispered Word is God's "initial aim" for every moment.²¹⁴ In process theology, God instigates each moment with possibilities catered to the value, experience, and feelings particular to every particular subject in its becoming.²¹⁵ So, like God, it is dipolar in nature—primordially connected to that nature of a God who loves all and consequently impacted by the subject(s) acting in each event.

The whispered word is consequent because the word is "bound to our contexts, bound to our freedom, bound to our own decisions."²¹⁶ The whispered word is the primordial aspect of God in the sense that it is, for Suchocki, "literally the source of our being."²¹⁷ It moves deep in our depths, below consciousness. And yet it is almost always hidden, "not clearly discerned."²¹⁸ The whole of creation is sustained by this life-given word or aim, according to Suchocki, though we may not always be in tune with it. The word/aim is a whisper because all too often we are too habituated, busy, and distracted to hear or feel it.

The Proclaimed Word is Jesus. He is the word of God revealed in time and history. This word reveals to us "that God's plan for creation *can* be fulfilled," and that we "are invited to participate in God's revealed word, which in turn sensitizes us to that hidden whisper."²¹⁹ This word judges and enables us.²²⁰ Jesus, the proclaimed word, is the norm of appropriateness for Christians.

Then, the Word is received. It is received not just through "the physical act of receiving sounds through one's ears and interpreting them."²²¹ Rather, the full setting for

²¹⁴ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 7.

²¹⁵ Whitehead, *P&R*, 244.

²¹⁶ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 17.

²¹⁷ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 13.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 14. Emphasis hers.

²²⁰ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 17.

²²¹ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 23.

the proclaimed word (preaching) impacts the reception. That is the worship service, the body language of the preacher, the sound of the preacher's voice, the building, and all the visible and invisible elements present in the event of comprehending the word impact the reception of the word.²²² As the sermon is let go, its words will be received and interpreted in as many ways as there are people in the pews. The sermon, then, extends to the ways in which the community becomes a sermon in the world.²²³

Thus, in Suchocki's theology of preaching, our ministry is pivotal to the ongoing "re-presentation of Jesus the Christ."²²⁴ Preaching is ongoing proclamation of the Proclaimed Word, Jesus. And so preaching is participation in the ongoing redemptive work of God, by the power of the Spirit. God needs preaching and preachers to bring the shout, Christ, from the whisper into the consciousness of creation. The Word is a Living Word, not locked into a holy canon. Ministry to the Word becomes dynamic, organic, and relational.

Though Suchocki embraces Christian tradition as "a living thing," she does not step outside of her theology of preaching to play with how this could impact the tradition of preaching beyond pulpit and pew.²²⁵ To be alive is to be dynamic, shedding and creating cells constantly, taking in new sights, sounds, insights, smells, and memories at every given moment. Thus, being a tradition, in Suchocki's process thought, does not require stasis, nor the refusal to integrate contemporary realities, for only "a dead tradition is impervious to change."²²⁶ However, Suchocki is explicit in her practical process ecclesiology about change not being valued for its own sake.²²⁷ Rather Christians are called to a posture of "critical openness to the changes entailed."²²⁸ According to

²²² It would be interesting to hear from the ghost of Clyde Reid concerning whether or not these elements of the liturgy—the work of the people—are acceptable as avenues for active participation in the communication of God's preached word.

²²³ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 37.

²²⁴ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 21.

²²⁵ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 41.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ A common critique of process is the idea that change is essentially good and that there is no guiding norm of appropriateness, rather just a blind worship of novelty. Hopefully these cursory introductions of process nuance change as something that is not simply God's aim, but that God seeks to companion us through change in order to keep traditions, identities, and other organisms alive, perhaps fully so.

²²⁸ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki. *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*, New Revised Edition. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 4.

Suchocki, we still need to be in tune with God as things change and novelty opens up, for God “is not only the course of the entity’s future, but the source of its best future.”²²⁹ And for Christians, Jesus remains our best theo-ethical norm.

If we apply this understanding that Suchocki has for the content of the sermon to the practice of preaching itself we open ourselves up to wrestle with and be invigorated by the reality of our contemporary situation: crumbling churches combined with growth in house church movements and online presence and communities guarantee that the possibilities will be endless. But in the midst of changes and challenges God—who is leading us forward as we cling to what is behind—can be the source of our best future.

Suchocki offers a poetic and imaginative process theology for preaching. Allen in partnership with Williamson and in his solo work offers this as well, for preaching and worship. Infused with process-relational theology, all authors frame the world as deeply relational and God as profoundly present in these relations. The postures these process thinkers inspire are humble, horizontal, attentive postures of with-ness that seek relational empowerment in leadership rather than coercive domination and subordination.

Both process contributions have been critical of binary thinking and how it has impacted the church and preaching. For Allen and Williamson, collusion with the binary has left the impression that preaching is impotent to dismantle other oppressive structures and “the major structural evils of our time.”²³⁰ But like Sarah Travis who sought to decolonize the pulpit without confessing its role in a system that birthed colonization, Allen and Williamson do not expose the binary as it operates for good and ill in preaching nor challenge oppressive assumptions born of the entangled pulpit/pew binary. These radical theories are applied to sermon content only and not liberated from the binary to trouble the overarching metaphysical system for preaching.

Allen and Williamson do state that “Process perspective enriches all aspects of the preaching event: the notion of what a sermon is and what it can do, the preparation of the sermon, and its preaching.”²³¹ However, in execution and emphasis throughout Allen’s work, “Process-relational thought has its greatest impact in regard to the content of the

²²⁹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 33.

²³⁰ Williamson and Allen, *Credible*, 39.

²³¹ Williamson and Allen, *Adventures*, 137.

sermon.”²³² Like McClure, Rose, and others, this process approach to preaching continues to think “of the sermon as being monological in form but dialogical in quality.”²³³ Preaching is still a monological moment in a liturgical setting delivered from a pulpit to a pew.

The setting in Suchocki for the preached word is also concretely the liturgy.²³⁴ “Preaching,” for Suchocki, “is a relational event that involves God, a text, a place, a preacher, a sermon, a congregation, and the persons within that congregation.”²³⁵ The place is assumed to be a building, specifically the place that houses pulpit and pew. This is where the Word is proclaimed and initially received. However, probing deeper, the congregation is not limited to the people who are gathered in one place under one roof in the pews on Sunday. Suchocki says what differentiates a community from a crowd is “a shared identity in Christ.”²³⁶ Perhaps this could mean communities may meet in virtual places, but this is not part of Suchocki’s intent. Still, there does seem to be room in Suchocki’s theology of process for preaching beyond the binary, although she does not explicitly name any possibilities.

With Allen the constrictions of pulpit-pew assumptions are more obvious. For Allen, preaching is a practice that makes a sermon really real in the confines of an oral/aural binary. For example, while discussing the need for preachers to not have their face stuck in a manuscript in the pulpit, Allen and Williamson *claim* “It is important for the sermon to have a truly oral character,” so that a sermon comes “to life” with “a spoken, living quality.”²³⁷ Related to this is the notion of real presence, presumed to be face-to-face.²³⁸ Thus the oral/aural character of preaching originates in the relationship of pulpit and pew in a church building. In other words, “A sermon is not fully a sermon until it is spoken in the presence of the congregation,” and it seems that congregation is *seated*

²³² Ronald J. Allen, “Preaching as Conversation among Proposals” in *Handbook of Process Theology*, Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman, Eds. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 84.

²³³ Williamson and Allen, *Adventures*, 149.

²³⁴ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 23.

²³⁵ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 24

²³⁶ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 33.

²³⁷ Williamson and Allen, *Adventures*, 156.

²³⁸ “Of course, the preacher can talk in the flesh to members of the congregation.” Williamson and Allen, *Adventures*, 154.

facing the speaker in the pulpit.²³⁹ Assumptions about what constitutes the only possibility for genuine relationality impose significant blinders in the work of Allen and Williamson.

Finally it seems the door is closed on novel means of preaching within a process framework when Allen states explicitly in his 2006 essay on process preaching, “if a person seeks to preach from a process-relational stance, the sermon must be oral-aural in character.”²⁴⁰ This especially feels final knowing that in 2006, as opposed to 1991 or 1997, social media was beginning to take hold of culture. Sermons were already being preached via satellite and on Second Life throughout the world. Preaching was taking place beyond the oral/aural, pulpit/pew confines of homiletics. So for Allen, it needed to be stated that his process view is not wide enough in intensity to hold these forms. As a result, the sermon is a face-to-face, liturgy-locked event, spoken by a preacher and heard by a congregation. While pushing against binary thinking in hermeneutics and theology, the binary that defines preaching’s event, space, and form of relationality remains.

Suchocki and Allen, while embracing the adventure of process theology in developing homiletic models, can be invited to journey further within the attractive lure of process theology for the sake of preaching that is not merely caught between pulpit and pew. They too are subject to false stasis in homiletics.

For scholars of preaching, then, recent struggles with the stasis of pulpit and pew encourage us to lift our eyes to the possibilities for preaching that are upon us in this new historical moment. Tapping into the adventurous spirit of the philosopher Whitehead, we may find the energy and openness to redefine this practice without necessary adherence to static-substance oriented categories that do not allow for innovation. Engaging the gadfly of our present digital age with an expansive view of the practice of preaching, we may allow our imaginations to reach beyond the limits previously constraining the embodiment of ministry to the Living Word.

²³⁹ Williamson and Allen, *Adventures*, 157.

²⁴⁰ R. Allen, 86.

Conclusion

The stasis in homiletics caused by a pulpit and pew dualism perpetuates a narrowness that may obscure the novel possibilities for preaching and ecclesiology that our current historical moment has to offer. This stasis also impacts the way we frame theological education and preaching as a discipline within it. The narrow static vision of ordained ministry as service to the pulpit and pew stifles theological institutions as well, possibly constricting the work of the Holy Spirit. These systems seek to produce leaders for a church patterned after church as it has been done before—the system hopes it will remain—without attention to the realities of the multiplicity of the church as it is expanding and emerging. With our eyes locked on the preservation of pulpit and pew, we can miss opportunities to be innovative in the development of participants in the ministry of the Living Word beyond the pulpit and pew. We can strangle the call of God toward more beauty and intensity and find ourselves stuck defending preaching as it has been done in an idealized past. Whitehead summarized the paradox: “The world...craves for novelty and yet is haunted by terror at the loss of the past, with its familiarities and its loved ones.”²⁴¹ In the traditional schema with its linear power, nudges and suggestions for change are met by terror of loss of power—the power of a past seemingly under the system’s control. But in process theology, when that fear of novelty knocks at the door, faith in a God of partnership and innovation may answer, only to find that no terrible thing knocking down our door after all.²⁴²

As we will see, preaching as defined by the static category of pulpit and pew as it plays out in the classic Western schema stunts the conversation in homiletics about whether and how technology can be utilized in our ministry to the Living Word. It means that virtual preaching is not “real” because we only associate preaching with communion, and communion—a sacrament—cannot be done in a disembodied “virtual” way. So *if* virtual worship is not “real” worship, *then* virtual preaching is not “real” preaching. Preaching that is less than real—meaning face-to-face communication of preacher to people in pews—is not really worth our time and research and pedagogical attention. This obviously limits our imaginations for the preaching ministry as it pertains to social *media*,

²⁴¹ Whitehead, *P&R*, 340.

²⁴² This is a play on a quote made famous by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Fear knocked at the door, faith answered, no one was there.”

for its “location” is other than the worship service in a concrete or otherwise “real” building. Is it possible that we can refuse to settle for such a narrow imagination? In the following chapters, we will open up a new imaginative space in which social media is a place of meeting where our congregation and community is constantly having theological conversations about the world as events unfold in real time. This place is ripe for prophets who see part of their ministry as bringing scripture, exegesis, leadership, and the Living Word into the social media conversation. It could be the site where a novel, socially mediated homiletic is emerging.

Process theology has had a powerful partnership in the content of our preaching. Now process theology can be consulted not merely for the content of our sermons but for a life-giving posture in our guild and within theological education, one that celebrates appreciative inquiry rather than defending a tradition or swatting at the gadfly of technological change. Challenging the stasis of a pulpit and pew framework, our preaching *practices* may be provoked by God’s creativity with novelty. God desires for all of us, including this guild, greater intensity rather than preservation of things as they were.

However, the intensity of the technological landscape is not to be embraced for novelty’s sake, abandoning fully the handing down of preaching traditions. Such a shallow course would only provoke a novel narrowness and quickly lead to novel stasis in our thinking about preaching that will crumble under another wave of cultural changes as they come. Nor is the technological landscape to be ignored for tradition’s sake, remaining stuck in preservation mode. The work of preachers and teachers of preaching will entail prophetic navigation of the communication landscape under the direction of a Christian theo-ethical norm of appropriateness for preaching. Another task will be to lift up some norm that sets preaching apart as an historical tradition of preaching, a theo-rhetorical practice that is distinct to the church. This will be the work of chapter four.

This second chapter has explored some of the ways in stasis around abstractions of preaching practice, primarily in the pulpit and pew binary, have been a stumbling block to the fluid practice of preaching and the movement of the theo-rhetorical Living Word. If adherents to the traditional schema and adherents to process can agree on anything, it is that communication is an ever-moving cultural reality. The problem is

when we forget that communication is a vital part of the practice of preaching. That is, when we adhere to the binary these changes in communication are viewed as problems to be solved or ignored rather than lures for change and innovation of our practices for communicating the Living Word.

Traditional theological systems do not always have the buoyancy to respond to evolutions in communication, though tactics can be deployed from within to address these changes. But process theology, with its affirmation in a fluid God and its suspicion of the static, offers homiletics a path out of the pulpit/pew binary, a path out of fatalistic thinking, a path of adventure for those who are up for the ride.

Freed from the idea that our role is to sustain and defend ministry to pulpit and pew, we now may be faithful to sustaining and cultivating ministry to the Living Word, incarnate again and again in our particular cultures of communication. But before we can organize a proposal for preaching in this emerging technoculture of the twenty first century it is necessary to at least survey the developments and lures for adventure that these developments have made. This is the work of chapter three: encountering the gadfly.

CHAPTER III.

EXPLORING THE GADFLY: A SURVEY OF TECHNOCULTURE AND ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE 21ST CENTURY

Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.²⁴³

Technology can become sacramental, it can become a bearer of the self-giving love of God to a broken world. But in order for this to happen, Christian faith and practice must establish a genuine and ongoing discourse with technologized society.²⁴⁴

Introduction

Thus far we have only mentioned in passing a few nods to technology and its impact on preaching. Before we could even have a conversation about whether and how technology impacts preaching we first needed to introduce fluidity into the nature of preaching itself—practically and theoretically speaking—and to trouble stasis in our framework for defining preaching that limit futures for preaching. We needed to agree that preaching is a practice vital to ministry to the Living Word, one not bound to the pulpit and pew. We needed to remind ourselves that preaching is a liturgical act, as well as a practice that has transcended the formal Sunday worship event. We eventually need to agree that preaching has a universal familiarity in essence that persists through revolutions in technology but that it is and has been simultaneously diverse in nature (this will be the work of the fourth chapter). Preaching is a theo-rhetorical act, but in a process, non-binary framework, theological stability does not inherently trump rhetorical fluidity. The creative tension of theology and communication has always and will always impact the practice of preaching.

Fundamentally, we also needed to understand God through process theology as one who sees the creative advance of culture, including technological culture, as bringing opportunities for novelty to emerge and intensity to grow. In this chapter, we look at

²⁴³ Melvin Kranzberg, “Technology and History: ‘Kranzberg’s Laws,’ in *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (The Johns Hopkins University Press and the Society for the History of Technology, July 1986), 545.

²⁴⁴ Susan J. White, *Christian Worship and Technological Change*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 129.

perspectives on technoculture²⁴⁵ in the twenty first century in order to discern what invitations for creative engagement exist in our ministry to the Living Word.

Often, the first place our mind goes to when one asks about the relationship between worship and technology are the artifacts of technology such as screens, computers, projectors, lights, etc. Writing on the future of sermon form in a digital age from a purely artifact level, Richard Littledale lamented the “bleak future where preaching is altogether divorced from a face-to-face encounter between a real preacher, warts and all, and a real congregation.”²⁴⁶ Of course, this statement assumes that preaching which takes place from a conventional pulpit to a conventional set of pews inherently promotes life-giving, mutual giving and taking, face-to-face encounters. Face-to-face preaching does not guarantee a quality of relational power promoted by process theology, just as the use of technological innovation does not *sine qua non* promote inauthentic or abusive relationship. This, again, is a form of binary thinking—that there is a solid line between real and virtual existence—and it is yet another example of both the false oppositions of binary thinking and stasis at work to undermine thoughtful engagement between preaching and technoculture.

So we return once again to the binary of the classic Western schema, this time inserting technology into the mix. Most arguments about the validity of technology—those that are made from a predominately religious stand point or not—operate within the schema. Rather than dealing with the complexity of technology and our relationship with it historically as human beings, “technology” as a category is thrown from one side of the binary to the other, often in opposition to humanity. When technology is aligned with God, arguments for it are centered in technophilia. Technology takes on God-like characteristics of the binary schema.²⁴⁷ Through technology, weak and frail bodies containing, for example, brains have the capacity to be uploaded into a machine and

²⁴⁵ I will use this phrase, borrowed from Susan J. White, throughout the project instead of “technological culture.” Like White, I am not merely concerned with the tools that technology introduces and requires, rather, I am interested in exploring technology’s influence at the level of knowing and communication.

²⁴⁶ Richard Littledale, “Sermon Form in a Digital Future,” in *The Future of Preaching*, Geoffrey Stevenson, ed. (London: SCM Press, 2010), 145

²⁴⁷ For an interesting example of technophilia, read about the merger of 1960s Flower Power with 1990s Silicon Valley in Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

preserved for eternity.²⁴⁸ Technology takes on salvific proportions as that which can defeat illness, make life more efficient, and even save the church from falling into irrelevancy.

+	-
GOD	WORLD
MAN	WOMAN
SOUL	BODY
CULTURE	NATURE
LIGHT	DARKNESS
GOOD	EVIL
TECHNOLOGY	HUMANITY

Figure 6. Inserting Technology and Humanity into the Dualistic Schema²⁴⁹

But, technology also gets set on the other side of the schema.

+	-
GOD	WORLD
MAN	WOMAN
SOUL	BODY
CULTURE	NATURE
LIGHT	DARKNESS
GOOD	EVIL
HUMANITY	TECHNOLOGY

Figure 7. Inserting Humanity and Technology into the Dualistic Schema

When the binary reads this way, technophobia enters the picture, encouraging the production of literature and philosophy around technology that closes the door on

²⁴⁸ See Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005) for a stunning and complicated piece from the point of view of a technological optimist.

²⁴⁹ Case-Winters, 24, 69.

redemptive practices. Technology becomes an enemy that needs to be controlled.²⁵⁰ The underlying fear is that eventually technology will become too powerful for humans and so rob us of all that makes us human.²⁵¹ Our creation overpowers the creators. Engaging in technology may only make humans less pure, less powerful, and less imaginative. In this line of argumentation, the church will shun all that reflects trends in *contemporary* technology (for, as we will discuss shortly, technology always has been a shaper and participant in the design of worship).

From a process framework, this binary is resisted in order to have a different kind of conversation about both the problems and possibilities of technology in relation to human beings, creation, and the church. This is how we now will engage the gadfly of technology that is buzzing in the face of the church and society in the 21st century.

Christian Worship and Technological Change

Most everyday conversations about technology and the church remain at the artifact level. Will we put a screen up in the sanctuary? Should we create a website? The artifact and utility level, according to Susan J. White, writing specifically on technological innovation in Christian worship, is only one of three “distinct, but interpenetrating, levels” of technology.²⁵² Technology also refers to the processes by which artifacts are manufactured as well as the larger cultural attitudes that emerge as we influence and are influenced by technological change. These interactions create particular technocultures for each age.²⁵³

Ultimately, for White, mainline traditions are naïve about the impact of technology on how the liturgy is performed and prepared. Liturgy and technology do have and have always had “something to do with each other,” beyond the anachronistic

²⁵⁰ See Brad J. Kallenberg, *God and Gadgets: Following Jesus in a Technological World* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011). Kallenberg claims “the scale of technological evil is more like a tsunami than a homicide” (131). Technology, for Kallenberg, creates a “technopoly” that negatively impacts the way Christians see the world (10). Unlike my argument from a process perspective, Kallenberg understands technology to inherently reduce conventional reality into approximate representations.

²⁵¹ See David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

²⁵² White, 16.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

question of “how to run the overhead projector.”²⁵⁴ However, the study of liturgy as an organized discipline in theological education has centered its energies on the retrieval of the “Ur-text”²⁵⁵ of forms of prayer and order, or the text of earliest precedence and so of greatest authority regarding how liturgy should be done today.²⁵⁶ White critiques this collusion of antiquity with orthopraxis as having distracted scholars from reflection on the technoculture of participants in the liturgy today, as well as from acknowledging how the Ur-text itself is a product of a particular technoculture.²⁵⁷

To offer examples of where technological change and liturgical change have intersected, White highlights time-keeping technologies as they developed—from the exactitude of calendars to hours and eventually minutes and seconds—as well as communication technologies such as the monastic scribe and printing press. Each tool—and the desires accompanying them before and because of their existence—changed worship practice and the perception of the people who participate in worship. Every age, White emphasizes, is a technological age.

Every stage of Christianity has impacted and been impacted by the technologies of its age, especially as tools for mediation. Peter Horsfield, Professor of Communication at RMIT University who has written on the relationship between media and Christianity since 1984, sees “Christianity itself as *a mediated phenomenon*, one in which the matrix of mediation within which it takes shape at any particular period of history is integral to its character.”²⁵⁸ Yet it would be wrong to claim that at any given period and with any given media Christianity responded in unison to its emergence.

White never delves into the specificities of preaching and its relationship with technological media change. Such a survey has yet to be constructed. Yet a look into works in homiletic history reveal how technology has influenced the content (the structures for argumentation expected in literate technoculture 500 years ago up to

²⁵⁴ White, 10.

²⁵⁵ This is similar to the concern noted by Thomas Long as the Hippolytus Force in chapter two and the urge to validate current practice with appeals to ancient practice. Again, the issue is both the sanitation of past practice that White notes and the stripping away of the cultural influences that allowed the ancient “Ur-Text” to emerge in the first place.

²⁵⁶ White, 28.

²⁵⁷ White, 31.

²⁵⁸ Peter Horsfield, *From Jesus to the Internet: A History of Christianity and Media* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 286.

Eugene Lowry's loop and its relationship to the sitcom of the 1980s) and delivery of the sermon (from basilicas, cathedras and cathedrals, triptychs, stained glass, printing press, and electronic sonic amplification). Our intentional, thoughtful, and critical relationship with changes in technoculture is vital to the impact of our ministry to the Living Word, whether we acknowledge it or not in theory.²⁵⁹

Gloom and Doom of Digital Internet Culture-Technophobia

Perhaps our trepidation to address technoculture is in large part due to the doom and gloom on the *New York Times* best-seller list surrounding the future of humanity in light of the Internet and new media. Authors like Nicholas Carr play on the anxieties of people who view our cyber future through the lens of inevitability as well as pending doom. In sum, according to these authors, our kids no longer know how to have real relationships based on authenticity, presence, and conversation; our brains no longer allow us to sit and process deeply reality. We are shallow, distracted, and dumb; our brightest years as a species are slipping away as the Internet takes over our consciousness.

No doubt, changes in technoculture are, as they have always been, changing our brains. The way we learn, communicate and process learning, and the way we engage with one another profoundly are woven into are becoming, as process understands. The way our brains were formed when Jesus walked the earth in a predominantly oral/aural technoculture were unique to that time. The way our brains were formed in the wake of mass printing production and the shift to literary technoculture was unique to that time. Today, in the last seventy-five years of rapid shifts in technoculture, our brains are being wired in distinct and novel ways.

According to Carr, this rewiring is nothing but trouble for humanity. He opens the first chapter of his *New York Times* Best-Seller with a hook: "Over the last few years I've

²⁵⁹ Another excellent book exploring the religious roots of Western technology is David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999). He links human desire to develop technologies back to the fall from Eden and a desire to recreate the relationship between humans and God and a quest for transcendence. Unlike White and Horsfield, Noble claims that the technoculture of the last couple of decades makes a break from previous eras, no longer benefitting humanity. The break means that while religion and technology once worked together to promote human flourishing, this new era threatens humanity in a desire to transcend it.

had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been tinkering with my brain, remapping the neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory.”²⁶⁰ The greatest impact is on the brain’s capacity to focus, investigate, and innovate as it is being fed immediate rewards on the hyper-linked Internet. The more time we spend in cyberspace hopping from page to page, link to link, the more neurons that fired together and wired together by reading books for hours or being in sustained face-to-face conversation decay and lose connection. Our brains are wired to want quick bits of distraction at rapid pace. We lose the capacity to think critically and deeply. We lose to the capacity be present to one another in real time.

Carr goes on to paint a dramatic decline in human capacity to flourish and be in relationship, nay human capacity to be human: “The great danger we face as we become more intimately involved with our computers—as we come to experience more of our lives through the disembodied symbols flickering across our screens—is that we’ll begin to lose our humanness, to sacrifice the very qualities that separate us from the machines.”²⁶¹ In other words, for the first time in all of history, our tools seem to be no longer under our control. They are determined to control us.

Carr romanticizes the technoculture of the printing press, failing to nuance the shift in culture and the death of previous ways of knowing that occurred.²⁶² He only looks at the past 500 years, during which “Gutenberg’s printing press made book reading popular pursuit,” producing “the linear, literary mind” that “has been at the center of art, science, and society.”²⁶³ The romantization of this perfect brain continues: “As supple as it is subtle, it’s been the imaginative mind of the Renaissance, the rational mind of the Enlightenment, the inventive mind of the Industrial Revolution, even the subversive mind of Modernism. It may soon be yesterday’s mind.”²⁶⁴ This last phrase is another

²⁶⁰ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: Norton, 2010), 5.

²⁶¹ Carr, 207.

²⁶² See Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, for the *lounge durée* of technoculture. He reaches back into primary oral cultures—from Greek poetry to Qoheleth in the Hebrew Bible—to reflect on the psychodynamics emerging from oral/aural ways of knowing/communicating. These dynamics, for Ong, are still our primitive starting point. But tools have restructured consciousness, beginning with the alphabet around 1500 BC and on to the printing press around 1500 CE. His is a concise but far more complex take on how our use of tools alters our ways of knowing.

²⁶³ Carr, 10.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

sensationalized claim, aimed to hook the reader who, like Carr, views creative advance with horror of a past lost rather than with curiosity and possibility.

Of course this same linear literate mind created eugenics, fueled the flames of a purely rational and unemotional genocide of Jewish people, invented weapons of mass destruction, and organized chattel slavery. Carr does not tell the whole story of the horrors the literate human mind is capable of.

Turkle's work is just as provocative and furthers the alienation argument of Carr. In *Alone Together*, Turkle argues that our smart machines, which promote hyper connection, are slowly detaching us from one another in real time. As we pursue hyper connection on the Net, Americans, Turkle argues, become "increasingly insecure, isolated, and lonely."²⁶⁵ The human voice and face are masked by these Net identities, making it easier to ignore people, on one hand, and troll or harass them on the other. Dehumanized already by our devices, it becomes all the easier to be cruel and to be vulnerable.

In her later work, *Reclaiming Conversation*, Turkle laments the ways in which we allow connection to trump conversation. The deep root of failed conversation is the place-less-ness and face-less-ness that the Net enables. In other words, according to Turkle, we are always able to be anywhere and elsewhere and struggle to be present to our partners, family, friendships, as well as educational and work environments. In generations who have only known this technoculture, there is "widespread agreement that there is an empathy gap."²⁶⁶ For Turkle, remembering our humanness by disconnecting from our devices can right this wrong. However, she does not call for a wholesale rejection of technology.²⁶⁷

This technological fatalistic line of thought is reflected somewhat in Turkle, who claims to be "not anti-technology" rather "pro-conversation,"²⁶⁸ but especially in Carr. The claim is that our society is devolving at an unprecedented rate and the only way to

²⁶⁵ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 157.

²⁶⁶ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).

²⁶⁷ Turkle, *Reclaiming*, 362.

²⁶⁸ Tim Adams, "Sherry Turkle: 'I Am Not Anti-Technology, I Am Pro-Conversation,'" *The Guardian* (October 18, 2015). <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/oct/18/sherry-turkle-not-anti-technology-pro-conversation> (accessed January 26, 2017).

defeat the robots is to resist with extreme counter-cultural postures. There is hardly any room to choreograph innovative collaboration with these technologies as we hand on the best of our traditions in new and novel means. Rather, humanity is described as weak and addicted to the machines we bore into the world. A coup is underway. Power is being taken from us.

This rhetoric fits in perfectly with traditionalist cultures locked into the western binary schema, including the mainline protestant church. Technological innovation is the enemy *if* it is trying to have more power over us than we have over it. The response then is not playful discernment of how these innovations can impact our lives. Rather a slippery slope argument is set in place: If we engage just a little bit, then eventually humans will be replaced with robots all over the world. Yet, the inevitability has not stopped humanity from upgrading phones and buying the latest gadgets on Black Friday.

Is this the fear in homiletics? If we engage just a little bit in technoculture, then pastors will be replaced with robots programmed to preach the lectionary. If we really believe that homiletics consists of teaching humans universal programs and algorithms that lead to the construct of sermons, then yes, perhaps we should be afraid. But our students should never bank our methods wholesale as if they themselves do not have anything particular to offer to preaching nor their communities. This is the delusion of linear power at work. Preaching methods are not one size fits all as applied to individual practitioners or congregations. Can a robot impact and be impacted in the way humanity, made in the image of God, can? No. Advantage: humans.

The warnings from Turkle and Carr are clear, and will be reengaged later in chapter five as we discuss means for inhabiting the Internet—a system of power imposing its own desires—with theological integrity. But where are the moderate proposals for navigating the technoculture that will not be turned off with a swipe of the finger? Concretizing technology as evil only promotes narrowness and prohibits intensity. If we only turn to the *New York Times* best sellers for wisdom on encountering the gadfly we find ourselves ill-equipped to navigate the badlands of a shifting technoculture as well as a wider view of a shifting age out of the Industrial and into something new. Perhaps it is time we put a hiatus on swatting at the gadfly in order to acknowledge it and engage with it as homileticians. Perhaps it is time we change our

attitudes from grinning and bearing the badlands until the dust settles and normalcy achieved, and instead choreograph a conversation about preaching in the midst of the cultural shift.

The Bigger Contextual Picture: Navigating the Badlands

From the business world we get a broad portrait of the shifts at foot in this technological age. Mary O’Hara-Devereaux, CEO of Global Foresight and business forecaster and strategist, offers *Navigating the Badlands* as a guide for participants in the business world who are hoping to find direction for their work in an emerging technological age. This metaphor describes the rugged time between the Industrial Age and the as yet to be determined full promise of the Information Age. To do so, O’Hara-Devereaux took the *longue durée*, looking with colleagues at changes in technoculture that emerged with the invention of writing in 3500 BC and on into the end of the 1990s in order to forecast the foothills of a new age to be found in 2020. She and her colleagues “settled on the belief that we are now some fifty years into a seventy-five-year historical cycle of disruptive innovation.”²⁶⁹

In rapid succession over the last fifty years, the world had developed novel knowledge and tools in everything from chemistry, physics, and biology to information. The twentieth century was a century of new technologies: radar, medicine, explosives, laser, radar, television, mirco processing, cloning, and genetic engineering.²⁷⁰ As a result of each innovation, economic and social contexts for companies have been perpetually shifting, though inherent with the messiness of the badlands is an inability to pinpoint clear cause and effect patterns. The end result though has truly been a new world, one our grandparents would never have anticipated or recognized. What is most important to note for individuals and institutions during this disruptive era is that decisions made in the thick of it are giving shape to the age emerging.

According to O’Hara-Devereaux, these disruptive cycles are characterized by messiness, rupture, and monumental changes to institutions. These cycles and the waves they set in motion, in turn shift business and organizational life to the core. No doubt, this

²⁶⁹ Mary O’Hara-Devereaux, *Navigating the Badlands: Thriving in the Decade of Radical Transformation*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 6.

²⁷⁰ O’Hara-Devereaux, 43.

is as true for the religious institutions as it is for business and economics. Certainly we could consider the age of exactitude in time measurement to have been at the time a cycle of disruptive innovation,²⁷¹ just as the printing press was.²⁷² The disorder eventually settled into a new order each time, but it took hundreds of years to do so. However, as disruptive as those cycles were, never before have we seen such rapid fire changes to the ways in which we know our bodies, our neighbors, our climate, our universe, and our capacity for virtual engagement.

We are now sixty-one years into this vastly disruptive cycle of technological innovation. Consider for a moment that the Academy of Homiletics has been around for 50 of those years. All teachers of preaching in the late modern era have known as a guild is this current cycle of disruptive technological innovation. Playing with O'Hara-Devereaux's badlands metaphor, all we have known as a backdrop for our work are the storms of this landscape that creep up without warning: increased terrorism, global competition, ethnic cultural divides, volatile stock markets, increasing wealth gaps, falling social institutions, and new technologies. Even if it hardly infiltrates our theoretical work, these storms daily infiltrate our personal lives, the lives of our students, those in our pews and congregations. They unpredictably infiltrate how we know and communicate.

According to O'Hara-Devereaux, systems and institutions can react in two ways; either by hunkering down or cultivating adaptive strategies. Those who hunker down will likely find that their identity as institutions are forced to break apart, leading either to re-emergence or dissolution. Those who will not make it to the foothills of 2025 are those who avoid risk, stifle diversity, are slow to make decisions, and are addicted to stability, among others. Those who make it to the foothills will engage cultures, make decisions quickly out of integrity, seek collisions rather than avoid them, and be fast learners.

A comfort for the attentive historian, and something O'Hara-Devereaux reminds us of, is the fact that these disruptive cycles are many, and that the world has not ended as

²⁷¹ White, 67. Citing historian of technology Jean Gimpel, White notes that while the West quickly embraced the mechanization of time, the East was more hesitant. It was not until the twentieth century that a mechanical clock was allowed to be installed in a Greek Orthodox Church.

²⁷² White, 89ff. White sketches out in particular the impact of print culture on the mechanization of the liturgy in a Taylorist mode, as play in worship order gives way to the perfection of worship order and the production of efficient worshipers.

a result of them. But institutions and worldviews have been profoundly impacted in each stormy cycle.

Overall, this portrait of how to navigate the badlands lends itself nicely to a process understanding of reality. In order to do more than survive one must learn to seek coherence between who they understand themselves to be and the world as it emerges. It requires a deep knowledge of self, an understanding of a theo-ethic that guides rapid decisions, and a posture of expectancy and openness to what comes our way, rather than hunkering down in stasis.

Defending the value of preaching under the umbrella of the static pulpit and pew paradigm is akin to hunkering down in the badlands of the late twentieth and early twenty first century rather than cultivating adaptive tactics. Our ministry to the Living Word of Jesus Christ is more likely to survive if it embraces diversity rather than stifles it.²⁷³ This does not mean, however, that we capitulate to a particular hegemonic adaptation of a technological mode of preaching. Novel modes of preaching and becoming the Body of Christ in the world emerge out of openness to the diversification of practice via multiple platforms for ministry. The decisions we make now will and are giving shape to the role of the church in the emerging age.

Foundations for Technological Conversation: Kranzberg's Laws

As we have seen, there is a tendency to approach technological change and technoculture from one of two poles in a binary scheme. One side of the pole is technological determinism, or technophobia. This is often the posture of Carr as well as others who see an unavoidable future wherein our machines will overpower humanity, dehumanize us, and program us in machinelike fashion and/erase our species from the

²⁷³ I make this assumption on notions of process theology that speak of a “creative advance” wherein as new elements emerge, the old elements are not lost. It is natural for this advance to take place and unnatural for it to not take place. Thus, in preaching and ecclesiology we have seen an organic emergence of the novel without erasure of the orthodox. Growing in Size and Stature, we harmonize the diversities and achieve the aim of beauty/harmony that is crucial to process thought. See John B. Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead, Second Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 122ff. This also relates to what Ong observes in *Orality and Literacy*, that while new periods emerge they do not wholesale wipe out the former. Process thought would add, and nor should the new replace the old.

planet.²⁷⁴ On the other side is technological embrace, or technophilia. This is the worship of technological development as if it is a tool for humanity to become perfect humanity.²⁷⁵ At its extremes, this approach assumes that we will eventually conquer death and the limits of our biological bodies with our brilliant technologies. Neither of these poles is a generative starting place for us as we begin to think about how preaching and technoculture interact with one another.

A third approach to technology is to recognize its inherent contextuality and historicity. This has been the cry of Dr. Melvin Kranzberg throughout his four decades of research and teaching.²⁷⁶ Kranzberg, a pioneer of the historical study of technology as well as the study of history through technological change, was the Callaway Professor of the History of Technology at the Georgia Institute of Technology. He was also one of the founders of the Society for the History of Technology and an editor of the journal *Technology and Culture*. In his 1985 presidential address to the Society he helped to establish, Kranzberg summarized three decades of work with six laws framing the discipline of the history of technology.

²⁷⁴ This pessimistic attitude around technology can be traced to the work of theologian Jacques Ellul. According to Ellul, the evolution of modern technology only creates the illusion of progression toward more human freedom. See *The Technological Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1964), *The Technological System* (New York: Continuum, 1980), and *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990). Susan White summarized this stance as one claiming that in actuality, technology is bound to control and limit human freedom as it grows beyond our control of it and imposes its own inorganic criteria onto organic life, thus dehumanizing and enslaving all it encounters (White, 23). Melvin Kranzberg calls Ellul's understanding of technology "technological omnipotence" as well as determinism. Thus, according to Ellul, the Christian's only hope is to reject the world technology has made entirely (White, 26).

²⁷⁵ Posthumanism is often used in a broad manner and conflated with the telos of transhumanism. The key distinction between the two for the purposes of this project is that transhumanists are technophiles who tend to interpret cultural posthumanism by projecting a time in the future when, thanks to our advances in science and technology, we will as humans be able to become posthuman, that is able to transcend the limits of our biological bodies and be "reformulated" as humans, perhaps even becoming "ultra-humans." For more on this nuance see Francesca Ferrando, "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialsims: Differences and Relations in *Existenz* 8/2 (2013), 26-32.

²⁷⁶ Christian ethicist Ian Barbour also takes the contextual approach to his work on the relationship between technology and religion, especially in his 1990 Gifford Lectures. Barbour admits that technology is a powerful force. It is a force for good *and* bad. It can liberate and threaten human life. It has evolved to address issues of global hunger and poverty and it has evolved as an agent of global climate change and nuclear war. Humans have power to do good and bad in this world with emerging technologies. It is a risky endeavor, for we are all part of one fabric, and face consequences that may have ripple effects beyond our immediate comprehension. Like Kranzberg, Barbour reaches the conclusion that we have the responsibility to identify and reflect over and over again what is being imposed by technology and how we can modify it for the well-being of people and planet through political processes.

This chapter began with Kranzberg's First Law: technology is not good, bad or neutral. Grasping this law is beneficial to this study for it reminds us that technology has a historical existence. What seems good in the moment may end up having bad consequences on the ecology of our world. What seems bad may offer some good. All of this may depend simply on the point of view of the one making an assessment. Thus our tools are not to be shunned wholesale nor embraced. Nor ignored. At the same time, there is no such thing as a neutral or non-impact of our technological advancements. Thus it is the work of historians to pay attention to these trajectories and to educate those who make policy. This will link to the fourth law.

The second law sounds familiar: "invention is the mother of necessity."²⁷⁷ That is to say that innovation breeds innovation. Making one part of the car more efficient leads to innovation in other parts of the system. Anytime the balance is upset it needs to be restored with human effort. One could also apply this law to the impulse of so many westerners to have the latest phone, even if the one they currently use works just fine. Suddenly, the technologies one smart phone provided no longer satisfy the consumer. A need is created for the next best thing. Kranzberg did not live to see the rapid-fire embodiment of this law in our technoculture of the last decade especially in smart phone culture.

Now the third law: "technology comes in packages big and small."²⁷⁸ Another word for packages may be "systems."²⁷⁹ That is, this innovation takes place in all realms of life, from the simple to complex, industrial and global to organic and local. As a result, Kranzberg emphasizes that no technological development can be studied in isolation. The history of technology is inherently interdependent and relational. This is of course akin to the core beliefs of process thought. Cause and effect may not be clearly drawn, but influence and impact always reach far beyond and isolated system or machine.

We have already alluded to Kranzberg's fourth law, which is "although technology might be a prime element in many public issues, nontechnical factors take

²⁷⁷ Kranzberg, 548.

²⁷⁸ Kranzberg, 549.

²⁷⁹ See Thomas P. Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930, Reprint Edition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), ix.

precedence in technology-policy decisions.”²⁸⁰ Technological advancement and efficiency does not trump the wellbeing of society. Technology should not be pursued for its own sake without attention to human need.²⁸¹ What is said about the political and social I will say of the theological. Tools that may make preaching more efficient at delivering messages across a greater expanse do not take precedence over the way these tools shape the church.²⁸² As a theo-rhetorical practice, theology as pertains to ecclesiology takes precedence over the numbers-based quantification of efficiency of delivery and reach.

It is no surprise that Kranzberg’s fifth law elevates his life’s work: while all of history is “relevant,” according to Kranzberg, “the history of technology is the most relevant.”²⁸³ We need not say much more about this law here only that it reminds scholars of preaching of the importance of looking at how our tools of communication have impacted more than the means of delivering the gospel message. These tools impact how we know, how we think, how we speak and respond to the preached word.

Technology has always, according to Kranzberg, been a human activity, fundamentally so, not merely an accessory to our development. This is Kranzberg’s sixth and final law. Anthropologists and archeologists insist that “the physical development of our species is apparently inextricably bound up with cultural developments” with tool making being as fundamental as language development and abstract thinking.²⁸⁴ Our becoming is intimately tied to how and why our tools become. But, the becoming and emerging capacities of technology do not determine human actions.²⁸⁵ Humans still have the capacity to decide and discern how they engage with their technologies. They are able to see in part how long term effects harm or help social and political landscapes and then to right wrongs or encourage the good.

Critics in the line of technological skepticism may claim that Kranzberg could not have anticipated in 1985, when he delivered this address, the advances in robotics and

²⁸⁰ Kranzberg, 550.

²⁸¹ Again, this was the fear of Ellul and Langdon Winner: that technology was being pursued for its own sake without regard for human need.

²⁸² I will make this argument about satellite preaching in particular in the fifth chapter of this project.

²⁸³ Kranzberg, 553.

²⁸⁴ Kranzberg, 557.

²⁸⁵ Kranzberg, 559.

Artificial Intelligence that we have seen. Could his claim, “Behind every machine, I see a face—indeed, many faces: the engineer, the worker the businessman or businesswoman” stand today?²⁸⁶ I think so. As advanced as we are, one look at even the most prestigious robotics competitions reveals the community of human intellect and ingenuity that is behind the movements of one robot. One also sees how the human is still needed to step in when a part fails, when the robot gets off course, when communication between the human mind and machine is broken. We are still years away from independent, self-healing robotic machines. The “software” (humans) still runs the “hardware” (machines).²⁸⁷ The proclamation of such an independent future for machines sounds ultimately like the desires of binary thinking in technological dress, a fate cast by powerful humans afraid of losing their hold on power. The binary skews our vision and our navigation with novelty again.

Historians of technology such as Kranzberg strive to reveal how “utopian hopes” for technological innovation compare to “the spotted actuality.”²⁸⁸ It is their duty to compare short-term aims with long-term results. These historians challenge notions of technological omnipotence as well as notions of apathy regarding the role of technology in our world and becoming.

At this point, Kranzberg offers to homiletics an open door to begin to account for the ways in which our history and practice interacted with technology in the past. It is beyond the scope of this project to write this worthy analysis.²⁸⁹ But at the very least we can agree that technoculture is not something that preaching has ever been able to avoid. Technology has a history and so preaching has a historical bond to technological innovation, both in the technoculture of preachers and congregations over time and in the means by which preaching is logistically practiced. This bond has resulted in varying dynamics that have shaped the practice of preaching throughout our history.

²⁸⁶ Kranzberg, 558.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Kranzberg, 548.

²⁸⁹ Peter Horsfield has offered interesting accounts of the ways in which media and Christianity of interacted through two millennia. See *Religious Television: The American Experience (Communication and Human Values)* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 1984), with Mary E. Hess *Belief in Media: Cultural Perspectives on Media and Christianity* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), and his most recent work, *From Jesus to the Internet*.

Naming Some Key Cultural Shifts in Technoculture

At this point we will spend some time naming the emerging themes of our present technoculture. These themes emerge from and with the tools of communication that are staples in our technoculture: smart phones, tablets, smart watches, and the like. The media—social in nature hence the term ‘social media’—we engage with these devices emerge from and with our understandings of presence and communication: Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, blogger and other sites, and whatever next months’ new social media platform will be.

At the moment of writing this dissertation, media scholars describe our context as “Web 3.0.”²⁹⁰ This version of the web is engaged from portable devices more than any other device, such as smartphones and tablets. Content—applications downloaded as social media—is personalized to the user as are search functions. Pew Research indicates that nearly two thirds of Americans now are smartphone²⁹¹ users and that these people are more likely than ever to use that smartphone as a place to enter the online world.²⁹² Most Americans carry in their pockets a portal into an ever-growing array of social media platforms. And they use them. Constantly.

The distinction between Web 2.0 and 3.0 is yet to be strongly identified. Both use social media for interaction and engagement that is user-generated. That is, the combination of applications for social engagement vary from user to user and are not one-size fits all. At the same time, a collaborative effort, known as the “Semantic Web,” is underway to standardize common data formats across the internet and to “create

²⁹⁰ Meredith Gould, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways, Second Edition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 4. See also Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner. *Networked Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 46ff.

²⁹¹ There is a slight distinction between smartphone and cell phone and the lines grow fuzzier every year. Both are mobile devices, handheld, able to be used for calls, short message service (SMS), and multimedia message (MMS). These days most cell phones also have the capacity to go online. A smartphone is the merger of the cell phone with the PDA, or personal digital assistant. The PDA tended to be require a stylus or pen for input, but did not have phone capacity. The smartphone does what the cell can do while also having the capacity to store music, images, and programs. This Pew Research study from 2015 specifically asks about smartphone usage. Cell phone usage in America by August of 2015 was at 92%, and certainly a large number of those users went online with their cell phones as well. See Lee Rainie and Kathryn Zickuhr, “Chapter 1: Always on Connectivity,” *Pew Research Center Report* (August 26, 2015) <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/26/chapter-1-always-on-connectivity/> accessed on August 2, 2016.

²⁹² Aaron Smith, “U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015,” *Pew Research Center Report* (April 1, 2015) <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/01/us-smartphone-use-in-2015/> accessed August 3, 2016.

simpler and more consistent user interfaces and web experiences”²⁹³ across our many devices. The greatest change is from the time of Web 1.0, only a decade ago, where online digital media were largely static and reader-only, generated by fewer people. Looking over two decades of the Web, we see that as it develops it becomes more user-particular, participatory, and collaborative in nature. This makes these new media distinct from television and radio, which delivered largely read or listen only content from a few sources and little chance for participation. As we will discuss later, this has led to shifts in technoculture from consumer to collaborator.

For good *and* for ill, our newest media has had a great impact in how we organize and communicate with one another globally in this world. For good, it has been a powerful tool in the ongoing work of dismantling of white supremacy in the United States. It has held up a mirror to the unjust hate-full treatment of black men and women that the traditional media—newspapers and newscasts on television and radio that once had the power to clean up content—seemed to mostly ignore. In the age of Snapchat and Facebook live feeds, a black woman can livecast to millions of people—anyone with a phone in their hands—the aftermath of police brutality, her boyfriend shot at a traffic stop by a police officer, in real time but of course then re-broadcast and shared throughout the web. In this sense, social media have been a force of conscientization²⁹⁴ in and beyond the United States. We have yet to see the fruit of this reality.

For ill, these devices have been used by terrorists to organize violence in Paris and Brussels. Tools have been created to make connections via phone without a trace. Gone are the days of being able to bug and trace a phone call. Applications lock phones and erase data so that only a select few can be in the communication loop. ISIS has also used social media to create a terrorist movement that does not rely on on-site training or static, stationary cells of organization. Anyone willing to participate in the movement can

²⁹³ Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner. *Networked Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 47.

²⁹⁴ Or “consciousness-raising,” an indefinite process of having an active posture in the unfolding of history, according to Juan Luis Segundo in his work *Liberation of Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 211. This posture has been key to the Black Live Matter Movement, captured in the hash tag #staywoke. A search on Twitter or Instagram of this hash tap reveals a slew of reports all over the country of ongoing violence against black people. These sort of abuses of power against black people that are caught on video are shared widely in order to keep the consciousness of black and white people raised and to resist apathy to the ongoing trauma of racism in this country.

search online for content and motivation for their brutality. Key leaders are nearly impossible to find and eliminate because the movement reflects the radical horizontal posture and spread of power that is born of Web 3.0. In other words, it has become all the more easy to organize without organizations, especially traditional top-down organizations and institutions.²⁹⁵

Rather than focusing on each particular media, media that are fluid and here one day and gone the next, we must look one level above the programs and platforms to describe the ways in which they shape our technoculture: *how we communicate and relate to each other*.²⁹⁶ Other books and articles offer opinions on how to use tools of social media to grow the church and extend ministry, but these only scratch the surface of technoculture's deeper impact on the ways in which we know and relate to one another.²⁹⁷ Some have cast technoculture's impact on Christians in a sort of spiritual frame, wherein the gods of technology ("iGods" which can be a technological artifact, "a technologist," or someone tempted by the promises of "the gadget") compete with the desires of the true God.²⁹⁸ Scholars seeking to bring theology into the social media conversation, such as those selected to research media on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, have found the approach of focusing on how we communicate and relate in our present technoculture to be more fruitful. "Conversing with digital culture in such terms," according to Daniella Zsupan-Jerome who reports on the Roman Catholic Church's theological engagement with social media since Vatican II, "allows for the recognition of larger trends and broader patterns, such as the movement toward an increasingly

²⁹⁵ See Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008).

²⁹⁶ See S. Craig Watkins, *The Young and the Digital: What the Migration to Social Network Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for Our Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), for a study drawn from surveys and interviews with young people and parents focusing in on the shifts in behavior, attitude, and relationality observed in the emerging generation (now known as Millennials) who are native to this present technoculture.

²⁹⁷ Along with Gould and Zsupan-Jerome, see for example Keith Anderson, *Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015); Elizabeth Drescher and Keith Anderson, *Click to Save: The Digital Ministry Bible* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012); and Karen L. Wiseman, *I Refuse to Preach a Boring Sermon! Engaging the 21st Century Listener* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2013). Seeking to bring discernment to Christian engagement with technology on the more phobic side of the spectrum is John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011).

²⁹⁸ Craig Detweiler, *iGods: How Technology Shapes our Spiritual and Social Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013), 2.

participatory communications culture, the desire toward an increasingly visual self-preservation, the fragmentation and integration of online and offline identities and presences.”²⁹⁹ These themes will guide the following.

Our tools have shifted the way we view authority, power, relationship, and conversation and so must offer another vista into ecclesiology in the 21st century. All too often, we never get beyond artifacts in our discussion of preaching and technology. The development and engagement with emerging tools and applications has led to four key shifts in technoculture: it has challenged traditional notions of real presence, led to a shift from consumers of information to being collaborators and curators of information, which in turn has led to democratization of information, and finally, has led to greater value being placed on communication that is timely rather than profound. These shifts have also challenged notions of what truth is in the 21st century, posing a challenge to ministers who desire to bring more truth into the world through witnessing to the Living Word.

1. Changing Understanding of Relational Presence: X-Reality

What if, instead of seeing the real vs. virtual divide in terms of embodied vs. disembodied we think about the new permutations of digital and virtual technology informing our lives as particular ways we are embodied?³⁰⁰

Ten years ago, in the age of Web 1.0 and dawn of Web 2.0 the debate about technology tended to hover around the value of real presence verses virtual presence. Two decades ago, going online was an intentional event. One had to dial up on a modem and wait for a connection. Typically, this person had to sit at their desktop computer to go online and enter the virtual community. While this still is the case for some avenues of the Internet, especially gaming, most of our online presence in the age of smart phones and tablets is intricately woven into our moments of “conventional” reality.

²⁹⁹ Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, *Connected Toward Communion: The Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2014), 85.

³⁰⁰ Kathryn Reklis, “X-Reality and the Incarnation,” New Media Project at Christian Theological Seminary, (May 10, 2012). <http://cpx.cts.edu/newmedia/findings/essays/x-reality-and-the-incarnation> (accessed December 1, 2016).

The traditional debate, then, fits into classical binary thinking, which we already have challenged as being too simple and static to hold God in a process point of view. Approaching technoculture from the binary, Christians may argue that virtual presence is not real presence, rather it is akin to the heresy of Docetism in the Body of Christ. Christians online are only apparitions of real Christians, and so any gathering of this virtual body in a virtual space only seems to be churchly activity. Embodiment implies Incarnation while digital or virtual implies disembodiment. As a result, embodiment implies good behavior and action while disembodiment implies bad. However, following this line of argumentation quickly falls apart when we consider the complex reality of embodiment. Are there not plenty of embodied actions and behaviors that run against the theo-ethic embodied by the incarnation? Rape, violence, and lying are all embodied acts that our theo-ethical norm would deem bad. Embodiment is not *sine qua non* theologically aligned with the Incarnation, a celebration of the full humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. Thus, there must be ways for humans to engage in virtual reality, if we must call it that in binary terms, which model the theo-ethic of Incarnation.

But the experience of Web 3.0 resists binary thinking. Try to keep track of how many times you experience the presence of people through your phone, watch, or computer throughout your day. With every buzz and chime from your phone you get notifications from social media. With the movement of a finger or two we respond and react to the presence of a friend on the other end of our technological artifacts. Then we shift our focus back into whatever else we were doing before, seamlessly. We do not have to sit and wait to go online then sit for a prolonged event to log off. There is no solid line between virtual worlds and real worlds anymore.

Kathryn Reklis and other scholars of our newest media “describe this disappearing gap as X-reality—reality that moves fluidly across the virtual to real spectrum and wherein virtual or digital space is just a differently mediated way of being real.”³⁰¹ That is, our whole reality is a blend of face-to-face and screen-to-screen engagement. The weave of both is really real to us, an embodied reality that contributes to our becoming. This notion of no longer experiencing a solid line between virtual and

³⁰¹ Reklis. See also Beth Coleman, *Hello Avatar: Rise of the Networked Generation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

conventional reality mirrors the blurring inherent with process panentheism. God is both transcendent and immanent, the “Supremely Related One.”³⁰²

Process theologian and computer consultant Jennifer Cobb, writing in 1998, makes a link between a process understanding of God as the Supremely Related One and cyberspace. In *CyberGrace: The Search for God in the Digital World*, Cobb deconstructs the mind/body binary schema in order to construct a view of virtual reality that is an evolving place of process and connection, years before the social media of Web 2.0 and 3.0.³⁰³ This space, according to Cobb, transcends both the mind/body as well as divisions between the world of the spirit and the world of the machine. She celebrates cyberspace as a place where the Divine may be encountered and spirituality deepened in the emergence of complexity there. We may really encounter someone or something in this graced space, but how do we evaluate the quality of that meeting?

In Web 3.0 technoculture, face-to-face encounters are not the only real encounters that we have. Thus, according to Reklis, “The work of evaluating whether or not a human connection is real or whether a human interaction is good requires more than assessing if it is virtually mediated or not.”³⁰⁴ In a world where friends “hangout” via Google video service or have whole friend networks based on the internal communications in *World of Warcraft*, the potentials for deep and intimate connection through these platforms are displayed. “If it is the human spirit animating the connections we experience [online],” according to Zsupan-Jerome, “then these connections can and do convey our presence and invite us into a relational, communal experience online.”³⁰⁵

The dichotomy of virtual vs. real is disrupted in an emerging blended technoculture. But not *all* of us experience this blended way of being in the world. Thanks to the developments of technology in the biomedical field, people are living longer than ever before. As a result, our churches are experiences unprecedented multi-generational presence. Preachers will need to walk the fine line between engaging in the technoculture in ways that connect the congregation to one another and leaning so far into the technologies at hand for some generations that our oldest generations feel left behind.

³⁰² Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 33.

³⁰³ Jennifer J. Cobb, *CyberGrace: The Search for God in the Digital World* (New York: Crown, 1998).

³⁰⁴ Reklis.

³⁰⁵ Zsupan-Jerome, 102.

Preachers also must be wary of the youngest generations. Some studies have shown that children in this age feel unwanted, unseen, and unloved when adults take out a device in their presence.³⁰⁶ At the same time, how often have parents handed over a device to children during the sermon in the hopes that doing so would allow for the parent to hear the message without being distracted by a distracted child? It is a complex issue, no doubt. Thus the need for further discernment on the part of the preacher, as will be discussed in chapter five.

Many of us are almost always “online” even in person. For better or worse, this is the nature of an emerging X-reality. These connections feel like real connections to people for many.³⁰⁷ They are not parsed out as being virtual and therefore less than real. Binary thinking leads to either/or thinking, which leads to the set up for pastors: either we do this aspect of ministry online or in person. The concept of X-reality helps the pastor to realize that we are not making a choice between being conventional pastors in a church with a pulpit and pews and hospital visits and home visits or doing these things online. Rather, this is a call to embrace means of extension and intentionality via social media, but not exclusively through social media.³⁰⁸

2. A Shift from Consumer to Curator and Collaborator

Mass media—newspaper, radio, and television—generally dominated technoculture of the twentieth century. The masses consumed the media and information created, produced, and delivered by a somewhat select few. This trend maintained prominence through the 1980s and 90s. Academics like Neil Postman lamented the impact of mass media, television in particular, for its corrosive effects on the brain and

³⁰⁶ See Catherine Steiner-Adair and Teresa Barker. *The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013).

³⁰⁷ One may argue whether or not “feeling like” we are present with someone through social media is “really like” physically being present. This project has not set out to validate the quality of experience in virtual worlds. Rather, from a pragmatic space, it takes as a given the present moment in which so much of our days involves social media and interaction through our technologies. As will be clear for the remainder of the dissertation, I will not call on the church to disengage from social media and technology. Nor I will claim that every single church needs to get with the times and participate in X-reality to be relevant to church. I seek middle ground and to offer a theo-ethic for those who wish to be ministers to and within the technoculture of Web 3.0 and beyond.

³⁰⁸ Gould, ix.

society in general.³⁰⁹ Recreational activities for many in the United States involved watching sitcoms on the night they aired (nothing to record here unless you had the VCR for it), nightly news, going to the movies, and reading the morning paper. Rather than resisting the shift in technoculture, homileticians like Eugene Lowry created a method of structuring sermons out of it in his classic *The Homiletical Plot*. In this sermon method, preachers are encouraged to follow the plot of the sitcom in order to engage the listener who has accommodated to this media. Willow Creek and other mega-churches of the 1980s and 90s flourished in this technoculture of mass media entertainment and show business. Christians and seekers accustomed to consuming the nightly news from the authority on the television screen found little dissonance with consuming the gospel from the projection screen.

Participation was not easy to cultivate in this era of technoculture. Though underground sources of information of course existed in local pockets. In order to create and collaborate with the mass media, you could become a journalist or a dedicated author of letters to the editor. To create media, you made short films with a clunky video camera and shared the VHS with a fairly limited group of contacts. There was a glass ceiling for the average citizen wishing to create media. But by the 2000s, scholars noticed a generational shift from consumerist postures to participatory postures with media.³¹⁰ After years of American free time being filled with the consumption of television, this generation is watching less television than their parents.³¹¹ When they watch television, they tend to multitask the experience, tweeting and chatting through the experience rather than silently digesting the media being offered to them. These are not all simply distracted and shallow youth of the Internet culture, as Carr would cast them to be. These are participants in and with technoculture who desire more than passive consumption of media.

³⁰⁹ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (London: Penguin Books, 1986).

³¹⁰ See for example Henry Jenkins, et al, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). Also John S. McClure, *Mashup Religion: Pop Music and Theological Invention* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011).

³¹¹ Clay Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus: How Technology Makes Consumers into Collaborators*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2010), 11.

When the traditional schema corresponds to mass media, all authority and power is given unchallenged to the ones who get to produce information for our consumption. For preachers and pastors, these consumers of technoculture—most notably boomers—transitioned gaze from TV screen to overhead screen or pulpit without much dissonance. Today, we worry about the presence of teens and young adults looking down at their phones as we speak from the pulpit. As binary thinkers, we may assume that they are not properly consuming our message, hence the duress. They do not have the attention spans to sit back and listen and so, we assume, they learn nothing. But if we shift into the posture of the current technoculture and reexamine authority and power and community from X-reality in Web 3.0, we see something else, something more interactive and relational perhaps taking place.

Given the fact that studies maintain that most sermon listeners engage in sporadic listening, it could be that the cell phone is helping, rather than hindering engagement with the sermon.³¹² If X-reality were embraced as a way of participating in your sermon, it might be that girl in the pew could move beyond pure consumption of your sermon. Perhaps she will tweet a portion of your sermon live through the World Wide Web. Perhaps, she will actually listen intently for what she thinks are the golden moments of your sermon in 140 characters or less. Perhaps she will intentionally amplify your message and the gospel of Jesus Christ beyond the limits of the four walls of your sanctuary. Perhaps this is a more helpful way for her to digest the message and for the message to become Incarnate in the world—through active listening and collaboration.

This impulse within the listener to co-create the sermon is not necessarily novel to this historical moment. Homileticians Marianne Gaarden and Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen utilized empirical studies to explore how churchgoers in Scandinavia exercise agency within the shared environment of the sanctuary and “create new meaning and understanding.”³¹³ Gaarden and Lorensen interviewed churchgoers about what they did when they listened to sermons. Their findings support the notion that “preaching involves

³¹² See the summary of the "Listening to Listeners to Sermons" empirical study of sermon listeners in John S. McClure, "The Practice of Sermon Listening," *Congregations*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2006), pp. 6-9.

³¹³ Marianne Gaarden and Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, "Listeners as Authors in Preaching: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives" in *Homiletic* vol. 38, no. 1 (2013), 28.

a reciprocal relation” between the preacher and the congregation.³¹⁴ Their conclusion is counter to the assumption about agency for the pew under the traditional binary when they claim that the “churchgoers are to be understood as the primary authors of preaching and that preachers have the role of co-author.”³¹⁵ However, the meaning authored in diversity by the people in the pews tends to remain within the mind and heart of each individual, while the meaning made by the preacher with the text is publicly broadcast within the traditional pulpit-pew binary. Novel platforms of communication could allow the primary authors of preaching to share and spread their contributions to the greater church and to the larger public.

Sharing, curating, and collaborating intentionally with certain groups of people is what anchors community in our technoculture, according to new media scholar Clay Shirky.³¹⁶ Consuming tweets and status updates as a lurker does not create community. The more a person engages with social media, the more she feels a real part of the conversation of the community. This is the equivalent of face time in X-reality. To be seen is to be shared. To be heard is to be followed, liked, re-tweeted, and tagged. This is a vital part of our ministry of presence in the current technoculture, just as vital as our presence at coffee hour and fellowship meals. “In a participatory culture,” American media scholar Henry Jenkins claims, “members also believe that their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another.”³¹⁷ To comment on a post, to answer a question on the sermon in a Tweet is telling a congregant they are of value to the church, the body of Christ.

Authorities are created in social media by the extent to which participants in technoculture gather around them. Authorities can also come and go while the message remains and is sustained according to how many “converged around the information.”³¹⁸ Messages themselves can become an authority in this way, without the force of the one who started it. As soon as a tweet is shared, note how quickly people like and/or re-tweet their message. This is how an outsider can sense whose voices rise above the cacophony

³¹⁴ Ibid., 30.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 31.

³¹⁶ Shirky, *Cognitive*, 25.

³¹⁷ Jenkins, xi.

³¹⁸ Zsupan-Jerome, 7.

to have greater impact on our thinking and seeing of the world. Although power is potentially democratized in this technoculture, there are still people with more power and amplification of voice on the web than others.³¹⁹ But this power of presence is indeed a result of the collaboration and curation of others who choose to follow particular people and agencies, as well as algorithms in social media that pick up on “trending” persons and ideas. It becomes a chicken/egg origin story. Once again, traditional one-way conceptions of power and authority do not fit with culture as we find it today.

New media scholars agree that the technoculture of social media is defined by participation, curation, collaboration, and sharing. Consumerism is not a defining activity of the new social media. Listeners today, the ones who are born into our churches and the ones who we fear losing, seek collaboration. They live tweet the messages they hear. They will grab and remix the messages they hear without asking permission. A common hash tag can be the means for a common community to develop and continue to converse around the preaching of the pastor, one that includes members of the local and church and beyond.

This shift to collaboration and interaction is perhaps is a shift we may not only celebrate as a Church, but tease out as well. As we continue to teach preachers to effectively communicate gospel in this time and place, we could include ways of promoting collaboration through social media in the sermon process. Sermons have traditionally been a monological form of communication. Whether deductive or inductive in its style, the sermon may be conversational but is rarely an actual conversation. How can our preaching connect with a culture that values more than ever participation and collaboration without undermining the role of the preacher as primary local theologian?

Communicative practices of this technoculture push back against top down, monological models of communication; practices which were present in preaching for many years. Much to the delight of Clyde Reid were he alive today, tools now readily

³¹⁹ Celebrity is a powerful force in social media. Algorithms exist to promote the “most popular and most connected person or idea” (van Dijck, 157). The momentum in the network enables those who are in power to accumulate more power and reach in a quantitative measure. So while you may say the same thing on Twitter that Nadia Boelz-Weber just said, your post may get a like from your dad and hers may receive hundreds. Who is more of an authority then in this situation? For more on the emergence of “celebrity” or “star” as a source of authority in preaching and beyond, see Ted Smith, *The New Measures*, especially 193ff.

exist to enable true conversation and disrupt the monological illusion. These cultural communicative trends resist the same banking models that frustrated Paulo Friere and bell hooks in their landmark books in the field of pedagogy.³²⁰ For better or worse (meaning no matter how well, under, or mis-informed they may be), citizens of this culture want to participate in communication and the dissemination of information. Whether they do with their own voice or by serving as puppets for other dominating voices in the landscape is another matter. But there is a longing to participate that rises to the surface.

3. Democratization of News and Information

In the 1950s and 60s, Americans pretty much got their news from the nightly report (Walter Cronkite and the CBS Evening News) along with morning information in the local newspaper. Throughout the country, there was little nuance to the information being shared. Citizens consumed the information then went about their day. Only those aspiring to be journalists created the news. In the 1960s, in the age of Civil Rights and Vietnam, marginalized groups attempted to disseminate information that challenged the mass media, but on the whole one could know as much as the mass media put out for consumption.

As we saw in the previous point about our shift from consumer of media to collaborator and curator of media, a key change in this technoculture from the age of television and radio is the democratization of power regarding who gets to have a voice in the public space. Those few voices that once dominated the public space “now finds (or loses) itself in a cacophony of comments, opinion, perspectives” of the many voices sharing, spreading, and creating news.³²¹ Nearly anyone with a phone or PC or access to a public library can start their own blog, broadcast their voice, post their music or art, follow the work of others they respect, and connect. We can Yelp, tweet, and give a status report on whatever happens in our world from our point of view. And we can follow others all over the globe by connecting via social media.

³²⁰ See Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed 30th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Continuum, 2000) and bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge Press, 1994).

³²¹ Zsupan-Jerome, 7.

As we discussed in the beginning of this section, this has been the power of Black Lives Matter as it disrupts the apathy toward systemic racism and violence perpetuated by mass media. Mass media has truly given way to social media, which ironically is more of a media for the masses than mass media ever could be. Individuals are welcome to produce, curate, collaborate, as well as consume information in a global web of hash tags and links that lacks traditional geographic and cultural boundaries.

Top-down, single source media maintained high barriers regarding what news and information is real and relevant to society. The monopoly on information perpetuated one-way lines of power that led to the media having power over the consumers of it. Low barriers for the spread and creation of news and information mark participatory technoculture. Traditional media such as newspapers and newscasts struggle to stay relevant by going online, creating Twitter accounts, and striving for the timeliness in the dissemination of news that is, as we will discuss next, crucial to this technoculture.

Low barriers are not always liberating. When it comes to discerning what is true or factual in Web 3.0. In the wake of the election of President-Elect Donald J. Trump, traditional media outlets such as the *New York Times* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*³²² lamented the power and presence of so-called “fake-news” websites that litter Web 3.0. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg quickly responded to claims that his platform affected the election as a “crazy idea.”³²³

Contrary to what Zuckerberg claims, fake-news websites thrive in the democratic, open-source climate of Web 3.0. Using ad platforms on social media, these sites—such as the fake Denver Guardian—catch the eye of the onlooker, and usually generate some sort of emotional impulse that will lead to rushed peer-to-peer sharing on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. One such story that spread to millions in September of 2016 through Facebook was an article by the non-existent Denver Guardian claiming that Pope

³²² See Lee Skallerup Bessette. “Stop the Spread of Fake News,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 15, 2016) http://www.chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/stop-the-spread-of-fake-news/63183?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en&elqTrackId=39457388b28d4b16b7f5b67da18648f1&elq=fd69294f62f0471fac847d5da6434546&elqaid=11553&elqat=1&elqCampaignId=4552 (accessed December 2, 2016).

³²³ Kia Kokalitcheva. “Mark Zuckerberg Says Fake News on Facebook Affecting The Election Is a ‘Crazy Idea,’ Fortune-500, Fortune.com, November 11, 2016. <http://fortune.com/2016/11/11/facebook-election-fake-news-mark-zuckerberg/> (accessed December 2, 2016).

Francis had endorsed Donald J. Trump.³²⁴ Catchy headlines quickly go viral through a network of likeminded communities.³²⁵ Authority being established via trusted connections rather than traditional media outlets with fact checkers, the news is trusted and amplified at a rapid rate. Such fake-news gets spread everyday and there is little mass-media can do to combat it.

According to Max Read, this technoculture was fertile ground for President-Elect Trump.³²⁶ Trump has been active in Twitter for years but it was not until this year that his impulsive, inaccurate statements and claims were embraced by millions as truth. Read argues that Trump became his own fake-news website. The Clinton campaign, and his competition for the Republican Party nomination before her, could do little to put out the wildfires he set in the wee hours of the night in 140 characters or less. Read laments, “On Twitter, what’s the difference between *The New York Times* and Donald Trump?”³²⁷ What we see now is how the technoculture in general has shifted in such a way that fact checking is brushed aside as a waste of time, mass media sources are bias toward the candidate, and only the @realDonaldTrump (his Twitter handle before being sworn in as President) can be trusted. I will say more about how to adjudicate this situation when I develop my theological ethic in Chapter five.

At this point, it is enough to recognize that, for better or worse, just about anyone can start a blog, create a Facebook profile, twitter profile, Instagram profile and begin to express themselves as resident experts and commentators in their part of the world. On the Web there are countless self-proclaimed theologians spreading their word to the people. A pastor who wishes to maintain a monopoly on theological knowledge will struggle to accept the democratization of information, including theology, that takes places through social media. Today the fact is that clergy and academics are no longer

³²⁴ Zeynep Tufekci. “Mark Zuckerberg Is in Denial” in The Opinion Pages, *The New York Times*. November 15, 2016.

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/opinion/mark-zuckerberg-is-in-denial.html?_r=0 (accessed December 2, 2016).

³²⁵ Hence the commonly used term “Clickbait.” Advertisers make money off of the volume of clicks that lead to their site. The more controversial or shocking the ad, the more likely someone will go ahead and click on it.

³²⁶ Max Read. “Donald Trump Isn’t Just Benefitting From ‘Fake News’ Websites—He Is One,” *nymag.com*, November 18, 2016. <http://nymag.com/selectall/2016/11/trump-doesnt-just-benefit-from-fake-news-sites-he-is-one.html> (accessed December 2, 2016).

³²⁷ Read, *Ibid*.

“the sole communicators of faith.”³²⁸ All over social media, “‘amateur’ voices of authentic faith emerge alongside, and blog, tweet, post, create, and share in the digital context.”³²⁹ For this reason we need to make faithful disciples for the technoculture, who can clearly communicate their beliefs, who can discern the authenticity and truth in the claims of other amateur theologians, and who are not swayed by just any theological know-it-all tweeting out the gospel of Jesus.

Let us return to that girl on her phone during the sermon. Rather than taking the preacher’s authoritative statement as given, the technoculture subverts this understanding of authority as her sharing of the message “is likely to be immediately interacted with through social media: commented on, pulled apart, criticized, defended, and perhaps even lost in a rapid shift to a related topic.”³³⁰ Thus, social media typically engaged is not another means of mass media delivery. There is a spin and open door for more spinning with every share of the original message in part or in whole. According to professor of communications Peter Horsfield, in this situation “authority ascribed in digital practice is one earned in the process of interaction on specific topics or issues, a type of authority that is more common in oral-dominant communities than in the aloof, institution-based authority that most churches have carried into this third-millennium.”³³¹

This X-reality, as a participatory communication process, resonates in many ways with process theology in which God expects our spin and collaboration with God’s message. Power emerges in a web of relations, as the many become one in a force of unity and togetherness, solidarity. God is revealed as authority in our communities online and in person because of the repeated interaction with the always emerging and converging Word of God revealed in Christ, revealed in traditions, revealed in scripture. Our willingness to interact with God and re-tweet and share God’s love has the potential to enhance the authority of the gospel as a significant factor within multiple conversations. As God’s word emerges as an interactive voice in the events of each day that word becomes authorized as a source for truth, beauty, and justice.

³²⁸ Zsupan-Jerome, 91.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Horsfield, 266.

³³¹ Horsfield, 266.

4. Time is of the Essence

Perhaps the greatest change to technoculture is the rapid pace at which news stories hit the public, gain traction, and then are replaced with the next breaking event. Authorities in social media, those who are most often re-tweeted, re-posted, and interacted with, are those who are able to deliver a comment on a breaking event in the immediate moment. Comments on events that take place even the day before are likely to be overlooked or ignored. Thus, Horsfield claims, the most important messages are not those that reveal prolonged pondering and depth, they are instead those posted in a timely, immediate, fashion.³³²

This is another example of how the tools change expectation. As costs of production decrease and rates of reception increase, time is of the essence. Cameras do not need to be set up by the news crew for the information to be shared. Anyone with a cell phone can hit record, take the picture, and share widely the event taking place. In that moment of posting, interaction begins as participants share, comment on, and curate the event. We take to social media to hear a word of wisdom or inspiration or frustration from our chosen authorities. We expect to hear from them sooner rather than later. By the time the nightly news airs, we already know the events of the day, as well as those events that the newscast has not had the time to organize for a clean and produced news story. In Web 3.0, production value matters less than timeliness as an authorizing feature of news.

We have, in only a decade, experienced massive shifts in how people are informed, informing each other, connecting to each other, and organizing their days and lives. The church has all too often ignored the demands of the people on the church who are natives to this emerging technoculture. When the church is absent from these conversations, who misses out? Thankfully many theologians and pastors have already embraced new media as yet another locus of their work to bring Christ into conversation and to form Christians for action. These pastors are not merely perpetuating the binary, replacing real ministry with virtual ministry. They are navigating the badlands of X-reality—a reality that blurs tidy lines between existence and relationships online and off-line.

³³² Horsfield, 265.

Natives of this technoculture desire to collaborate and participate in the making of news and information rather than sit back and consume without input. They have democratized the spread of information in unprecedented ways. Authorities are those who emerge from the cacophony of opinions as those with the most credible, timely, and shared messages for the moment. Community is created by way of mutual interaction, tagging, commentary, and contribution.

These desires seem to fit with many efforts in homiletics lately to design conversational approaches to the ministry of preaching. The turn to conversational homiletics is but one piece of the puzzle when it comes to being effective communicators of gospel in our technoculture. Bringing that homiletic beyond the limitations of pulpit and pew will lead to prophetic innovation in our ministry to the Living Word and in our efforts to cultivate disciples who are more engaged, active, thoughtful, and participatory in the church.

An Example for Homiletics: The Catholic Church from *Inter Mirifica* and Beyond

One might be surprised to know that the tradition which has been the most consistent, public, and theological in its appreciative inquiry into social media is the Roman Catholic Church. Although I am not Catholic, I have found the fifty plus year public discernment of this tradition on Social Communication to be an excellent research model. These pastoral decrees on the whole are descriptive rather than prescriptive in their messages. They seek to explore the possibilities television, film, internet, and social media to be developed have for communicating to and as the Church, as well as ways in which the Church may challenge those very media and the potentially harmful manner in which they operate. Daniella Zsupan-Jerome highlights the Catholic Church's discernment of and engagement with social media since Vatican II in *Connected Toward Communion: The Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age*. She does so in order to reveal how digital culture can support human longing for communion with a theology of communication that “brings good news to all pastoral ministers about the gift and challenge” of digital communication for ministry in this day and age.³³³

³³³ Zsupan-Jerome, xiii.

When people reflect on Vatican II they do not often highlight the innovative conversation that began to take place on the subject of social communication as a groundbreaking moment.³³⁴ One usually recalls the move to liturgy in the vernacular from Latin or the decision to move altars from the back of the sanctuary slightly forward so that laity could see the choreography of the Eucharist rather than stare at the backs of the priests. During the first session of the Second Vatican Council, however, Archbishop Rene Louis Marie Stroum made a case about the import of the burgeoning topic of social media for the Church.

Archbishop Stroum began by highlighting circulation numbers around the world in 1962. Between daily newspapers, periodicals, films, broadcasting stations, and television stations, media were accessed some 18 billion times in a year.³³⁵ Such numbers were staggering to those who heard it for the first time. Archbishop Stroum and other leaders began the process of discernment and dialogue that would result directly in the decree *Inter Mirifica* in 1963.

Through Vatican II's decree on the media of social communications, *Inter Mirifica*, Church doctrine affirmed social media³³⁶ as a tool that may be effectively used by clergy and laity alike. "Responsibility" is the theme throughout. Social media *may* be used in order to further salvation as well as to instruct and guide. Beyond this, "the laity especially must strive to instill a human and Christian spirit into these media, so that they may fully measure up to the great expectations of mankind and to God's design."³³⁷ The more believers in media and utilizing media, the more likely media itself is recognized as a tool for salvific purposes designed by God. Social media *may* easily be a means of

³³⁴ Zsupan-Jerome points out that *Inter Mirifica* was named "the most criticized yet least well known and understood document" of Vatican II, *Ibid.*, 20. See also Andre Ruskowski, "Decree on the Means of Social Communication: Success or Failure of the Council?" in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty Five Years After (1962-1987)*, vol. 3, ed. Rene Latourelle (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 550.

³³⁵ Zsupan-Jerome, 3.

³³⁶ "Social media" is used interchangeably with "mass media" though the Council prefers the former term in its documentation. As seen in the previous section, scholars of new media and communication would not use the terms interchangeably in order to highlight the shifts in technoculture from the mass media of the twentieth century to the social media of Web 2.0 and beyond in the twenty-first century.

³³⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Inter Mirifica* (Decree on the Mass Media). Vatican web site. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204inter-mirifica_en.html. (accessed December 10, 2015).

perversion and “spiritual harm” as well.³³⁸ Discernment is required on individual and institutional levels. Thus, the second council of the Vatican through *Inter Mirifica* makes the claim early on that education on proper use and consumption of media should be taking place at all levels of the church, clergy and laity as well as children and adults, as soon as possible.³³⁹

By 1971, the Church would release a teaching that would begin to articulate a theology of communication that could dialogue with innovations in social media through today. *Communio et Progressio* took seven years of research, church wide questionnaires, and drafts to reach a final manifestation Pope Paul VI could support for the Church. The broad structure of the document is threefold: theology, culture, and the practice of the Church. Each angle approaches the topic of social communications in its own way and dialogues with the others. Thus the document embodies the dialogical approach the Church seeks to cultivate in its members, both lay and ordained, as it faithfully engages wider culture and public opinion through social media.

“Aetatis Novae” took the dialogical approach of *Communio et Progressio* into the dawning Internet age on the twentieth anniversary of its writing.³⁴⁰ Like *Communio et Progressio*, work began years before it was published in order to research the climate of the Church worldwide. While the document is an ecclesial one, it does not have the papal endorsement that *Communio et Progressio* had. But this document is to be considered an addendum to *Communio et Progressio* in light of innovations in social communication from 1971 to the late 1980s.

What really shifts in this document from previous statements is an understanding that media are not merely tools for communication but that they also profoundly shape our habits of meaning-making over time. Accordingly, “Today’s evangelization ought to well up from the Church’s active, sympathetic presence within the world of

³³⁸ *Inter Mirifica*.

³³⁹ Of course, *Inter Mirifica* is not the first Church decree on media. See for example the work of *ad experimentum*, Pontifical Commission for the Study and Ecclesiastical Evaluation of Films on Religious or Moral Subjects in 1948 and its evolution into the fields of Radio and Television.

³⁴⁰ Pontifical Council for Social Communication, “Aetatis Novae” (On Social Communications on the Twentieth Anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*) Vatican web site. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_22021992_aetatis_en.html (accessed December 10, 2015).

communication.”³⁴¹ The Church has seen how the tools themselves change our thought process and our way of being citizens of the world. They are not just tools to be used. Media are woven into our reality. The Catholic Church began to engage technology beyond the surface-artifact level.

The wisdom of these pastoral instructions is an understanding that due to the constant change and innovation of media, instruction is not made by digging deep into any one particular media (rules for film followed by rules for Twitter, followed by rules for Facebook, etc.), for it may pass in five or fifty or five hundred years. Rather, the approach is to set “out basic doctrinal principles and general pastoral guidelines³⁴²” for all social communication in light of the mandate to proclaim the Gospel. This dialogical approach to media “allows the Church to continue to explore and assess new media for their gifts and limitations, even as these new media change.”³⁴³

These documents also remind the Church that it has a long history of collaboration with novel means of communication to share the gospel. From handwritten letters to the printing press, radio, television, film and beyond the Church has seen these innovations as “gifts from God”³⁴⁴ to for the work of spreading the Good News to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Official Church teaching has not shied away from the Internet and social media in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It has encouraged the education for evangelizing and participating in these avenues for clergy and laity alike.

A guiding theo-rhetorical norm for communication emerges from these documents in an understanding of “Christ as the Perfect Communicator.” The Church describes the communication of Christ as being first and foremost a posture of witness, relationality, and unity of aim. That said the oppositional force to Christ is anything that

³⁴¹ Zsupan-Jerome, 84. AN 11

³⁴² Pontifical Council for Social Communication. “Communio et Progressio” (On the Means of Social Communication). Vatican web site. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_230511971_communio_en.html. (accessed December 10, 2015).

³⁴³ Zsupan-Jerome, 27.

³⁴⁴ “Communio et Progressio” as well as Pope Francis’ message for the 48th World Communications Day “Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter” [Sunday, 1 June 2014] https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20140124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html (accessed December 10, 2015).

blocks connections, online and in person. The Church state, “At any point when communication technology isolates instead of connects, divides instead of unites, and raises boundaries instead of building bridges, pastoral theology and ministry have important, prophetic roles to recall the standard of persons-in-relationship.”³⁴⁵ This disconnect can happen when participants on social media lack the awareness of self and audience which lead to contextualizing the Good News while seeking the common good, which according to these documents, relies upon the unity of humankind. Social media practices, according to the Church, must open the channels of relationship, not close them, for each advance in technology has “the high purpose of bringing men into closer contact with one another.”³⁴⁶

Overall, the Roman Catholic Church is consistent in insisting from 1963 to 2015 that though the social media are great platforms to evangelize and unite humanity, the goal is “to move from the virtual world of cyberspace to the real world of Christian community.”³⁴⁷ According to Pope John Paul II, virtual interaction can never replace conventional embodied interaction.³⁴⁸ The Internet is a tool, a gift from God as said before, that can *enrich* the ministry of the Church as a platform for evangelization, pedagogy, and conversation between Church and laity as well as Church and world.³⁴⁹ But the virtual can never *replace* conventional human-to-human interaction, which takes place in non-virtual reality. For Pope John Paul II and other leaders of the Church there remains a clear distinction between virtual and conventional encounters, a distinction that X-reality disrupts.

But it seems that Pope Francis is living into the badlands of X-reality and seems more open to the adventure the technoculture brings for the sake of Jesus Christ. Pope Francis’ 2014 address may be a glimpse of a shifting stance on the Church on the role of

³⁴⁵ Zsupan-Jerome, 59.

³⁴⁶ *Communio et Progressio, Part One, Point 6, 1971,*

³⁴⁷ Pope John Paul II. 36th World Day of Communications: "Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel." 2002 http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20020122_world-communications-day.html (accessed December 10, 2015). See also *Church and Internet*, 2002, “Virtual reality is no substitute for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments, and shared worship in a flesh-and-blood human community. There are no sacraments on the Internet; and even the religious experiences possible there by the grace of God are insufficient apart from real-world interaction with other persons of faith.”

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ *Church and Internet*, 2002, Part II, 5

the Internet as a place of meeting rather than merely a space for communication. In this message, Francis speaks to the Internet as a place “where people live and where they can be reached, both effectively and affectively.”³⁵⁰ He encourages the Church to keep its doors open *on the Internet* “so that people, whatever their situation in life, can enter, and so that the Gospel can go out to reach everyone.”³⁵¹ Ultimately, the Church will evangelize by any means necessary in order to communicate Gospel, moving people toward community, with the aim of communion.³⁵² Today, Pope Francis remains active in social media, tracking his travels on Twitter, offering timely responses to crises with tweets and posts. Pope Francis mostly offers mini-sermons for those who look to him for daily guidance in 140 characters or less: “Jesus seeks hearts that are open and tender toward the weak; hearts that are not hard but docile and transparent,” a sermon posted and then shared 5,944 times with 16.8K likes.³⁵³ At the time of writing this sentence on August 2, 2016, The Pope (@Pontifex) has 9.6 million followers throughout the world (myself included).

We learn from the Roman Catholic Church the value of consistent theological conversation around technological innovations. Tradition is a powerful authority in the RCC and even still they engage the gadfly critically and creatively. We can learn to take on a posture of appreciative inquiry toward these innovations rather than the swatting, frustrated, annoyed gadfly posture some begrudgingly embody today, swatting at the buzz in the hopes that it will go away. These innovations entail challenge, necessity, *and gift* for ministry to the Word. With discernment and ingenuity, we can look to the horizon of history with confidence and enthusiasm for preaching rather than doom and gloom. We can be purveyors of theologically sound innovation for the church and its proclamation rather than defenders of a crumbling institution. We can support and embody ministry to the Living Word rather than continue to argue for ministry to pulpit and pew.

³⁵⁰ Francis, *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² Zsupan-Jerome, 33.

³⁵³ Posted by @Pontifex on Twitter, July 31, 2016.

Process and the Future(s) of Preaching

The art of progress is to preserve order amid change, and to preserve change amid order. Life refuses to be embalmed alive. The more prolonged the halt in some unrelieved system of order, the greater the crash of the dead society.³⁵⁴

Hopefully by now this survey of technoculture in the twenty first century, far from being the complete story, has complicated simple notions of technology as being the enemy or the savior of humankind in general and the church in particular. We cannot afford to be technological determinists who assume that engagement with technology will be the slippery slope leading to robots in pulpits who are programmed with exegetical tools and theological knowledge in order to preach the perfect sermon to the congregation. Nor can we embrace technology as if it is the means to save preaching from the crumbling walls around our pulpits and pews. With innovations in technology that have come before, that which was in vogue does not entirely get replaced by the new. More often than not, intensity unfolds as more options are made available to us.

A third way of engaging the gadfly of technoculture is the mission of this project—we cannot take one side or the other, claiming technological change as liberator or enslaver. Affirming the theological definition of technology offered by scholars Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, we view technology as “a human activity that is carried out within the context provided by God for human beings to exercise their creativity and agency.”³⁵⁵ We must do so thoughtfully and critically as well as creatively, for we also hold in tension the truth that technologies are not neutral instruments awaiting our meaning making through them.

This third way manifests itself in two vital ways. First, it is a call to homileticians and thoughtful preachers to begin to reflect critically on this relationship between preaching and technological artifacts and attitudes with their gifts of criticism and construction. Second, it is a call for these teachers of preachers to be intentional about a pedagogy that makes theological discerners out of our students who will be in the field, fielding questions first hand from parishioners who both embrace and detest the technological web they are woven into.

³⁵⁴ Whitehead, *P&R*, 339.

³⁵⁵ Campbell and Garner, 23.

As process reminds us, reality brings about evolution and change. We see this as humans who cannot stop the march of time on our bodies. We see this as generations dealing with changes in culture throughout time—resisting, embracing, defending, or ignoring the march of time. Time does not stand still. Organisms do not stay stationary. Language and means of communication are organic to cultures as they emerge through time and space. Even Webster’s Dictionary adds new words, even emojis, to its catalogue every year.

Institutions desire stability and consistency as much as if not more than individuals. We see this in the conflicts that arise when tradition is challenged by the march of time and culture. We see this in some cultures as a turn to traditionalism that is the attempt to make a set of activities appear identical to older cultural precedents—with truth of the precedent’s own cultural setting removed—as a means to legitimate activities of the institution.³⁵⁶ But in order to survive, all organisms must adapt and grow.

How does ministry to the Living Word get caught up in these contrasting desires—novelty and stability? How can institutions be organized in such a way that process and the novelty that emerges become possibilities to engage with rather than problems to solve?

Part of the answer to these questions is a look into the history of preaching and technology. It is to realize that preaching has always and already impacted technoculture and been impacted by it, from the theological treatise of the Gutenberg age to the age of the sitcom and Lowry Loop. Our technoculture has shifted our habits from orality to literacy and now into the emerging social media. Preaching as a practice has continued to survive and in some ways thrive as novelty emerged.

The Incarnate Word is a Living Word and a living word, in a process view, is a word in process rather than a static and stationary word. “The ‘principle of process’ is that the essence of anything actual ‘is constituted by its becoming.’”³⁵⁷ Preaching is an organism consisting of many organisms, as is the church. It is a living and breathing practice done in and for the Body of Christ as it collaborates with the world, God’s body.

³⁵⁶Catherine Bell. *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 145.

³⁵⁷ Williamson and Allen, *Adventures*, 51. See also Whitehead, *P&R*, 23.

According to Whitehead, modern thought (under the auspices of the traditional binary schema) has taken as “a tacit presupposition” the “non-evolution of matter.”³⁵⁸ Modern thought about preaching does like-wise. Under this paradigm, preaching is not subject to the organic processes of life. The binary schema subordinates fluency under the guise of traditionalism. Adherents then are expected to resist change themselves and adapt back to the static norm of the authority in the schema: the pastor, the pulpit. Preaching itself as an organism and fluid practice has its fluency subordinated in this schema. This is how the acts of proclamation of female medieval mystics, slaves, and frontier women were for a long time written out of the history of preaching.

Change may be inevitable, but tradition need not succumb to change. Tradition lives through organisms that evolve with time as they perpetuate the sustaining and identity rooting aspects of tradition, hand them on, and reinterpret them through the means of their age. Traditionalism is the rejection of change at all costs in defense of tradition. But traditionalism renders those who are involved in that social system impotent in the face of real change.

Process theologian Bruce Epperly sees in traditionalism the embodiment of sin. The sin traditionalism is guilty of is “the turning away from God’s aim at creative transformation by holding on to outworn traditions.”³⁵⁹ According to Epperly, these defensive acts seek “to preserve a particular tradition or way of life,” lead to “stifling the imaginative and innovative possibilities that are part of what it means to be created in the image of God.”³⁶⁰ This is akin to the narrowness that Whitehead places in juxtaposition with intensity. By clinging to any event as a static rubric for all that is to come we prevent a more intimate living and becoming with God and creation.

The conversation about the future of preaching would end here if we remain in the traditionalist binary schema. Traditionalism, blind to the intensity of practices currently as well as in the past, would say preaching must be the sermonic event from a pulpit to a pew. Period. If it cannot be this way, then the church will proudly die clinging to the tradition before giving in to the novelty of the gadfly.

³⁵⁸ Whitehead, *P&R*, 95.

³⁵⁹ Epperly, 88.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

But we need not erase tradition as we engage the gadfly. Epperly goes on to say “Process theology surprises both traditionalists and seekers by taking an affirmative, but critical approach,”³⁶¹ to new contexts. Epperly sees the value of tradition, which allows for “the preservation of the values of our faith and culture,” as distinct and particular to a group.³⁶² However, in process traditional values “are always subject to transformation in light of changing social and cultural situations.”³⁶³ Authority is relational, in other words, not given to one over and against the other. Discernment is required for thoughtful and innovative response.

Conclusion

Process theology encourages us to look at preaching as a theo-rhetorical practice that is itself in process of becoming rather than an unchanging formula for gospel distribution. With a critical eye to history and present context, process thinkers question timeless and hegemonic static proposals for practice, theology, and rhetorical strategy. Timeless postures, and the systems that establish and perpetuate them, fear change and get defensive in the face of novelty. Energy is spent on new arguments for old structures rather than on appreciative inquiry that could lead to novelty and creativity. Process then encourages us to not lose tenderheartedness in times of great transition but to know that God is present in the changes for Godself changes and adapts with and for us. The church may be changing. Institutions may be crumbling as others, like the World Wide Web, come into being. But we still need communicators of Gospel to bring the Word to life in and for communities and to utilize the appropriate tactics for this ministry that reflect the heart of God.

We are in the midst of dramatic change in the ways we know and communicate—and this necessarily impacts the way we preach—the when of preaching (beyond the liturgy), the where of preaching (beyond the sanctuary), and the how of preaching (beyond the constraints of oral/aural event). Practices are impacted by the environments in which they are embodied. Our environment is in upheaval. The “badlands” we are

³⁶¹ Epperly, 122.

³⁶² Epperly, 88.

³⁶³ Ibid.

navigating as a global community bring about unpredictable storms and challenges on the route to the age that is to come. Hunkering down into traditionalism renders the territory hostile, and will lead to the demise of many institutions. The decisions institutions make as they do or do not adapt and move forward into the foothills of the emerging future will lay the groundwork for their role in that future. So it is with preaching. So it is with the church.

Perhaps the desires emerging from this disruptive cycle of change to technoculture are beacons, rather than irritants, luring homileticians and practioners to step into an adventure for preaching made possible within the wonderful uniqueness of this moment. What does it mean for preaching that today we find citizens that are seeking more participatory ways of knowing and communicating rather than passive consumeristic ones? What does it mean for preaching and ecclesiology that the democratization of power of voice has led to novel platforms for once ignored and marginalized voices to gain momentum and bring their struggles into light?

If the church encounters the gadfly of technoculture for what it is accompanied with a theo-ethical guide for how it could be done faithfully, then adventures in preaching are in store. Although we have briefly alluded to the theo-rhetorical ethic for communication of Christ the Perfect Communicator in the Roman Catholic Church, a more thorough process inspired rubric for homiletics is now called for. That is the work of chapter four.

CHAPTER IV.

HOMILECCLESIOLOGY: PREACHING EXITS THE HOUSE OF THE SANCTUARY

The preacher is one voice among many in a conversation that precedes and outlasts her. She is one conversation partner among many partners who are proclaiming the gospel and listening to others proclaim the gospel.³⁶⁴

Introduction

The ways in which society communicates and connects with one another have changed drastically in the last decade. Through our technoculture, we have experienced a shift from atomistic and institution-based ways of thinking about reality and participating in reality to networked ways of thinking about and engaging reality. While our aim in ministry to the Living Word has not changed—that is communication of Jesus Christ’s saving gospel in the midst of our lives as they unfold—the means of prophetically conveying the message have expanded. However, we often spend more energy on preserving falling structures that once fed our mission to the Living Word than we do on the mission itself as it lures us into the future. The aim of this project, as we have discussed, is not necessarily to abandon the ministry of proclamation from the pulpit, rather it is to increase the intensity, *the contrasts and patterns that create novelty* regarding preaching’s places of proclamation that might be organic to the technoculture we live in and the societies we form and are formed by in this technoculture.

Novelty is an element of the ordering of the universe that, according to John Cobb, was overlooked until Whitehead inserted it into our philosophical systems. Historically, there “is the continual emergence of novelty.”³⁶⁵ These novel occasions, while made possible by the past, emerge from the unique and ever changing occasions that bring new forms to the world in any given moment. The novelty that we have met in this dissertation thus far is the novelty of a place of meeting, communicating, and gathering that is beyond the limits of zip code, building, even country. This is the novelty of Web 3.0, of social mediated becoming through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter,

³⁶⁴ W. Allen, 40.

³⁶⁵ John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology*, Second Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 109.

and Instagram. God lures us then, as leaders of the church, to engage and harmonize ancient practices of ministry with this novelty in order for our presence and proclamation as ministers the Living Word still whispering wisdom today.

In order for preachers, the church, the guild, and theological education to creatively and prophetically engage as tradition bearers in these contextual shifts in technoculture we need to name what is core to our identities, that is what constitutes the genre of preaching. For preaching, this means naming that which is *trans-cultural*—identifying timeless homiletical elements that transcend the currents of culture. Finding the transcultural fingerprint of preaching is not an easy task. This core must be simple enough to fit preaching as it has happened over the past 2,000 years of Christianity as it has taken shape in various cultures. It aspires to be simple enough to fit preaching as it may happen in the next 2,000 years of cultural change and diversity. It must have the openness to its core to engage with technoculture and be nuanced in great particularity at the same time. That is the tricky work of the beginning of this chapter. Once this fingerprint is named, a new homiletic theory can emerge—one that emerges in the encounter of the fingerprint with this technoculture through a Christian process lens.

The Fingerprint of Preaching: In pursuit of Trans-Cultural Elements of Preaching

In 1996 the Lutheran World Federation issued a statement at the third international consultation of their Study Team on Worship and Culture. This statement, now known as the Nairobi Statement, was the result of six years of study among representatives from five continents. The Study Team was in pursuit of biblical and historical understandings of worship and how these understandings interact with ever-changing cultures in an ever-present cultural diversity. Ultimately, worship was found to interact not in unidirectional ways, but rather in a dynamic matrix of collaboration with and resistance of culture. The statement claims that “Christian worship relates dynamically to culture in at least four ways...it is transcultural...contextual...counter-cultural...and cross-cultural.”³⁶⁶

³⁶⁶ Lutheran World Federation (LWF). “Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities” (Department for Theology and Studies of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), (1996), 1.2 http://www.tlcvv.org/pdf/nairobi_statement.pdf (accessed August 10, 2016).

The transcultural way of worship is a claim that somehow, across five continents and within uncountable pockets of local congregations within those continents, worship is recognized as Christian worship by some sort of fingerprint that makes it distinct from other rituals. This worship fingerprint includes gathering, intercession, Eucharist, reading of Scripture, preaching, and sending. Though the ways these elements of the fingerprint are made incarnate vary from culture to culture, for the most part these elements are fundamental to the identity of Christian worship across time and place. These elements transcend the ebb and flow of culture. And yet, as the statement goes on to say, worship is never only transcultural. It is always contextual, and it times it will find itself counter to the norms of the dominant context it takes place in. The tension within these poles is the transformative power of worship.

From a process perspective, naming the transcultural and placing it on level with the contextual enables liturgists to grow in size and stature, that is growth in wisdom about your own tradition along with the capacity to hold contrasts without losing that identity informed by tradition. Without fear of losing an essence of Christian worship, the focus shifts to celebrating the ways in which these transcultural elements (or as some may say the transcultural *ordo*) is enfolded among churches throughout the world. The intensity of worship offers a kaleidoscope of the Kingdom of God and challenges presumptions that worship need be done universally in one general prescribed, usually colonizing, fashion. This is the starting point for the study of worship in an age of globalization, an age of rapid changes in science and technology. What then might we, who seek to navigate the badlands of disruptive innovation and set preaching in the foothills of a new age, ask is transcultural about preaching?

For those who are even the least bit familiar with the work of Alfred North Whitehead, some red flags may be flying at this point in the project. The aim to seek out trans-cultural elements of preaching smacks of the modernist penchant for foundationalism and essentialism, which Whitehead consistently argues against. As theologian Catherine Keller reminds us, “Whitehead thawed out the metaphysical tradition of the West, melting the unchanging” categories of substance and subject “into the turbulent flow of an endless Becoming.”³⁶⁷ Is there anything constant if all is a

³⁶⁷ Keller, 2002, 10.

“turbulent flow of an endless Becoming?” Is it then counter to Whitehead for this homilecclesiology to pursue essentials?

In the process itself of time and the accumulation of events and occasions, process philosophers and theologians argue that whatever is to come about does so from what has gone before. Individual subjects, even disciplines, emerge out of a trajectory of interrelated events unique to the trajectory. This process never reaches completion. Everything is in a state of ceaseless becoming.³⁶⁸ But there is some quality of relation and accumulation that makes the stream distinct from other streams of becoming. The practice of preaching exists in this way. The church exists in this way. You the reader exist in this way. You are recognized as being you throughout the flow of your becoming, which makes use of possibilities presented to you out of your past. Once in a while there may be radical turns, and there may be some who do not have the size and stature themselves to embrace your transformation. But you will find the trace of key elements from your past that remain throughout your growth that mark you as you, a fingerprint of sorts that is uniquely you.

This metaphor can be applied across the becoming of all persons and practices. Process theologians often start as Whitehead did, using the metaphor of the flight of an airplane. Philosophers start on “the ground of particular observation,” then take flight “in the thin air of imaginative generalization,” always to land again “for renewed observation.”³⁶⁹ So let the reader take a moment to observe from her own core the philosophical concept of becoming and perishing. C. Robert Mesle invites the reader to self-reflect as he asks, “do you not *feel* yourself as arising out of your immediate past, out of your experience of just a moment ago?”³⁷⁰ Tripping and falling in public may cause you to laugh if you have been having an easy-going day and are in the company of good friends. Tripping and falling in public when you have just lost your job and are by yourself will result in an all-together different response. All people and practices arise or are becoming out of their past, their unique fingerprint. And different possibilities for becoming become available. Even and especially God.

³⁶⁸ Whitehead, *P&R*, 267.

³⁶⁹ Whitehead, *P&R*, 5.

³⁷⁰ C. Robert Mesle, *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2008), 43.

Preaching has its own fingerprint across 2,000 years that helps us to recognize it and set it apart from other communicative practices. Preaching has “primordial” elements that are in creative tension with its “consequent” elements. As Christians, we believe that the primordial word of God has been proclaimed in the “primal revelation”³⁷¹ of “a babe within a manger, grown to a preteen in a temple, and a young man at a baptism,” a man we know as Jesus of Nazareth.³⁷² Christian preaching’s primordial elements are intertwined with the elements of being and relating revealed to us through Jesus, the Word made flesh. Preachers always seek to communicate Christ incarnate to others through the language, location, and platforms of a particular time and place. This revelation of God’s hidden word through Jesus is what both judges and enables the church to live a life pleasing to God.³⁷³ And preaching is a holy practice absolutely essential to the becoming of the church (the Body of Christ), for only by ongoing proclamation of that revealed word do we extend “God’s incarnation in Christ across history,”³⁷⁴ as that word interacts with each of our own particular histories.

Different moments in time have modified our understanding of preaching’s footprint. In the modern period, it has been the work of many in the field of homiletics, especially women and people of color or not of European ancestry, to challenge the elements of preaching’s assumed footprint that have privileged the practice of white men to the detriment of those whose identities we have written out of the fingerprint for true preaching.³⁷⁵ The fingerprint for preaching has been used to silence the whisper of God in many potential prophets. As was said before, much of this had to do with the oppressive pulpit/pew paradigm and the accommodation of preaching to the power lines of this binary, excluding women and people of color. To make the argument for a more expansive definition of preaching, these homileticians had to challenge the implicit fingerprint for preaching as the communication of the ordained preacher (male) from the

³⁷¹ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 17.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁷⁵ See Florence. *Preaching as Testimony*, Kim, *Women Preaching*, Turner and Hudson, *Saved from Silence*.

pulpit to the laity. They had to develop their own tactics to participate in the ongoing ministry of bringing the “shout” of God—Jesus Christ—into the hearing of our world.³⁷⁶

From our process-oriented perspective, the fingerprint of preaching is a particular core relational matrix that includes four partners *in service of the Good News of God’s ongoing activity in and for the world*: God’s w/Word, interpreted, within a particular context, and communicated.³⁷⁷

Preaching is in service of and an embodiment of the Good News that God is still present and active in our world. Preaching is not merely done for fun or because it is an interesting hobby to take up. Preaching is not theological Ted Talk-ing about God as revealed in scriptures—sharing interesting tidbits about God who acted in the past. Preaching is not meant to highlight and re-cast all the bad news we see all week on the television and in our Newsfeed without aiming toward some promise that the “as is” is not the “as it should be.” Preaching that has Good News within it, as homiletician Gennifer Brooks reminds us, “enlivens, awakens, and energizes preacher and people for joyful living even in a troubled world.”³⁷⁸ Preaching that lacks this element fails to link the church with God’s on-going activity and distances the people of God from the grace of God.³⁷⁹ Thus, we must always first take seriously the purpose of preaching, which is to form a Body for God’s ongoing activity that is efficient and informed by the Word of God.

Depending on the various theologies of preaching, one of the four elements will be emphasized over another. This is the inherent contextual nature of preaching. It has

³⁷⁶ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 17.

³⁷⁷ This fingerprint is similar to the four codes John S. McClure identifies as being fundamental to the genre of preaching: the scriptural code, the semantic code, the theosymbolic code, and the cultural code. See McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 9ff. One could liken context to the cultural code, interpretation to scriptural, God’s w/Word to theosymbolic, and communication with semantics. I seek less rigidity with my fingerprint, acknowledging interpretation within each partner, also honoring those who preach in traditions that hold more than the Bible up as being scriptural authority in the church.

³⁷⁸ Gennifer Benjamin Brooks, *Good News Preaching: Offering the Gospel in Every Sermon* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2009), 5.

³⁷⁹ See Charles L. Campbell. *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). In this important work Campbell reminds preachers in the wake of 9/11 that “exposing” the “powers” and “principalities” at work in our world is not the sole task of preaching. In order for preaching to be just and effective, the preacher must also “envision “the alternative way of life that is “non-violent resistance” to the powers that be. See also Walter Wink. *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

transcultural elements but is always contextual. Each element is nuanced by each distinct theology of and in preaching, as well as the sermon forms that arise from these nuances. For the postliberal, present context has less sway on the message of the preacher than the context of the Christ event as a trans-historical reality. Good News is found in the person of Christ not in the unfolding events of this world.³⁸⁰ For liberation homiletics, the context takes precedence over the sacred text. Preferential treatment for the poor and marginalized means that the sacred text must be challenged in certain aspects if it does not affirm the least of these and bring Good News now to them.³⁸¹ Postliberal preaching is not more true in its adaptation of preaching's fingerprint than liberation preaching. Homiletical theories—no matter how oppositional their theologies, forms, and aims may be—configure preaching's fingerprint in unique ways that allow for each homiletical approach to be known, essentially, as preaching.

When static categories creep into the trans-cultural fingerprint for preaching, their falsely dependent and isolated definitions for preaching will be found to crumble in the face of the other—other ways of preaching, other visions of preacher, other settings for preaching. And, as we have been arguing, the limiting static categories most prevalent in this day and age of homiletics are those implicated within the pulpit and pew and the assumption that preaching only takes place in the Sunday service as oral-aurally mediated sermon.

As we claim a simple fingerprint for what preaching is, we can make some clear statements about what preaching definitively is not.

Preaching does not have to happen in a pulpit *alone*.³⁸²

Preaching does not have to be spoken communication *alone*.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ See Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*.

³⁸¹ See González and González. *Liberation Preaching* and Christine M. Smith. *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

³⁸² This is perhaps the least provocative statement of the bunch, for already many preachers, especially women, have moved their preaching from the pulpit to the level ground on which the congregation sits. This has come about for practical and theological reasons. Personally, some pulpits are just too high for a five foot tall woman to stand behind without looking like a child playing the part of preacher. For others, it is an attempt to perform the sermon in more conversational, less formal, style.

³⁸³ This is an interesting proposal a colleague of mine has brought up and is processing in her research: preaching without words, through movement and drama. We often affirm liturgical dance to accompany music or the scripture reading but have not yet explored the possibilities of preaching in this manner. My

Preaching does not *only* happen in the sanctuary.³⁸⁴
Preaching is not *only* a monological delivery of content.³⁸⁵
Preaching is not *solely* the work of the ordained minister.³⁸⁶

These are only a few ‘not only’s’ that need be noted. They are not meant to exclude any form of preaching. Preaching can and does occur in those ways. Rather, the point is that claiming any one of those ‘not only’s’ as core to the fingerprint of preaching wrongly marginalizes other means and places of and for preaching God’s Good News. The hope is that the general fingerprint of sacred text, context, interpretation, and communication in service to the Good News of God as revealed in Jesus Christ is broad enough to inspire an intense array of particular practices. The fingerprint should be able to include an extremely hierarchical homiletic such as Karl Barth’s alongside the conversational approach of O. Wesley Allen. In essentials I seek unity for homiletics, and in non-essentials, charity.³⁸⁷ The fingerprint is never all that defines particular theories of preaching. But all theories of preaching will have the fingerprint within them.³⁸⁸

hope is that a stripped down core fingerprint such as this can help colleagues like her to affirm such novelty as preaching practice. See also Kathy Black’s critique of the priority of the spoken word and discussion of sign language in preaching, as well as the use of imagery and movement in worship beyond words: “Beyond the Spoken Word: Preaching as Presence” in *Quarterly Review* 18 (Fall 1994): 279-293.

³⁸⁴ Of course, we know of street preachers, and rarely do they make a good name for themselves. But this also opens doors to dinner churches and theology pubs as being more than sites of loose theological conversation but as in fact being homiletic practice beyond the sanctuary and the worship service. And, as we are about to discuss, this opens the door to preaching in X-reality.

³⁸⁵ Wesley Allen, whose “homiletic of all believers” most closely coincides with homilecclesiology closes the door on conversation in the sermon. I seek to keep that door open for those who do this and do this well.

³⁸⁶ Could this open the door in homiletics to the practices of say Mormon preaching, which do not revolve around the formal sermon of an ordained preacher from the pulpit but revolve around the testimonies of the congregants themselves?

³⁸⁷ My Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) heritage is coming through. Though I assume that those who carry the torch for Barth in preaching today will have plenty of disagreement with my proposal. I know too many preachers (including myself) to conclude that preaching is God’s full revelation without the stickiness of my flesh and experience and bias getting in the way. May we disagree and dialogue gracefully!

³⁸⁸ Even still this effort is in and of itself partial. My attempt to deduce the core of a practice is merely a proposal put forth in search of interlocutors, and so of strengthening. This is why the concept of “size and stature” is celebrated in process thought. May I be found to have been too limiting as we journey together as practitioners and academics of preaching.

Preaching Shapes the Church into becoming Good News in/for the World

A preacher is compelled to communicate some message of God's Good News as it arises within her from a wrestling match with context and text. The preacher is shaped in this ongoing activity of ministry to the good news. The people who continually hear her and interact with her as one shaped by this activity with the Word are in turn shaped distinctively. Although a congregation is a collection of distinct individuals it is still more than that. According to Suchocki, a "congregation is an organic body commissioned to do the work of Jesus Christ in the world."³⁸⁹ A preacher is compelled to the ministry of preaching because she is aware that this practice is the ordinary means by which the extraordinary Word of God continues to become incarnate in and for the world.

According to Suchocki, every "unit of existence...in the world...begins with the touch of God,"³⁹⁰ so the preacher is not the only human given access to the divine aim of God. Revelation is everywhere as a whispered aim or lure initiating activity that requires the adaptation and innovation of each creature. The preacher must cultivate in herself a capacity often overlooked by other creatures to tune in to this feeling/aim/whisper of God within her, her context, the scripture, and the present moment of actual occasions. And she must keep especially tuned into the "biblical revelation of God's presence in Jesus of Nazareth, named the Christ," for this "special revelation...is prior to general revelation,"³⁹¹ in our Christian tradition, for we participate in this special revelation as an organic body commissioned to continue Jesus' healing ministry.

Preaching is the extraordinary means by which the brain of the Body gets synapses firing, limbs moving, action taken, on behalf of the Wisdom and Love of God. As Suchocki so aptly proclaimed, preaching, "this mundane chore, this seemingly never-ending event—is today's equivalent of that stable, that manger," in which the revealed word of God took his first breath.³⁹² Preaching ushers in the first beautiful breaths of God's revealed word underlying the becoming of the church in all times, again and again. Like the process of childbirth and child rearing, the direct impact of preaching is beyond

³⁸⁹ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 29.

³⁹⁰ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 39.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁹² Suchocki, *Whispered Word*, 17.

her control, out of her hands.³⁹³ The sermon always has a life of its own. Yet she hopes that by her preaching she leaves the church in her proximity a better church than before the message was shared.

Another way to conceive of this is perhaps what Karl Barth calls the “spirituality” criterion for preaching. That is, preaching is a prayer that seeks and invokes God, upon whom creation depends.³⁹⁴ We end each event of preaching with an ‘Amen’ spoken and unspoken—*may it be so, God, may this Good News be so.*

*Preaching Centers on the Word of God—Spoken and Speaking*³⁹⁵

For most Christians, the authorized resource for the word of God spoken to humanity is the sacred text of the Bible. The reasons why one may call a text sacred vary from tradition to tradition. For some, it is because the Bible is the inerrant word of God written down by humanity without error. For others, the Bible is the inspired word of God because it is a deep and sustained documentation of God’s interaction with humanity and creation, but, as a human document, it may have some contextual errors within it that need to be corrected by the ongoing revelation of the word of God through time. For a small cohort in Christianity, the Bible is held up as one sacred text among other religious texts, such as the Bhagavad Gita. One may even wonder to what extent confessions of the church become the sacred texts of our preaching.

For the first preachers—the women at the tomb—the only sacred text was that of an experience of the Risen Christ through an empty tomb, which shouted the Good News of Life beyond Death to those early risers. The definition of sacred text should also include those women who were not given access to the actual text in medieval times. There is a sacred text in their communication, be it oral traditions of the Sacred One, Jesus Christ, or direct experiences of him in a mystical sense. Text may not be limited to the written word. Paul preached about Christ through the lens of the Hebrew sacred text,

³⁹³ See Jana Childers, ed. *Birthing the Sermon: Women Preachers on the Creative Process* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).

³⁹⁴ Karl Barth, *Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 90.

³⁹⁵ Again, the limits of language! I do not mean to limit preaching to the word spoken and written to the neglect of those who practice sign language and pursue communication of God’s word through movement, visuals, etc.

after all. Jesus did likewise on the road to Emmaus when he helped re-orient Cleopas and his partner to the Hebrew scriptures.

Somehow we believe that as the preacher speaks a word in proclamation, the word “enters into the immediate past of the hearer, demanding a response.”³⁹⁶ Historically, that response has been a spectrum from titillation to conviction to novel understanding and comfort. Process homileticians believe that God always collaborates with the preached word, weaving “that proclamation into the rest of the hearer’s past, adapting a relevant initial aim that will lead to transformation,”³⁹⁷ through the unique, intentional touch (initial aim) of God for each person in each moment. Our ministry of proclamation in this way “can increase the resurrection power for each individual’s future”³⁹⁸ who is present in the preaching event. The spoken word heard becomes the source of God’s creative transformation of the church and world.

The spoken word of God from the past then speaks into our present in preaching. Though God is active in this work, it still behooves the preacher to become just as effective at exegeting the text as she is at exegeting the context and congregation for whom she ministers. Preaching witnesses “to the continuing presence of God the Source, Word, and Spirit in all life,”³⁹⁹ as well as to the unique revelation of God in the biblical accounts of Jesus the Christ, who remains the Living Word. Preaching is vital to the becoming of the church because it is a statement to the world that God is still speaking us into being. This is at the heart of the fingerprint of preaching.

Preaching is Deeply Contextual

The best preaching is preaching that is deeply contextual in its origin and destination, be it a high-profile urban context with a large interdenominational church or a tiny town and country church. In this way, preaching models the attention to contextuality exemplified by God, especially in the example of Jesus. Preaching is deeply contextual in its origin when the preacher has done the personal work of digesting the

³⁹⁶ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 120.

³⁹⁷ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 120.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ruth C. Duck. *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 138.

spoken word of God and inspecting how it speaks into her life. Then it is deeply contextual in destination when the preacher is intentional about discerning how the word of God may particularly impact the context she preaches amongst. The message, when organic to a context, more readily finds local soil to spread into, take root in. There is no one-size-fits-all rubric for this work, for soil differs from location to location, elevation to elevation.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones beautifully speaks to the mystery of preaching's contextuality when compared to the product of the sermon itself:

If you do not know the difference between the sermon and the act of preaching, as a preacher you will very soon discover it...It happens like this. You are in your own church preaching on a Sunday. You preach a sermon, and for some reason this sermon seems to go easily, smoothly, and with a degree of power. You are moved yourself; you have what is called 'a good service' and the people are as aware of this as you are. Very well; you are due to preach somewhere else, either the next Sunday or on a week-night, and you say to yourself, 'I will preach that sermon which I preached last Sunday. We had a wonderful service with it.' So you go into this other pulpit and you take that same text, and you start preaching. But you suddenly find that you have got virtually nothing; it all seems to collapse in your hands. What is the explanation?⁴⁰⁰

The explanation I propose is that the preacher has overlooked the power of context in the act of preaching itself. Context may be a component to the composition of the sermon manuscript, but the practice of preaching feeds off the presence of those who are in our midst and under the sound of our voice. The Holy Spirit can tune the preacher into the context in all its uniqueness, as can concrete tactics for knowing context offered by fields of sociology and ethnography.

In a relational view of existence, context is never static. The web of relation means that context is never merely isolated to the individual level. Context is also cultural, social, interhuman, even intermolecular. These integrated relationships, and the process we all partake in integrating them, produce reality.⁴⁰¹ Every moment is a new and unique occasion in our becoming, we are in a perpetual state of "creative

⁴⁰⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 96.

⁴⁰¹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 10.

transformation.”⁴⁰² Thus, context is a moving target, yet it is a monumental partner in the fingerprint of preaching.

Another way of saying this is that preaching—a vernacular, rhetorical practice—is inherently particular, something Jesus modeled in the ways in which he catered parables and teachings to those whose context he was in. Even still, we only catch a glimpse of those parables not in Jesus’ original context but through the contexts of the Evangelists some fifty years or more later. Our work involves always getting to know that historical biblical context better, not giving in to simplistic interpretations of Pharisees, Scribes, and women, for in their own time Jesus was fully aware of the complexity of each in context. At the same time, preachers cannot neglect the work of getting to know those our preaching ministry seeks to impact as well. Attention to context applies both to exegesis of scripture and tradition as well as congregation.

Preaching is an Interpretive Act

Related to the deep contextuality of preaching is the fact that preaching is always an interpretive act. It is never mere translation of the word of God. Thus, as preachers in the postmodern context, we know hermeneutical awareness is crucial to the development of preachers. We all have particular theological and experiential lenses through which we read the text and context, and those we preach to have their own as well.

We come to the text and context with certain questions and itches that we hope the word of God will scratch. As Thomas Long said, “The whole aim of a preacher’s study of a biblical text is to hear in that text a specific word for us, and who ‘we’ happen to be at this moment makes a considerable difference in how the preacher approaches the text.”⁴⁰³ The ‘we’ and ‘us’ through which we interrogate the text and context is never a static reality, for all of us are in a process of becoming. Even if a preacher uses the lectionary as a guide, she will often find that three years later, when a text rises to the surface again, the sermon preached to the congregation three years ago does not ‘fit’ with the congregation as it exists today, nor the preacher as she sees the world today. This is why scripture is endlessly prophetic, living, and breathing. It demands interpretation.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 9ff.

⁴⁰³ Thomas G. Long. *The Witness of Preaching* Second Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 69.

Preaching is not a historiographically rigorous exegetical paper attempting to explain what happened and why certain words were written or canonized. It is not a Message version of the Bible translated into the vernacular of the contemporary audience. We are not re-telling the sacred text without nuance. The very tone of our voice, the placement of our particular bodies in a particular city or congregation participates in the interpretation of the word of God. We interpret as our listeners interpret. Preaching is a profoundly interpretive act.

Preaching is an Act of Communication

Preaching is an act of communication. Always. A message emerges in the practice. It is mediated. There is directional energy of a word that must be received incarnationally. A people is always anticipated and anticipating the message. A person or group of persons is always active in the development and delivery of this message.

The Bible captures for us a narrative of God communicating with creation and our preaching partners in that ongoing work. Preaching is communication of the sustaining word of God to a people in need of sustenance. The message seeks a connection with flesh and is not content to remain in the mind of an individual.

Because it is a communicative act, and because communication is a product of culture and influencer of culture, *preaching is and has always been impacted by changes in culture, especially technoculture*. As forms of media and mediation change, so does preaching change. The rhetorical guidelines of Ancient Greek culture were a product of its time and the climate of society and politics of those who participated in that culture. Sermons became written manuscripts and printed artifacts with the arrival of the printing press. Microphones and systems of voice-amplification, along with large overhead screens permitted preachers to become “close-up” to thousands of persons, whispering, as cameras zoomed closer to the preacher’s face. Reification and stasis occurs in homiletics when we assume that any of these forms of mediation will carry over unchecked into the future rhetorical aspects of preaching. In a culture in which Web 3.0 mediates both ideas and affect, the means and methods of communication change dramatically.

Because of the other partners in the trans-cultural fingerprint of preaching, we are reminded that preaching remains a theo-rhetorical act. It is not simply giving a speech

about Jesus. It is a sacred communication, one infused with the Holy Spirit in ways I would dare not narrowly define. Rhetoric is historically understood as the art of “persuasion,” a concept that is also at the heart of process thought. But while rhetoric historically developed means for persuasion through the right arrangement of argument and choice of words, process understands persuasion to be *the unique action of God* who perpetually lures, attracts, and leads us to beautiful and just actions. Process preaching seeks to collaborate with God in that aim of luring creation into right relation through our proclamation.

But preaching is also rhetorical in the sense that it will, as an act of communication, take on different forms as cultures develop their own effective patterns for communication. Today, the term rhetoric is not limited to verbal language. It has been extended to aspects of the visual world and the immediate interactive world of social media as well. This opens up many new possibilities for preaching.

With the fingerprint, the practice of preaching is given flexibility to adapt to all sorts of people with varying gifts of communication as well as all sorts of changes in technoculture. We are in a new situation in which we can be free to minister in ways that are distinct and multivalent.

Note that the time and place for preaching does not have a transcultural node in the matrix. The ministry of preaching encompasses more than the once a week sermon, though for some this will remain the weekly and most prominent site of preaching delivered and received. Preaching also may take place in the midst of a congregation of Christians as well as in the midst of the unconverted and skeptical. We celebrate now the ways in which preaching may:

- be done with 140 characters or less, or 1,400 words on a Word Doc.
- take place in the liturgical setting or in a post to Facebook.
- be done as a monologue from a pulpit or as a dialogue from a chair.
- be poetry at an open mic night or a choreographed dance in a sanctuary.

Thinking ahead to the next chapter, in which we will engage the “gadfly” of social media more fully, we can say that Tweeting a verse of scripture without any interpretation behind it is not preaching, though it contributes to the ministry of preaching a sermon without beginning or end that is larger than any one sermon event. What makes preaching

recognizable is the work of interpreting text through context rather than simply broadcasting a text. Nor is the simple work of curating and sharing different news articles and the blogs of other people through social media a sermon in and of itself. But doing this work does help to bring depth to the matrix of theological conversation and offers links to those in our communities who want to dig deeper into the issues of the day and bring the sermon to life *together*. These are sermonic activities that enhance the quality of what Ronald Allen and Wesley Allen call “the sermon without end” that ministers of the Living Word tend to.⁴⁰⁴

It also is apparent that the work of identifying the fingerprint is not merely to argue for preaching in Web 3.0 exclusively and to replace conventional preaching with virtual preaching. That would be a narrow aim. As a preacher and homiletician, my hope is to bring flexibility into a discipline for the sake of the ongoing, life-sustaining communication of God, continuing the saving activity of the One whom we proclaim.⁴⁰⁵

For the remainder of the dissertation we will explore the possibilities for the transcultural fingerprint of preaching when it meets the context unique to our present technoculture. We have encountered that gadfly in chapter three and now, engaging the gadfly, we allow for novelty to emerge as it may.

Coming to Terms with a New Term: *Homilecclesiology* Emerges

To imagine the *how* of a proposal that reinvents preaching beyond the event, spatiality, and media of the pulpit-pew model is rather difficult. So while Barbara Brown Taylor tells us that we “should immediately dismiss any idea that preaching is the beginning, center, or end of the conversation,” our practice and unchecked history of the pulpit/pew binary creates a sort of paradox.⁴⁰⁶

To break from philosophical predecessors, Whitehead felt the need to cultivate his own *language*, thus adding to the difficulty of following process and its novel

⁴⁰⁴ Ronald J. Allen and O. Wesley Allen, Jr. *The Sermon Without End: A Conversational Approach to Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015).

⁴⁰⁵ Cooke, 189.

⁴⁰⁶ Barbara Brown Taylor. “The Weekly Wrestling Match,” in *What’s the Matter with Preaching Today?* Mike Graves, ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 171-2.

propositions that were counter to the dominant ways of viewing the world.⁴⁰⁷ Yet, the terms unsettled unconscious and unchallenged norms regarding the way of the world and the way of God in and with the world. Likewise, seeking a radically dynamic and relational homiletical reality that does not rely solely upon a pulpit/pew binary, and in the spirit of Whitehead's own novelty and neologisms, I propose "homilecclesiology" as a more apt and living term for the events and energies that are present in the moment of preaching and the entanglement of preacher, people, exegesis, Spirit, Word, church, liturgy, sacraments, ecology, and God in preaching beyond the pulpit/pew binary. My hope is that the word 'homilecclesiology' to discuss the events, energies, and entanglements of preaching in this digital age will infuse the practice and theory with the laity and promote a truly relational homiletic.

Homilecclesiology is a conversational homiletic, not merely in metaphor but also in practice. It seeks to be an "other-wise" homiletic in yet another direction, by opening the door to that encounter beyond the limits of the liturgical event, sanctuary space, and face-to-face encounter. It is a "homiletic of all believers" as well, but again beyond metaphor, it gets communal voice in the ongoing activity of preaching consistently and even disruptively. It is both a statement on "homiletical ecclesiology" and an "ecclesiological homiletic" in an era of ecclesiology that is shifting from reliance upon institutional affiliation to networked ways of relationality.⁴⁰⁸ And so, it is complicated in that its practice is radically horizontal, fluid, and spontaneous.

The most pointed break away from conventional homiletics is what is paradigmatic of the *where* and *when* of preaching, but this may also lead to an expansion on *who* can preach.⁴⁰⁹ As we have discussed in previous chapters, homiletics so far has

⁴⁰⁷Epperly, 10.

⁴⁰⁸ W. Allen, 39. Wesley Allen is one fellow homiletician who strives to get beyond the pulpit binary by highlighting ecclesiology and indeed challenges the notion that preaching should be hierarchically defined by the sermon from the pulpit. However, homilecclesiology seeks openness to conversational preaching in ways Allen seems unwilling to venture. This is more than the "conversation sermon" from the pulpit. It is naming the very conversation(s) taking place in X-reality around sacred texts and living faith 'preaching.' Allen seems tethered to the sermon as performance of one even though he seeks to demote the rank of that moment in the matrix of theological conversation as on par with other moments.

⁴⁰⁹ When we get to the novel practices for preaching in chapter five, we will notice the ways in which the congregation actively becomes co-participants in the ministry of preaching. There are ways then for conversational preaching to, in practice, be more than a metaphor for the tactics of listening before and after the sermon. The sermon itself may become more and more conversational, in actuality.

been a field of study embedded in the classic Western binary schema and the institutionality it both feeds and is a product of. Embedded in this schema, homileticians have struggled, whether they knew it or not, to break from the oppressive power lines of the schema as pertains to the place of the pulpit over and against the place of the pew. Preaching also then has become a practice tethered to the worship service, for with every passing year, the Sunday worship service becomes the only time and place for the congregation to gather to hear the word proclaimed. This tethering has resulted in stasis around the where and when of preaching, which has waylaid homiletic creativity and innovation. To pointedly break from this spiral and allow emerging communities to exit the house of the Sunday sanctuary, a new term must be claimed, hence the use of *homilecclesiology* rather than *homiletics*.

Preaching Exits the House of the Sanctuary

We have systemic problems, which is to say the problems facing the church and all of humanity are a series of interconnected, interanimating, and interdependent problems.⁴¹⁰

In the broad church today, there is a cloud of anxiety that seemingly follows most pastors, seminary boards, faculty, and those congregants who faithfully remain in the fold of the institutional church. Spoken and unspoken is fear about the death of the church as it has been defined, and so the death of Christianity, as it narrowly has been defined. There is fear that great changes are afoot and beyond our control. There is fear of the unknown.

In the midst of these fears, so many churches and theological institutions struggle to maintain home base—be it the sanctuary or seminary campus. The idea of exiting these houses of history and security and memory is often depressing, crippling, and debilitating.

But not all institutions see the exit as forced or as failure. Some see it as a chance to untether to deteriorating structures that were becoming a drain on the work of ministry, education, and service. Some churches rent storefronts after selling their sanctuary. Some

⁴¹⁰ Dwight J. Friesen, *Thy Kingdom Connected: What the Church Can Learn from Facebook, the Internet, and Other Networks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 22.

seminaries create a network online for education and find more students across a greater geographical range than ever possible before. Some see the changes within an alternate paradigm. They are telling a different story about what it means to be church and to train leaders for the church.

In *Other-wise Preaching*, John S. McClure paints a broad picture of waves of so-called “exits” that have taken place in the history of preaching. These exits include such shifts as paradigmatic innovation regarding the traditioned authorities in preaching: that is Bible, tradition, experience, and reason. In light of postmodern realities, McClure claims a radical new grounding for preaching needs to be established before engaging with those four authorities.

Undergirding these exits is McClure’s theo-ethical proposal for homiletics in a postmodern era is a commitment to human others first and foremost.⁴¹¹ Deriving his norms from the work of Emmanuel Levinas, McClure claims that once preachers exit those arenas of misplaced concrete or stasis,⁴¹² including the concrete we mistakenly place on our personal identity as if we are unaffected by other organisms in their becoming, they are able to meet with the face of the other and find the concrete erased. They also find in that meeting a lure of obligation to the care of that other-neighbor, not merely for the sake of the sermon but for the sake of the world. Experiencing the erasure of misplaced concrete in the personal identity of the preacher in that meeting, a new identity begins to be reclaimed with the other’s face/*visage* or *vulnerability*, not strictly limited for Levinas to the embodied face-to-face, now in view as she turns to scripture, experience tradition and reason. And, in a key familiar to process thought, our preaching is impacted by these erasure-encounters again and again.

Practically speaking, the other-wise preacher then approaches traditional hegemonies of authority with a deconstructive eye, not merely accepting as given the power previous generations had reinforced in their preaching practices. And yet, the most

⁴¹¹ John S. McClure. *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 133-4.

⁴¹² “Misplaced concrete” is my language for what I see as the same phenomenon described in McClure as “hegemonies.” The results of both terms are evidenced by the crushing of novelty/innovation as both pursue normalizing narrowness in the midst of the challenge of gadflies. Again, this is a play on Whitehead’s notion of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness in mathematics. It is not a critique of concrescence, which is a vital aspect of process thought. Misplaced concrete is aligned with stasis as an enemy to the natural flow of reality.

profound sign of authority for preaching, that of the pulpit, is not approached with an other-wise critical eye. McClure concludes his proposal with this call: “Other-wise preachers...stand in pulpits on Sunday mornings *exiting* (going under erasure) and taking people with them.”⁴¹³ Even if the person of the preacher exits metaphorically, there stands the pulpit over the pew. Even if the preacher exits metaphorically, the collective gaze looks not within or to each other but up at the pulpit awaiting the word of God to be given voice and presence. This final hegemony remains unchallenged, though McClure has offered many tactics for inhabiting its location in other-wise ways.

Ultimately, homilecology advances beyond McClure’s proposal in two ways: first, it invites preaching to exit the house of the sanctuary, paradigmatically and pragmatically. Second, it challenges the narrow frame set up in this postmodern ethic that only face-to-face encounters count as erasure provoking encounters with the presence of God. It is this issue that we will first discuss.

Beyond the Limits of Conventional Face-to-Face Encounter

In 2001, when McClure published this face-to-face ethic for homiletics, the World Wide Web was a very different place. In the era of Web 1.0, most people sat down at a personal computer in order to go on-line and engage in mostly read-only content. Virtual worlds did exist at this time, and certain subsets of people were criticized for logging onto these worlds in order to escape the reality of the conventional reality, including ministers who planted churches in VR. Thus, though the technology existed at the time, it is likely that McClure did not imagine that a preacher could go and speak with others, meeting the *visage* or vulnerability of our neighbor, in the virtual world. It was assumed that this work could only take place IRL (In Real Life).⁴¹⁴ Thus, as McClure speaks of erasure in the encounter of an other, he asks those who would be other-wise preachers to commit to speaking with others by leaving her desk to go “in search of real bodies to engage in conversation about the text.”⁴¹⁵ The preaching life thus becomes a rhythm of enriching the world through radical encounter with the otherness of humanity. Sermons

⁴¹³ McClure, *Other-wise*, 152.

⁴¹⁴ “IRL” means In Real Life in the parlance of our technoculture.

⁴¹⁵ McClure, *Other-wise*, 146.

are not merely impacted by this rhythm. McClure sees this posture as crucial to the maturing of the world in a post-modern, globalized moment in history.

In our current technoculture of Web 3.0, we no longer place such firm boundaries between the real and virtual world. The real world, in fact, is mostly a hybrid of virtual and conventional encounters. I have affirmed Kathryn Reklis' conception of this reality as "X-reality" to more aptly speak to its novelty.⁴¹⁶ Incarnation is not more likely to occur in one site as opposed to the other. Christ transcends and is imminent within X-reality. We have shifted the paradigm to move away from binary thinking. So, homilecclesiology extends McClure's work of challenging implicit authorities in preaching by offering preachers the chance to exit the house of the sanctuary and move on from homiletical reasoning that stifles our engagement beyond pulpit and pew as well as conventional reality. It extends the place of encounter to include but not be limited to the smart phone, tablet, or computer, but it also pays attention to the values now promoted by the technoculture we are becoming within.

Perhaps the greatest binary disrupted by this process homilecclesiology is the sacred/secular divide that, as it exists, vilifies online encounter as being less (real, meaningful, sacred, etc.) than encounter IRL. Allowing the house of the sanctuary to be what validates preaching only reifies those limits on homiletical imagination, even if we already see in real life preaching that transgresses those boundaries. Ministerial life in X-reality—the posture of radical blurring of those on/off line boundaries—can promote the celebration of the sanctity of every moment, for platforms exist which can name every moment, *and place*, as infused with God. It is a profoundly panentheistic stance. Encounters with others and otherness are just as apt to occur in X-reality as they are on the street. This may be truer for Salina, Kansas, than Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Nonetheless, in McClure's *Other-wise* homiletic, non-organic, local encounters are not given much weight as encounters that may indeed lead to erasure, lead to radical transformation. These blinders to relational encounters in X-reality will be challenged by homilecclesiology as we exit the paradigm established by house of the sanctuary as it

⁴¹⁶ Reklis, *Ibid.*

faces “legitimacy collapse”⁴¹⁷ and into the paradigm expressed in the networked shaped house of the “Digital Cathedral.”

Legitimacy Collapse: Why Sanctuary Crumbles in Our Networked Age

Joshua Cooper Ramo is a former advisor to CEOs, generals, and politicians who has seen in his lifetime a disruption of reality. Ramo, in his book *The Seventh Sense*, is another voice proclaiming that we are on the brink of a radical paradigm shift akin to the stirrings that led to the Enlightenment 300 years ago.⁴¹⁸ According to Ramo, evidence of these shifts is found in “legitimacy collapse,” something that happened in the Reformation and that is happening again now.⁴¹⁹ On the whole, Ramo argues that respect for and trust in institutions has collapsed, be it our political institutions, banking, and education.

As we have discussed, homileticians have felt legitimacy collapse for years. What we are now seeing from above is more than just a challenge to the church and its hierarchical systems. All traditional systems organized by gatekeepers and hierarchies are being radically confronted by a turn to networked identity rather than identity through institutional affiliation. This shift introduces fluidity and complexity to identity as well. Those who study community through a networked approach argue “that communities are in their essence social structures and not spatial or geographic structures such as neighborhoods.”⁴²⁰ Whereas institutions are generally static and/or slow moving to change, networks are in constant flux, for a network is any set of connective points. New points are introduced daily, even hourly, as the internet has fewer gatekeepers than

⁴¹⁷ Jeffery R. Young. “How Colleges Should Adapt in a Networked Age.” podcast interview with Joshua Cooper Ramo for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 21, 2016). http://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Colleges-Should-Adapt-in-a/237842?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en&elqTrackId=7731dc0e96844e10b1cb30f2bfe98dbb&elq=978bf280b4d4491fb0982806658c1700&elqaid=10816&elqat=1&elqCampaignId=4107 (accessed September 23, 2016).

⁴¹⁸ Joshua Cooper Ramo. *The Seventh Sense: Power, Fortune, and Survival in the Age of Networks*. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2016).

⁴¹⁹ Young, Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Campbell and Garner, 7.

institutional life.⁴²¹ Identity becomes less about the institution that you are a member of and more about who or what you are connected to.

This networked reality has its benefits and risks, of course. Ramo argues that the myth of a radical democratized internet is in fact, myth. Networks can fall into being engines for perpetuating inequality just as easily as institutions can. After all, ISIS is a terrorist network, one that is far more difficult to defeat by its networked nature that transgresses geographical boundary lines. Ramo reminds us that the network is far more malleable and quick to change than any institution can be.

Unlike Ramo, the aim of cultivating awareness about our networked ways of becoming is not mastery over a new system, for this would be a fall into grasp. His portrait of connection seems less concerned about empowerment and seeing value in our capacities to be impacted and to impact connectively as it does to make connections for maximum impact in a one-way sense of power for leaders impacted by the institutional collapse to reassert their power. In his vision of the age to come, human instincts battle with machine instincts.⁴²² His is still a very modern, binary world of us vs. them. Though he correctly names the shift to networked reality and what it means for definitions of authority and power, he tries to carry over Enlightenment notions of reality into a fluid system in which these fragile categories no longer compute.

Homilecclesiology sees an emerging networked reality not as a threat to clerical power, but as a revolution in ecclesial empowerment. Today, laity and leaders alike are exhibiting traits of what Campbell and Garner call the “prosumer.”⁴²³ The binary of producer/consumer is complicated in X-reality and in the behaviors of Web 3.0, thus the elision. The digital platforms of Web 3.0 empower individualization and tailoring of the products encountered in the network. We are all curators active in the development of the connections we make through our smartphones and devices. We are less satiated by consuming the products of a few than by getting our thoughts, opinions, and voice in the mashup up of a new product.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ Campbell and Garner, 5.

⁴²² Ramo, 30.

⁴²³ Campbell and Garner, 44.

⁴²⁴ See McClure, *Mashup Religion*, 95ff. McClure speaks to the opportunity, with our given technologies, to “invent the theologically possible” through “sampling, remixing, and mashup.” The theologian/preacher

Preachers may engage this desire for interactivity rather than seek to preserve their authority as resident theologians. They may do this by taking sermon development into new media, leaving it open to the laity for comment, remix, and challenge. They may even take their proclamation into these platforms via Twitter chats guided around a certain text, listening and speaking together to find the gospel for the moment in that network of connectivity. Preachers still will study and prepare as those who facilitate the learning environment that is preaching conversationally. This flexibility may lead to less polished and clean sermons as products perfected for Sunday, but does not imply that preachers may show up with nothing prepared and improvise with the congregation on Sunday morning. Others may still offer the Sunday sermon informed and engaged more dynamically because of the interactions taking place during sermon preparation. But all of this means more investment from the church—understood as a dynamic network rather than static institution—as a priesthood of all believers with stake in the process of becoming more like Jesus. This shift will require more dedication and education in the laity as a whole.

Homilecclesiology seeks to nurture pastors as connectional hubs who are doing the work of helping us remain in touch with one another and our glocal realities through the Living Word. Within networked reality, ministers to the Living Word seek to weave a cathedral built of living stones, more fluid, spontaneous, trans-geographical and trans-ecumenical than our sanctuaries of stone, brick, and mortar.

Homilecclesiology: The Novel Site(s) and Events for Preaching: “In Cathedral”

Rev. Keith Anderson calls on pastors to nurture an ecclesiology of “Digital Cathedral” in his 2015 book by the same name. This is not, as it may appear at first glance, a call to pastors to establish churches online and to give up on conventional churches off-line. Such a posture reifies the false firm boundaries between online and off-line realities. Rather, Anderson calls on pastors to take their ministry into X-reality by embracing “an expansive and holistic understanding of church—one that extends

is metaphorically understood by McClure to be a songwriter using her voice, rules of composition, and sampling of other voices to allow a new message or song to be heard. This book very much anticipates the desires of Web 3.0 culture to be prosumers of art/meaning rather than consumers and it explores the preaching genre without over-reliance upon the pulpit as static location for preaching/theologizing.

ministry both into digital and local gathering spaces.” This ministry tends to the sacred in the everyday, rather than focusing solely on the sacred in the sanctuary. It is an ecclesiology that radically partners with the shifts in culture that have occurred through the emergence of our social media technoculture. The most radical shift being that of networked ways of fluid connection, identity, and formation rather than hierarchical institutional static ways of identity by permanent affiliation.

In many ways, Anderson’s Digital Cathedral is a quality of presence and connection in the network through the lens of Christian faith. He is attempting to describe a quality of connection—a way of establishing a distinctively Christian network within the network—so that pastors can engage with networked reality theologically and critically. The network society, as it exists, “both unites people and fragments them into specialized groups.”⁴²⁵ Recalling Kranzberg, the society that is becoming from the development of our technoculture is not inherently good (connectional in just and affirming ways that nurture a better society) or bad (isolation and harmful individuation to the detriment of society). Our technoculture is not neutral either. This is due to the fact that the network emerges from the tension between personal operating systems in which the individual acts as some sort of “autonomous center” as well as connectional with unprecedented interactions between individuals across traditional boundaries of connection.⁴²⁶ Merely doing ministry through social media may or may not represent a critically held theological understanding of who Jesus is and how we seek to re-present him to the world. Thus, Christian leaders need be aware of how they network in the network.

Those who would be authorities in the Digital Cathedral, Anderson’s network within the network, must consider authority in a novel way in order to critically correlate with network society as a whole. Thus, the term “in Cathedral” is coined. Anderson uses this term coined by his colleague Elizabeth Drescher to describe his particular, novel, understanding of church leadership in this digital age. In cathedral plays off the term *ex cathedra*, which translates as “from the chair.”⁴²⁷ Historically, this chair was known as

⁴²⁵ Campbell and Garner, 8.

⁴²⁶ Campbell and Garner, 9.

⁴²⁷ Keith Anderson. *The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), 20.

the teaching chair, and was the site in the cathedral from which the bishop would speak pronouncements to the congregation. For hundreds of years, technoculture supported this way of leadership via the appointment of institutional authorities exercising power from the top down to the laity who gathered in static institutions of the Imperial Church.

The first radical challenge to this way of ministering came with the Reformation and the shifts in power that occurred with the printing press and its technoculture. From here, the Catholic Church made a marked stance in the past, unmoving on the model of *ex cathedra* leadership, while the Reformers, in a spectrum of course, allowed novel understandings of how a minister leads and how God's will and word are distributed beyond the cathedra. Yet it seems that in many ways the power shifted to the pulpit as Luther's "metaphor 'Word of God' was reserved for Christ, the Bible, and preaching."⁴²⁸ The metaphor was powerful enough, according to Wes Allen, to equate "the preacher's voice with Christ's and the Bible," which of course is "a false equation."⁴²⁹ This equation is correlated to the binary schema, wherein as we have discussed before, God, Christ, pulpit, preacher are lined up over and against the world, pew, laity. Now five hundred years later, we are seeing new challengers, steeped in a new technoculture, question the acceptance of this understanding of how God speaks to the world.

What happens to a ministry based on the notion of unwavering institutions when society begins a radical movement away from trust in institutional authorities—be it in politics, media, banking, and yes, religion? Cracks in the infrastructure. New metaphors emerge to try and stop the leaks, but none of them are strong enough to block the pressure as it builds. In order to remain in the house of the sanctuary, homileticians have sought to grasp conversational metaphors for the pulpit and yet it seems to not be enough of a proposal to pave the way for vital ministry to the Living Word in this digital age. It is time to exit the house of the sanctuary, as if the pulpit were the *only* legitimating factor for the ministry of preaching.

In order to exit the house of the sanctuary, we must note that preaching historically, not in one event or one year, entered the house of the sanctuary through a series of negotiations and alignments with technoculture and imperialistic movements.

⁴²⁸ W. Allen, 18.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

When it did this, a new authorizing symbol was elevated—that of the pulpit. Of course, Jesus never spoke from a cathedra, let alone a pulpit (perhaps once in that earliest and shortest sermon before the synagogue in his hometown). Preaching for years took place underground, in homes, in city centers, on hills and in those years the gap between preacher and people grew as the institution of the church grew and gained global power. The pulpit and the sanctuary have their own technological-theological histories and seeing them in such a way reminds us that those elements are not essential to *the* definition of preaching.⁴³⁰

Ex cathedra is still a term used today, now implying infallibility and generally used to describe someone who is overbearing in their speaking on issues. *Ex cathedra* also refers specifically to the office of the pope in the Roman Catholic Church who, when speaking from that chair/office, is believed to be offering infallible teachings to the church. This is unilateral institutional power, wherein the one who speaks *ex cathedra* is granted all authority to shepherd the church. Thus the ecclesiology of church *ex cathedra* revolves around the formal authority of the pope. We can also think of *ex cathedra* metaphorically and apply it widely to sovereign hierarchical models of church wherein the one has all power over the rest from the pulpit—be it a wooden pulpit or a screen projecting the authority of a preacher in satellites of churches across the country. This is the ecclesiology of the classic western schema. The One seated in the chair as the One aligned with God over and against the rest.

Ecclesiology in cathedral contrasts that centripetal authority of the installed bishop/pope/pastor of the institutional church with a spirituality of the everyday that is centrifugal in nature, spiraling outward into the networked X-reality that we now build community within, beyond the institutional church. Authority is shared for God is not exclusively in proximity to the One seated in a pastoral office to speak on behalf of God.

⁴³⁰ The most detailed sketch of the preaching ministry from the earliest years up through the mid-twentieth century is Bernard Cooke's 1976 book *Ministry to Word and Sacrament*. In it he describes how practices in specific historical periods of the Christian movement shaped and were shaped by theologies of authority and proclamation and pastor. Any look into the *longue durée* of history should remove some anxieties and fears over changes in our historical context and practice, and remind us of the vast array of valid and historically rooted preaching ministries that exist into today and that may come into being in the future.

Rather, God speaks to everyone and the pastor strives to make connections to this collective speaking in order to discern God's lure for the church in this day and age.⁴³¹

Anderson has done significant research around what character traits are required for pastors to thrive in this digital and spiritual age, and the emerging ministry in cathedral as opposed to the sanctuary based model.⁴³² For Anderson, survival comes down to three leadership attributes: ministry as “networked, relational, and incarnational.”⁴³³ These three attributes exist in perichoretic ways within the leader who speaks/listens in cathedral. To only tend to one is to render it less effective than it could be in collaboration with the others. According to Anderson, as ministers become more aware of the networked nature of life they become more aware of the undergirding relationality of reality and so are able to be more incarnational—that is obedient to “an incarnational impulse to be present where people are” rather than to demand attendance from people where the preacher plants herself.⁴³⁴

These qualities of ministry align easily with a process understanding of how God relates with the world. Rather than claiming that God transcends the world with unidirectional power, process says God is supremely with the world and within the world and that world is within God. God is less concerned with maintaining group boundaries of who is in or out of the family than with seeking to awaken all of creation to an abiding whisper within reach of anyone at any time. Ministry in cathedral is a lot like ministry in process theology: it mirrors the deep relationality, interdependence, and co-creativity of God. But this also reflects the technoculture we live and move and have our being in. This is ministry that is hybrid in nature, celebratory in its hybridity rather than forced into it. This is ministry that does not lament the bygone golden years of ministry in sanctuary, but that prophetically engages ministerial presence and practice in X-reality, going to where people are rather than expecting them to enter our doors to hear the Word of the Lord.

⁴³¹ As we will see in the next chapter, the location of preaching does not necessarily lead to reform. Technologically novel means of preaching that exist today do and do not model the posture of preaching in cathedral. Thus the need for a theo-ethic in the final chapter of this project.

⁴³² See also Anderson and Drescher, *Click2Save*.

⁴³³ Anderson, 44.

⁴³⁴ Anderson, 90.

Preaching in the house of the sanctuary was long tethered to preaching *ex cathedra*. Power lines ran one way, from the cathedra, then the pulpit, out to the pew. This ushered in homiletic theories and theologies that focus on those who come into the sacred church on Sunday, out of the secular world, as being the recipients of the preached word. This centripetal force which has long been a given to homiletics is counter to the desires of Web 3.0 and networked reality. However, it seems resistance goes back farther than our recent shifts. Perhaps those tensions expressed in the 1960s and early 1970s by homileticians who noticed a cultural shift regarding authority figures was the start of an exit from the house of the sanctuary that needed to take place paradigmatically in homiletics. Perhaps Web 3.0 and the turn to more collective, democratic shifts in authority has seeds in the unrest of the Civil Rights Age, the cynicism at the end of Flower Power, and those crises in preaching described by Fred Craddock, David Randolph, and Clyde Reid among others. We have been on the path of exiting the house of the sanctuary for some time, but have been afraid to name it as such and to grieve the loss of common landmarks for our ministry in the exiting.

Homilecclesiology: The Sermon as Dipolar Event

Recall from the second chapter the language of God's dipolar nature, that God exists in the perpetual tension of consequent (imminent, fluent, malleable, responsive) and primordial (eternal, transcendent, immanent, eminent) natures. And because God is the chief exemplar of all becoming, we too are dipolar in nature in less amplified ways.⁴³⁵ We are human becomings, not just beings. We have the capacity to respond and change but rooting all such changes are aspect of ourselves that are in their own right eternal to who we are in the *longue durée* of our living. In other words, some part of us is recognizable to who we were at age one, 13, 22, and 48. We are not malleable that our past is erased in our future. What is true of God is true of humanity. What is true of humanity is true of creation. What is true of creation is true even of practices such as preaching.

The primordial is the nature traditionally ascribed to God, as One who has supreme knowledge from the beginning of creation. This knowledge, not coupled with

⁴³⁵ Whitehead, *P&R*, 343.

the consequent nature, is perfect and unchanging knowledge. Creation has no knowledge of its own and nothing to contribute to God's knowledge. Power then is unidirectional rather than multidirectional. Rather than a God of mutual relation and conversation within creation, we have a God of unidirectional relation and invasion of creation to right our wrongs, exercise judgment, or insert revelations at moments of God's choosing.

The sermon in the traditional binary schema is performed in the manner of primordial nature. The event is unidirectional, of single focus, seeking to target a malleable and consequent population. The sermon seeks to create a new people but it in and of itself is no longer in the process of being created. Rather, it is a message delivered to the pew, performed in the pulpit, and heard by the laity who then is changed by the message.

In contemporary homiletic theory, we have lifted up the need to cultivate preachers with the capacity to be impacted by their contexts if they truly wish to be a force of impact in their contexts. But for some reason, this dipolar nature of the preacher was cast aside in the event of the sermon itself. The nature of the sermon event has maintained the unidirectional nature of a God who impacts but is not impacted, a Word who grasps us but cannot be touched by us, a message that transcends reality but will not be tainted by this fluent and unreliable reality. Homilecclesiology nurtures the dipolar nature for the sake of preaching itself.

Process theology does not leave out the consequent nature of God. Therefore, moments in the Scriptures wherein a prophet argues with God and changes God's mind are not mere flukes or the result of a few scattered super humans with unique relationality to God. All human beings impact the mind, heart, and creativity of God. Whitehead's closing litany to *Process and Reality* infuses his proposal for a novel understanding of a God who is dipolar in nature:

It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent,
as that the World is permanent and God is fluent.
It is as true to say that God is one and the World many,
as that the World is one and God many.
It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently,
as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently.
It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God,
as that God is immanent in the World.

It is as true to say that God transcends the World,
as that the World transcends God.
It is as true to say that God creates the World,
as that the World creates God.⁴³⁶

What if we were to insert the practice of preaching into this litany? What could it mean for us who risk exiting the house of the sanctuary in homiletics to consider the dipolar nature of the sermon in more than metaphorical ways? Could we truly say:

It is as true to say that the message is permanent and the context fluent,
as that the context is permanent and the message is fluent.
It is as true to say that the pulpit is one and the pew many,
as that the pew is one and pulpit many.
It is as true to say that, in comparison with laity, the preacher is actual eminently,
as that, in comparison with the preacher, the laity is actual eminently.
It is as true to say that the people are immanent in the sermon,
as that the sermon is immanent in the people.
It is as true to say that Gospel transcends the congregation,
as that the congregation transcends Gospel.
It is as true to say that the pastor creates the sermon,
as that the people creates the sermon.

Out of this litany, the boundaries between preacher and people are complicated. No longer is the priesthood of all believers a trope in the sermon event, indeed, the priesthood is given the agency to proclaim the Gospel and contribute to the spread of the Living Word throughout the networks in which we live, move, and have our being. The sermon is truly without beginning or end, nor is it confined to the pew once a week. It is an ongoing conversation in which the whisper of God, manifest throughout creation, is steadily being amplified, brought to the surface of human consciousness, given space to dialogue.

The capacity of the message to be impacted by the laity, directly, is a value in homilecclesiology. This is more than a conversational sermonic approach. This is a call to imagine the dialogue as sermon, wherein our very life of prayer, experience, and study is the sermon preparation and the insights that emerge in the dialogue are indeed lifted up as the aim of the sermon. The aim is discovered, mutually, rather than deduced by one and assented to be the many.

⁴³⁶ Whitehead, *P&R*, 348.

As preaching exits the house of the sanctuary it is free to dance with the emerging values of our digital age, mentioned in the previous chapter: 1) the changing understanding of relational presence in X-reality; 2) the shift from consumer minded laity to curator and collaborator; 3) the democratization of information that is newsworthy, or worthy of going viral; and 4) credibility of messages being more tied to the timeliness of their presence than the depth of the message. In Anderson's words, "the invitation of the Digital Cathedral" is "to put ourselves in places to encounter others, to appreciate the depths of the everyday, and to name it holy."⁴³⁷ Not only are we allowing those encounters, we are embracing the ways in which those encounters influence us, even the sermons we prepare and are always preparing. The institutional temples for preaching and preachers, so many of which are facing legitimacy collapse, can no longer horde the holiness of God. Our technoculture invites preachers to engage in the collaborative work of making the gospel go viral beyond the confines of ourselves. But this ministry must also emerge from critically held notions of who God is and so who we are and how we relate to one another. Thus, a theo-ethic is still required.

A theo-ethically informed posture of ministry in the Digital Cathedral invites pastors to leave the door of the church—for some in total as new missionaries in the field of Web 3.0 and others in hybrid fashion—and seek and save the lost holy moments of our days. We walk about X-reality not merely to jot down sermon examples for Sunday. We walk about to name or photograph right then and there gospel being proclaimed or to confront those conversational trajectories that are counter to the gospel. We walk about to listen to others and see where our congregants are stuck and inspired and we find that the whole of our preaching ministry is infused with life-giving relationality. We exit the house of the sanctuary and enter into the house of the digital cathedral as those with authority in the form of particular ministry experience and theological wisdom, but we do not hold that authority over people. We merely hope to use the power we have to empower others to speak gospel into broken spaces: that God loves the whole world unconditionally and so we must partner with God to bring justice to those who are not being loved in this world.

⁴³⁷ Anderson, 26.

Preaching in Cathedral: The Walk to Emmaus, Revisited (Again)

Exits are traumatic events. Transitions out of one job and into another are perhaps lesser traumas than exits that take place when we separate from a partner or lose a loved one to the communion of saints. Even if an exit is to ‘something better’ it is a trauma. There is a reason why stress tests weight the joys of giving birth, buying a new home, getting married, and starting a new job on levels on par with the death of a loved one, illness, losing a job, etc.

Exits occur on micro and macro scales. In this moment, we are in the midst of a macro exit from a modern, print driven institutionalized era into one that looks to be digital, networked, and hybrid.⁴³⁸ Already, we who care for and are cared for within the church have felt the trauma of an exit from the house of the sanctuary, and some call it a death. We have felt this in a generation of nones and spiritual but not religious who no longer sit in the pew, but cultivate religious or spiritual life as prosumer rather than consumer. On the level of theological education as an institution (*always* related to the health of the church of course), we have felt the trauma of cutting faculty and staff in seminaries because there are not enough resources to support them and not enough placements in established and stable sanctuaries to set up our graduates with job security out of seminary. Some of us remain in the sanctuary others have left altogether and hope to at least die with dignity. Others wander away from it to seek new vocations, lamenting the rubble as it accumulates in campuses and sanctuaries sold to the highest bidder.

Two disciples were on the road, walking away from the sight/site of the rubble of their decimated expectations. Jesus of Nazareth, the one they really thought would be Messiah, the one who really would restore the might of God in Jerusalem and overthrow

⁴³⁸ See John Dorhauer. *Beyond Resistance: The Institutional Church Meets the Postmodern World* (Chicago, IL: The Exploration Press of Chicago Theological Seminary, 2015). This postmodern world the church is meeting manifests itself in the ways of the Gadfly in this project. Dorhauer calls the church to own up to the death of church as it has been, what he calls “church 2.0,” in order to reimagine church as it will be in the years to come, or “church 3.0.” According to Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, mission is what the church needs to focus on in the midst of the death of church as institution/building to keep the church from dying with the properties it can no longer sustain. Many churches are making the choice to remain sustainable by either being a “church with a pastor but not a building, or figure out how to be church with a building but not a pastor” (11). Seminaries face the same questions, choosing buildings over faculty and staff or vice versa. Maintaining the sanctuary lifestyle is costly for the Church in these emerging times, but Dorhauer reminds us that, just as church 1.0 did not vanish with church 2.0, church 2.0 will not vanish with church 3.0. Thus as I have argued before, we need to grow in size and stature, allowing for variety rather than forcing a new hegemonic ecclesiology.

the Roman occupation, was dead. Not only was he dead, he was murdered in a public and political demonstration of power. The movement that those in power were so afraid of had been stopped dead in its tracks, or so they believed. While some participants in the movement remained near the place where Jesus' exit(cution) took place, this pair could not bear it. They instead headed West, poetically into the direction of the setting sun, to a town called Emmaus.

We could imagine their distress, but just in case our storyteller Luke tells us in verse 15 of their "heated discussion."⁴³⁹ They kept rehashing the facts, their experiences and encounters with Jesus, all the ways in which it really seemed as if he was more than the average teacher, someone sent from God. They had witnessed glimpse after glimpse of glory and now what? Was it a dream? Did we imagine it? Now Jesus was in a tomb and nothing in the real world seemed different than it was before the wild three years of his ministry began.

Thomas Long, as was discussed in chapter two, revisited this text, in the midst of an ecumenical movement of liturgical renewal that seemed to breath new life into the institutional church. Long exegetes the text in order to bring "the Lord's Supper back from exile in Presbyterian and Reformed congregations" with his retelling of the Emmaus legend.⁴⁴⁰ It was not until the Stranger, who was invited to dine with the wandering pair, broke and blessed the bread that he was revealed as Jesus. In like manner, argues Long, we experience the presence of the Christ proclaimed from the pulpit in the mystery and activity of the Lord's Supper. While Long used this text convincingly to speak to the historical and theological reciprocity of proclamation and communion the unfortunate by-product of this was the binding of preaching to a Sunday service in a sanctuary by one who is ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Long's theology of preaching is bound to the sanctuary and the tight-knit congregation that inhabits it. In his classic *The Witness of Preaching*, Long opens with the grounding image of a preacher as one who moves from dwelling amongst the

⁴³⁹ J. Bradley Chance. "The Journey to Emmaus: Insights on Scripture from Mystical Understandings of Attachment and Detachment" in *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 38 no 4 (Winter 2011), 363-381. Chance highlights that the Greek verb *suzētein* found here could mean discussion but also is used at other times by Luke to convey disputation rather than dialogue-see Luke 22:23; Acts 6:9; and Acts 9:29.

⁴⁴⁰ Long, *Reclaiming*, 14.

congregation in the pews to being called forth to witness to the Gospel to the congregation as one who emerges from the congregation.⁴⁴¹ This starting point should lead to preaching that inherently has pastoral sensitivity, the preacher always with the needs and experiences and personalities of her congregation in mind as she goes through sermon preparation. But the pulpit—and the sanctuary ecclesiology it emerges from—is of vital import to Long’s homiletic. He reminds preachers that while they may wish to wander from the pulpit and preach in other spaces of the sanctuary from time to time, the pulpit “is a symbol of the presence of the word,” meaning that standing there to deliver the sermon conveys the message “I am the temporary occupant of a venerable office to which I am committed and obedient.”⁴⁴² Long’s homiletic is bound to sanctuary and assumptions that preaching, like presiding at Table or in Baptism, is an office of one rather than truly communal affair. The preacher may have sat in the pews once, but now she has undergone a transformation that renders her set apart as theologian in residence. Thus Long, like most homileticians, aims at preaching being conversational in style, but not in delivery nor really preparation.

No wonder then that in his revisiting of the text, the nature of the proclamation on the road to Emmaus is framed as being monological, overlooking perhaps the dialogical quality of this pericope. Jesus stands in as the model for clergy and the office they hold, as *the* interpreter of scriptures and *the* breaker of bread. But look again at the text. The sermon begins not with a monologue from Jesus. It begins in the heated conversation between two followers. These followers are moving, not stationed in Jerusalem—the site of Jesus’ exit. They left the sanctuary of the Upper Room and are now walking and talking. As they are in the midst of this theological dialogue about Jesus, Jesus—in the guise of a Stranger—sneaks up on them. They do not realize it at first, but the reader is clued in to the fact that the one who provokes, listens, replies, and responds is the Resurrected Jesus, the Living Word of God.

The nature of the sermon-event here is not merely metaphorically conversational. This sermon-event is a conversation. It is a collaborative effort between ordinary people and the Living Word who is with us in these dialogues, pulpit or not. Jesus appears for a

⁴⁴¹ Long. *Witness*, 4.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 239.

moment but before he vanishes he has reoriented the interpretation of the scriptures that these two ordinary sojourners, opening their minds to understand the scriptures just as their eyes had been opened to his presence with them at the table. His followers do not grasp Jesus, but his presence was profoundly experienced. Recall the transfiguration: the epiphanic Christ will not be attached to any static place or time. Oh how our institutions long to grasp Christ, keep him safe and near and controlled and predictable for the sake of the church. Yet this is not the Christ revealed to us in scripture. Theologically, touch is the model, not grasp.

Before Jesus died, rose, ascended he could not fully empower the disciples to participate in ministry the way he meant for them to. His ministry would have been limited to the region of the Middle East, of Galilee, Jerusalem, and even Samaria. His followers at first could not imagine a religious movement that could transcend geographical boundaries, even religious boundaries. But by dying and eventually sending the Holy Spirit to collaborate with the Body, Christ's mission went viral for many years without becoming institutional. *Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*⁴⁴³

Perhaps that was the content of their heated discussion: he promised to be with us in this revolution and now what? We cannot do what he did. His office is permanently vacant and our movement now permanently halted. Where did we go wrong? Jesus shows up as the Stranger (gadfly) in order to challenge the concrete they had misplaced around messianic expectations and aspirations. Once made aware of his presence in the breaking of bread, Jesus saves them from despair with a presence that is not able to be grasped (pinned down, temple-ed in, locked up, a genie in a bottle if you will) but is life altering with even the slightest and briefest touch: *Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight...That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem...*⁴⁴⁴ Jesus is revealed as a hidden companion, profoundly with us but unexpectedly so. Resurrected, Jesus is no longer tethered to location and the limits of a single human body. Rather, his presence is manifest in many bodies in a network of Christendom.

⁴⁴³ John 12: 24 (NRSV).

⁴⁴⁴ Luke 24:31, 33 (NRSV).

According to Robert J. Karris, the Emmaus story is a window into Luke's distinct soteriology of "with-ness." By this Karris means that Luke paints a nuanced vision of how it is that Christ is a savior to humanity in three moves: 1) In Jesus's radical table fellowship with the wrong people in his context; 2) through Jesus, Luke demonstrates how God empowers people to move from destructive isolation to community; 3) God reveals his saving presence through enduring with-ness in Jesus' darkest hour.⁴⁴⁵ Each move is found in Luke 24: Jesus shows up in the midst of the wandering of these two followers, endures to stay with them, in part because they invite him to stay, then in sitting down to dine with them, he is revealed as Christ. Though he quickly vanishes, the pair are restored to community with other disciples, running East to Jerusalem in order to reunite with the eleven they had left behind.

Luke's soteriology sounds an awful lot like the soteriology of process theology. God saves and is saving all of creation by the quality of enduring presence. We are impacted by the saving as we become in tune with God's presence, and in collaboration with God, we even may enact justice in ways that save worlds, and so the World. Jesus does not swoop in and immediately reprimand the sojourners. He listens, asks questions, responds and does confront their misplaced concrete. But he does not take over the job of spreading the Gospel in light of their struggle to understand it. Time and again, Jesus empowers the network to do the work of proclamation in collaboration. Rather than an emphasis on the "witness" of preaching, which is Long's enduring metaphor, Emmaus reveals the power of the 'with-ness' of communal proclamation that is possible now outside the house of the sanctuary as well as within.

The Emmaus text serves homilecclesiology on two levels: first, it serves as a model for real dialogical preaching ministry that is more than the delivery of content in the setting of a weekly service alone. It reveals how the Gospel reveals itself in the midwifing of content, via provocative questioning and intentional listening, among believers rather than in monological form. Second, it serves as a model for those of us who presently are on an Emmaus journey of their own, heads down in heated debate

⁴⁴⁵ Robert J. Karris. "Luke's Soteriology of With-ness" in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 12 (1985), 346.

about the future of the church as our landmarks of meaning—the church and seminary—struggle to survive this historic time of disruptive innovation across the globe.

Though I am critical of how Long’s engagement with the text reifies the monological-liturgical-institutional nature of preaching in his retelling of Emmaus, I profoundly agree with Long when he argues for the historical and theological importance of feasting together, breaking bread as followers of Christ. Those who would be disciples of Christ in the church as it emerges in X-reality cannot ignore this sacrament. Feasting communally, prayerfully, with intent is something every human still has need of even if done outside of the walls of the traditional sanctuary. Community and companions are needed in the life of discipleship, for Epiphanies of Christ are likely to surprise us in such moments. We are called to be in touch with one another in myriad ways, to break bread and talk and serve and pray with one another. None of these actions require a sanctuary. All of them may be imagined beyond the confines of sanctuary ecclesiology. Who out there dares to give vision to ministry beyond the sanctuary, ministry that is in cathedral?⁴⁴⁶

A Homilecology of All Believers: Conversational Preaching 3.0

A process spirituality will seek to encourage people to enhance their God-given creativity and capacity to envision the new way in which God now calls us to walk. It will help people with the difficult intellectual and moral reflection involved in figuring out in what ways faithful people should understand and act in the situation in which it is given us to live. It will recognize that not all possibilities are from God (novelty is not to be defied), but that some are.⁴⁴⁷

As has been stated previously, the homiletician who has come closest to envisioning the ministry of preaching in this digital age is O. Wesley Allen, Jr. with his

⁴⁴⁶ A fascinating project that engages theologies of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Karl Barth to argue that the end of worship, or “religionless Christianity,” is the beginning of the New Jerusalem is that of Matthew Myer Boulton’s *God Against Religion: Rethinking Christian Theology through Worship* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008). In it, Boulton argues rather than being the temporary solution to the problem of separation from God this side of heaven, worship is the source of that separation. It perpetuates our distance from God and so needs to be reshaped from the inside out. A future conversation homilecology will undertake is this claim. Perhaps a day when more Christians take responsibility for prayer, preaching, worship, and service rather than relying on the profession clergy is nearly at hand and needed for the sake of the coming of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

⁴⁴⁷ Williamson and Allen, *Adventures*, 60.

Conversational Homiletic. Homilecclesiology affirms the conversational approach to preaching proposed by Allen and then offers it an opportunity to grow in size and stature. Allen's focus on "the matrix of ongoing conversation" in the church with the preacher is one partner in the conversation is a shared focus in homilecclesiology.⁴⁴⁸ This theology of preaching proposed by Allen subsumes hierarchical power of the preaching of the preacher, typically in the form of the sermon in the pulpit, within (not above or below) the matrix of theological conversation taking place among all believers at all times.

For Allen, the key is to "dismiss any idea that preaching is the beginning, center, or end of the conversation" but that the preaching of any one preacher is in the *longue durée* "one voice among many in a conversation that precedes and outlasts her."⁴⁴⁹ In the immediacy of the present moment, social media offers just this sort of reality for preachers, one in which the proclamatory conversation of the church is taking shape beyond the confines of privileged pulpits, even privileged publishing houses and seminaries. If the whisper of God is the initial aim of every occasion—not just the sermon—then the lives of every person contain within them an imprint of God's will and way in creation. This is not a Reformed understanding of preaching as the Word of God exclusively heard through the preacher.

In a way similar to many other dialogical homileticians, Allen's radically democratic theology of preaching reclaims the Reformed belief in a priesthood of all believers, while stopping short of expanding that priesthood to encompass a broadening of the event, space, and media for preaching. He does, however, encourage us to think about expanding our awareness of the intrinsically homiletical nature and function of the church, or *ecclesia*. While the church for years could rely on people coming to the stationary cathedral for networking and spiritual connection, this is no longer the case. Most Christians in the United States come for Sunday worship. Christians who say they are members and regular attenders are confident in making this claim even if they go to church twice a month. Mid-week services are disappearing and Sunday school numbers

⁴⁴⁸ W. Allen, 39.

⁴⁴⁹ W. Allen, 40.

in decline.⁴⁵⁰ But this does not necessarily imply a lack of desire for connection and formation from congregants. We need to shift our gaze along with our paradigm.

Christians and seekers today make life-giving, theological connections and conversation online. There are now ecumenical and trans-geographical weekly gatherings, such as the SlateProject on Twitter, with deep theological conversation and attendance. Platformed gatherings such as the SlateProject introduce to those tip-toeing out of the sanctuary a glimpse of what ministry to the Living Word could look like in the future of preaching. We will glimpse more of these in the final chapter.

In process theology, a compelling metaphor for God is that of companion of the world.⁴⁵¹ This is counter to the dynamic established by the binary system, wherein God is separate from the world in order to hold the power in the relationship. It also is counter to a dynamic in which God appoints only a select few of every generation to serve as His Mouthpiece. As companion of the world, God breaks bread with us (all), walks with us (all), talks with us (all). God as companion of the world is not, then, in the grasp of select institutional authorities. God's whisper then is radically horizontal in nature, rather than merely vertical with a few authorized contact points built into certain sanctuaries. Homilecclesiology exits the house of the sanctuary and resituates Allen's homiletical metaphor of 'conversation' among "all believers" within an expanding ministry of Word and witness in networked X-reality.

Imagining ministry that models this witness—especially in X-reality—can be quite intimidating. It will be important to think clearly about the setting of boundaries and how preachers within Cathedral establish and maintain the safety and integrity of homiletical conversations. Roger Silverstone points out that we "must ensure that the public space that the media create is one which works for the human condition and not against it."⁴⁵² A certain "hospitality" is required in media in order to nurture "connection and compassion"⁴⁵³ in our globalized, mediated context. As we will indicate in the next

⁴⁵⁰ Anderson, 45.

⁴⁵¹ Williamson and Allen, *Credible*, 31.

⁴⁵² Roger Silverstone, *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 33.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 24.

chapter, in which a theological ethic for homilecclesiology is developed, it is not the case that “anything goes.”

The inherently conversational nature of preaching can be nurtured through our engagement with social media platforms as pastors who dwell in cathedral, whether we have a pastoral office in the four walls of a sanctuary or not. The social media platforms we have before us offer novel means of keeping the conversation about Jesus’ presence and promise for this world before our eyes as natives and immigrants to this technoculture. But what remains to be discussed is how this can be so.

Some theological and ethical norms will need to be lifted up as pertains to how the transcultural elements of preaching interact with the lure of Web 3.0. As Kranzberg noted in the previous chapter, the technology we have available to us as preachers is not in and of itself good, bad, or neutral. Our posture in and with these tools extends our own embodied theologies, be they process-oriented or in the classical western schema. Social media and engagement with it as preachers is not done in a homogenous way. Our spirituality guides our engagement, but this is not always done critically. At the same time, it is important to remember that the people who created these novel tools for our interaction did not necessarily do so with a critically held ethic or norm in mind.⁴⁵⁴ In the next chapter, we will flesh out a process spirituality that will serve as a guiding theo-ethic for those who wish to genuinely dialogue with emerging technoculture as ministers to the Living Word.

Conclusion

Explicitly exiting the house of the sanctuary in homiletics means letting go of so many *assumptions*. It means letting go of our assumptions about the where and when of preaching. It means letting go of assumptions about the *who* of preaching—namely that it is the solitary work of an anointed person. It may even mean the letting go of our

⁴⁵⁴ Anil Dash, CEO of Fog Creek Software, calls for a “moral reckoning” in technoculture today. In an interview with Krista Tippett, he voices concern, as an insider, that computer science programs are teaching students who create our platforms for connection all binary code without the necessary tension of a moral code of conduct. Dash calls computer science out for being “a-historical,” a discipline of the “now” that goes on “naïve” adventures without a guiding framework. For more of this discussion, listen to the podcast *On Being*, “Tech’s Moral Reckoning” (January 12, 2017). <http://www.onbeing.org/program/anil-dash-tech-s-moral-reckoning/9132> (accessed January 25, 2017).

sanctuaries themselves in order to live more fully and invest more energies into our care for our congregations, communities, and world.

But we still have a mission to tend to as ministers of the Living Word, and it is a mission found in the fingerprint of preaching lifted up at the beginning of this chapter: We still must speak, sing, move, create in order to amplify God's ongoing Word-ing activity in the world by *interpreting* sacred *texts* and present *contexts* and allowing *communication* of that message from God as it emerges. Pulpit or not, leaders who are trained to read scriptures, know our history as a people, exegete texts and contexts, and clearly communicate faithful will be a part of the future church.

In the Emmaus story, the disciples missed out on the fullness of Christ's presence due to being stuck on assumptions about who Jesus was and how he was going to establish a new world order for the Jewish people. Emmaus offers us not just a reframed take on what preaching is and who participates in it, it also asks us to reflect on our crushed expectations about the institutional church and theological education itself; a result of static-preservation mindsets rather than the adventurous mindset which allows for innovation as opportunity knocks.

This is a challenge to ecclesiologies of sanctuary. Ecclesiologies of sanctuary assume that the institution of the church as it exists now need not be challenged. They assume that the right people will re-populate the pews if the right pastor populates the pulpit. They assume that theological education will be restored if we do a better job of recruiting people to get on board with established systems for theological education and clergy preparation. To exit the house of the sanctuary is to become disoriented and to seek reorientation in various levels of the church.

We have gone through these disorienting transitions before. In the whirlwind of legitimacy collapse, the hints of a new order begin to emerge. God longs to collaborate with us in the harmonizing of novelty and tradition. And so God offers us elements to guide us in this liminal space and time of creativity. We can envision futures for preaching and preachers in the midst of the collapse of what worked before. God continues to lure us onward as Christ's Body, inviting we who are Resurrection people to risk new adventures in being collaborators in Kin-dom work.

Using process theological standards of God's with-ness in the world in negotiation with shifts in technoculture named in the previous chapter we will sketch an emerging theo-ethic for this adventure as one centered on a simple yet provocative word: *touch*. A second guiding norm for this work of preaching in cathedral emerges from previous work in process homiletics and has been woven throughout this project: that is the two-fold norm of God's unconditional love for all of creation and the resulting call to justice for all of creation.⁴⁵⁵ We will address both in the final chapter of this project.

⁴⁵⁵ Williamson and Allen, *Credible*, 76.

CHAPTER V.

ENGAGING THE GADFLY: A PROCESS HOMILECCLESIOLOGY FOR A DIGITAL AGE

Christ has no online presence but yours,
No blog, no Facebook page but yours,
Yours are the tweets through which love touches this world,
Yours are the posts through which the Gospel is shared,
Yours are the updates through which hope is revealed.
Christ has no online presence but yours,
No blog, no Facebook page but yours.⁴⁵⁶

Introduction

In 2011, Ronald J. Allen revisited his 1991, “Agendae for Homiletics” with “Some Issues for Preaching in the Future.” Allen explicitly ponders “how far can the boundary of the notion of preaching extend” and so “prompt us to reconfigure our understandings of the norms for what counts as preaching, expressions of preaching, who can preach, etc.?”⁴⁵⁷ Allen lamented that while homileticians have succeeded in presenting a diversity of sermonic forms in the postmodern era, they have yet to dive deeper into what the emerging “postmodern ethos” could mean for the *way* in which we preach.⁴⁵⁸

Homileticians have felt the pressure and the apathy of emerging postmodern cultures about the church and its preaching. From Reid to Craddock, McClure to Lose, Rose to Travis—the hunch has been that something needs to change. The solutions have revolved around conversational sermonic forms—tactics for inhabiting the troubled space of pulpit and pew.

Now we are in the midst of rapid technocultural change. This change has reframed the ways in which we relate to one another, connect with one another, and come to know our world and ourselves. Web 3.0 is a global network that with ever-present and evolving tools has lured hundreds of millions of people into a daily reality known as X-reality, with relationships and connections and conversation informing and forming us in

⁴⁵⁶ Gould, 8.

⁴⁵⁷ Ronald J. Allen. “Some Issues for Preaching in the Future.” *Academy of Homiletics*, 2011, 47.

⁴⁵⁸ Allen, “Some Issues for Preaching in the Future.” 47.

a constant flow blurring the lines between “virtual” and “conventional” reality. The novelty of this moment offers to homiletics new ways in which to preach for those who are willing to embrace the new possibilities within technoculture for reimagining the event, spaces, and media in which we preach. In other words, Allen’s lament concerning the inability of homiletics to reimagine the *way* in which we preach (from a pulpit to a pew, rooting preaching in the liturgical event, a pulpit-pew monologue, and aural-oral media) could now be answered with adventures in Web 3.0.

But, as this final chapter will discuss, Web 3.0 and the technoculture that we inhabit is itself a system that imposes its own desires and wants on individuals, just as the pulpit/pew binary in the classic Western binary schema did and does. This digital age has been critiqued⁴⁵⁹ and called to a “moral reckoning”⁴⁶⁰ by some in the field who worry that the young movement is more interested in novelty than in care-full, ethical behavior in the production of and participation in social media. And so, homileticians who go on this adventure called homilecclesiology must do so with a theo-ethical norm that resists strategies of the system that run counter to the *Imago Dei* revealed to us especially in the person of Jesus Christ.

Homilecclesiology: Preaching and a Theology of Touch in Cathedral

This is the invitation of the Digital Cathedral: to put ourselves in places to encounter others, to appreciate the depths of the everyday, and to name it holy.⁴⁶¹

I have been arguing that preaching is a theo-rhetorical practice that is not confined to the liturgical event, house of the sanctuary, and oral-aural medium wherein one expert speaks from the pulpit to the listeners below in the pews. Preaching is an ongoing practice that weaves throughout our days in cathedral. This expansive understanding of the event, spirituality, and mediation of preaching is central to the existence of homilecclesiology.

⁴⁵⁹ For two excellent introductions to social and economic critiques of social media, see José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (Los Angeles: Sage Press, 2013).

⁴⁶⁰ Dash, *Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ Anderson, 26.

In our life as disciples of Christ, we must first reaffirm that all of our actions and behaviors in person, private, and online are perceived as windows into who Jesus is. This applies to a theology of touch because the Incarnation sings of God's desire to be in touch with creation. Throughout Jesus' life, this desire was embodied in Jesus' acts of healing, his table-manners, his desire to restore humanity with capacity to be in touch with one another beyond ordinary barriers to that right relation. We also see through Jesus a resistance to violent grasping, which is the enemy of touch. We saw this in the Emmaus pericope that concluded the previous chapter.

One may not immediately think of *touch* when speaking of technology. Often the assumption is that virtual encounters and places are devoid of that sense of embodiment. I cannot feel your skin brushing mine when we Skype or enter into a Twitter conversation, and so, the technophobe or technoskeptic in us says such encounters are out of touch with human reality, or significantly less than the flesh to flesh encounters we are accustomed to. On the other hand, those who deem themselves technophiles may call those who resist the lure of technology as being *out of touch*. However, when it comes to thinking theologically about just, creative, and nurturing postures for those who minister in cathedral and dare to step out of the sanctuary to minister the word of God, 'touch' proves itself to be a generative metaphor.

I have only found one other source for Christian leaders seeking to engage with technology in their ministry theo-ethically. That source has been cited in previous chapters: Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner's *Networked Theology*. In it, they dedicate a chapter to "engaging appropriately with technology and media." The norms for this engagement are based on a refinement of Ian Barbour's definition of appropriate technology, that it be "economically productive, ecologically sound, socially just, and personally fulfilling."⁴⁶² Campbell and Garner name a "Christ-informed response" to the use of technology and media based on Micah 6:8: that we are required in our engagement to "do justice, to love kindness and mercy, and to walk humbly with God."⁴⁶³ Their work suggests broad theological and ethical parameters for a project such as homilecclesiology in that they focus on cultivating right relationships in our engagement in order to serve

⁴⁶² Ian Barbour, *Ethics in an Age of Technology: The Gifford Lectures 1989-1991*, vol. 2 (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 25.

⁴⁶³ Campbell and Garner, 122.

the call to justice. Touch, however, as it will be defined below, keeps our focus on a process theological perspective, suggesting an organic-aesthetic canopy for this project's definition of right-relation with God, one another, creation, and technoculture as well.

The Centrality of Touch

Pervading the theology of homilecclesiology is a posture of touch. By this, we mean a posture of proximity that resists coercion and manipulation. It is an open-handed touch. It is risky, for it is rooted in one's capacity to be vulnerable rather than to protect oneself from being touched by another. God models this in daily dealings with creation, according to process theology.

Recall that central to process theology is the proposition that God touches and is being touched by creation *all the time, throughout time*.⁴⁶⁴ This is not the omnipotent and changeless God of Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* who can *grasp* but never *be touched* by creation.⁴⁶⁵ This is an adventurous and living God who is an intimate companion with all the cosmos. The world is God's Body and everything we do is felt by God.⁴⁶⁶ We seek then as Christians to have intimate connection with God's presence, something that does not require us to call God down from on high, but requires us to make ourselves open and sensitive to the whisper of God always already surrounding us.

Sovereign preaching, with its unilateral power, sought to grasp the congregation with Truth; truth is "conclusive," it is concluded on behalf of others. In homilecclesiology as well as other conversational homiletics, truth is disclosed, not concluded. Truth is "out-there" present in the whisper of God beyond the boundaries of our individual body, our geographic body, and our ecclesiological body. We are invited to con-spire—that is breath together—with God, the Word, the Spirit, nature and culture

⁴⁶⁴ Epperly. 44.

⁴⁶⁵ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012). As Warren states from the get-go: "It's not about you...If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose" (23). Throughout Warren's popular forty-two day discernment plan, God directs, moves, and shapes uni-directionally. Humanity "accepts" their assignment (289).

⁴⁶⁶ The theological model of universe/world as God's body is developed most fully in in Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 133ff. For McFague, this "organic" model for God is one among many, but one that is of vital import for the well-being of creation today (viii). Her enduring metaphor resists the classic western binary and connects with the philosophy of Whitehead, Cobb, and Suchocki, whose wisdom is woven throughout this project.

to bring about greater beauty, complexity, and justice in the world. To know God is to know one another. And just as we never truly conclude in the journey of coming to know our loved ones, and ourselves we never conclude the journey of coming to know God. We come to know God through the world—a complex web of all actual occasions. To ignore and be out of touch with each other and creation is to fall out of touch (on our end) with God. Preachers then do not listen to creation and people to make for a more persuasive sermon. They listen because only by listening beyond ourselves can we begin to know the will and heart of our omnipresent and omnicompassionate God.

However, our technologies can overwhelm us with awareness of the brokenness of the world we come to know God in. Touch requires us to discern evil and gauge our distance within multiple relationships. What is safe to touch? When is there too much touching? What kind of touch is needed? At the touch of our fingers, we can take in as much bad news in the world as our smartphone has the processing power to handle. But our minds and hearts struggle to handle such vast amounts of brokenness. Without some discernment and space in our posture of touch, we can succumb to grasp, overreaching, touching prematurely, seizing what rightfully resists touch, touching what cannot safely be touched, touching inappropriately. And yet, while creating space for the Spirit to buffer against the debilitating grasp of despair, we will nonetheless need to be preachers in X-reality who do not fear the touch of the world's lamentations. Remaining in touch with the Spirit of God, we remain in touch with hope.

The theo-ethic for this preaching ministry is derived, in part, from this understanding of a dynamic and synergistic relationship with God who touches—rather than grasps—us personally and socially in order to partner in the work of love and justice. Out of this understanding of God's interaction with Creation we then have the groundwork laid for how we interact with Creation to bring about its flourishing from a posture of touch. Our hermeneutic will be aware of the dynamics present between Scripture, preacher, people, and environment for each preaching event, striving in every interaction *to leave room for mutual touch*, for open-ended, adventurous intra-action rather than controlling the outcomes of the interaction.

Our technological tools can either aid us in being in touch—with the whisper of God, with one another, with events across the globe, with the condition of our planet—or

they can be an extension of our tragic fall into grasp—seeking to use technology to power over our congregations, to reach them without being reached, to broadcast our message without listening for feedback or input. As Kranzberg reminds us, technology is neither good nor bad nor neutral. There are unintended consequences of technology’s lure, “trade-offs” he says, between possible “goods” and “bads.”⁴⁶⁷ For example, there are many risks to engaging devices when in the physical presence of others. To disengage and disrupt face-to-face interaction by Tweeting or checking emails does not honor a posture of touch and conversationality required by homilecclesiology.⁴⁶⁸ For example, a pastor choosing to check her phone at the hospital bedside would do violence to the one she is ministering to in that moment. Discernment is required. Habits must be checked by a rubric rooted in the healing ministry of Jesus. Our posture with technology and the intent of our will as we engage technology will manifest itself accordingly—in “goods” and “bads.” For ministers and laity who seek the guidance of homilecclesiology in the digital age, we must discern best practices to remain in touch with one another rather than fall into desires to control, manipulate, even disconnect with new media and our technological devices.

There are some in our technoculture who engage technologies theologically as a means to grasp their lives, and so to escape from the as yet unavoidable touch of death and decay. These transhumanist postures hope to upload the mind when bodies decay, as if an operational mind is the fullness of life. They do, like some gnostic Christians of the past and present, seem to fear our vulnerable bodies that are so sensitized by and through touch. The *imago Dei*, as this population sees it, is expressed in the ability to transcend the touch of bodies, earth, and time. “The presumption,” as theologian Elaine Graham puts it, “is that the quest for technological advancement is at some level an expression of the *imago Dei*, and that this entails a necessary mastery over creation, heedless of the fragility and interdependence of life—ambitions which have in the past been used as

⁴⁶⁷ Kranzberg, 548.

⁴⁶⁸ See Shalini Misra, Lulu Cheng, Jamie Genevie, and Miao Yuan. “The Iphone Effect: The Quality of in-Person Social Interactions in the Presence of Mobile Devices.” *Environment and Behavior* 48, no. 2 (2016): 275–98.

rationalizations for dominion over non-human nature, and even colonized peoples.”⁴⁶⁹ Our understandings of God have great pull on how we seek to use and engage with technoculture.

Touch, in X-reality, does not rely upon the most basic sensation of skin-to-skin contact, though of course it does include that. Touch is recognized as a full-bodied sensation of coming into contact with another in ways that are mutually affirming. It means there is space enough in the encounter for my individuality to not be overridden by another’s. This is the very way in which God touches creation after all, never reaching in to grasp and override events as they unfold. Rather, God gently offers us direction, invites us to be in touch with Her, and mourns each moment we do not take God up on that offer without turning that open hand into a fist. This is where sin enters the picture: in our resistance to vulnerable and tender relationship with God and others.

Our technoculture has often been critiqued for its capacity to isolate individuals from life-giving community. This is the central critique of Turkle, whose aforementioned *Alone Together* paints the portrait of a generation of young adults in physical proximity to one another yet not connection to one another.⁴⁷⁰ They stare down at their phones, put in their ear buds, and choose to disconnect from conventional reality in order to immerse themselves in virtual reality. The consequences may be especially detrimental to our younger generations who have only known this hyperlinked, hyper-connected X-reality.⁴⁷¹ We have the capacity to be grasped by our technologies if we do not have a clear sense of our identity as human beings created in the image of an omnipresent, omnicompassionate God.

But at the same time, I have been arguing for us to resist this binary thinking, that going “online” is not “real” connection and community. As we will see in some of the case studies to follow, real community connection, being in touch with one another, can

⁴⁶⁹ Elaine Graham, “Post/human Conditions” in *Words Made Flesh: Words Made Flesh: Writings in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (London: SCM, 2009), 274.

⁴⁷⁰ Turkle, *Alone Together*, Ibid. See also Sara H. Konrath, Edward H. O’Brien, and Courtney Hsing. “Changes in Dispositional Empathy in American College Students over Time: A Meta-Analysis.” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15, no. 2 (2011): 18.

⁴⁷¹ See Luigi Bonetti, Marilyn Anne Campbell, and Linda Gilmore. “The Relationship of Loneliness and Social Anxiety with Children’s and Adolescents’ Online Communication.” *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 13, no. 3 (2010): 279-85.

and is nurtured through Web 3.0. The tools themselves are not sinful. Our postures with them lie on a spectrum between isolation/sin and connection/touch.

Technology could be an affirmation of our role as “co-creators” with God, or at least has the potential to do so. This is according to theologian Elaine Graham, who has spent years engaging technoculture theologically in Great Britain. So long as we do not try to “play god” with technology “at the expense of other members of the human community or the rest of (non-human) nature,” we operate within the theo-ethic of *touch*.⁴⁷² My claim is that the God Graham tells us not to “play” is the God of classic Western theology: all powerful, controlling, dominating, and knowing at the expense of those on the opposing side of the binary. But if we “play” in the *Imago Dei* of a process God, then we are more likely to co-inspire and empower creative ways of engaging technology together.

The Role of Preachers in Cathedral: Touching the Omnicompassionate God

Preachers have always known that their central role is to be personally connected with God so that they may be stewards of the connection within others. The church has expected the ordained preacher to be anointed and appointed, to have a special connection with the Spirit of God and to lead out of that connection. In the sovereign model, the preacher was the gateway to God. In the network model, the ordained preacher works to create a hospitable commons where people feel the lure to connect with God, but all believers as preachers have the responsibility to connect with God.

In the homiletical theology of process theologian Marjorie Suchocki, God whispers to all of creation, not only the chosen, the baptized, or the born again. So while there may be a lot of “God talk” in Web 3.0, not all of it may be recognized as the whisper of God luring us onto intensity, love, and justice. Guided by a non-grasping theological ethic of touch, preachers can work to connect the dots of some of us this talk with the whisper of God. While not necessarily developing a full blown community, preachers create a commons, not by mirroring the frenzied sharing and shouting that so often is the posture of conversation in the digital cathedral, but by discerning, introducing, and or/sustaining the touch of God in the flurry of conversation. The

⁴⁷² Graham, 275.

preacher is one who publicly theologizes consistently, infusing reality as it seems with reality as it could be beyond our limited view.

The ministry of preaching in the digital cathedral is not simply the ministry of sharing neat or interesting stories, articles, images, and links. This is what makes the need for intentional presence crucial to these spaces. Most people are sharing information that they do or do not like, broadcasting bias and prejudice on a worldwide stage. Instead, the preacher's task is to infuse the conversation with the touch of God: words or images that aim conversation toward the touch of the God in front of us who is luring us toward more beauty, intensity, and complexity. If we share a testimony, article, scripture, or story, it is framed with a theological aim in mind. We share it because in it is the Whisper of a God who calls us to love one another and invest in the wellbeing of one another.

This is where the project finds affinity with Wesley Allen's proposal of the preacher as photographer. It is not that the preacher is more holy, spiritual, wise, or official than those who she is linked to in the network.⁴⁷³ Rather, it is that she has been trained to engage the Bible through multiple lenses and to be sensitive to its originary context as well as use in history for good or ill. She then has a heightened capacity to see God's activity in the world through scripture, to offer a biblical lens to those on the network to read life through as well. It is this biblical lens that makes the view distinctly Christian and helps us then to discern the good news and the ongoing whispers of God in the work of building the Kin-dom.

To fulfill this role, preachers (ordained or not) then must take seriously their own spiritual life. They are as intentional about silence as they are about speaking. They pray and study. They tend to their connection with God as well as to the networks they participate in. These are ancient concerns for the preacher that continue as we shift the paradigm for the when, where, and how of preaching.

One of the critiques of digital culture is its self-centeredness; people creating profiles of an ideal self, hiding their shadow sides, people only liking and commenting on those things they are in agreement with others on, seeking likes rather than dialogue, algorithms designed to create echo chambers where we only hear from those who think like us, etc. One of the most counter-cultural ways in which Christians, especially leaders

⁴⁷³ W. Allen, 51.

in the church, can inhabit X-reality is with a deep capacity to *see*. This is a seeing of the spiritual sense, informed by spiritual connection to God, listening to the cries of our neighbor, and cultivated compassion for one another. It is the capacity to “perceive the visible reality as it truly is”⁴⁷⁴ beneath the surface of things. This is God’s power, of course. God has omniconpassion because God can see beyond the actions of wounded people to the wounds themselves. God can see the potential in every event and person, even when we cannot. God sees the systems that hold us bondage to hurting one another in ways we cannot or will not. Thus it is the role of those who seek to be found in the *Imago Dei* to be found more and more connected at a Soul level to this God in order to lift up the whisper of God to a shout in the busy-ness of our days.

The preaching that takes place among the priesthood of all believers in X-reality will only go as deep as the soul-climate of the movement’s participants. It has always been the case that a preacher preaches out of who they are, but all too often this crucial piece of homiletics is left out. Preachers are not merely sharing information about God, they are, with their very presence, reflecting what they do or do not know of God. The onus is on us to be better antennae for God, for process spirituality in general and preaching in particular understands the response-ability of humans and takes it seriously. Not everyone listens for God’s whisper above the noise of this world. Preachers do. As Suchocki says again and again in her theology of preaching from a process perspective, “Because the revealed word of God in Jesus Christ is a historical word, given in time, preaching is absolutely required as the extension of God’s incarnation in Christ across history.”⁴⁷⁵ Homilecclesiology—which calls for a preaching priesthood of all believers—calls for deepened spirituality within the whole church universal.

The Role of Preachers in Cathedral: Hub of Life-Giving Connection

At this point, we must begin to flesh out the role of the *ordained* preacher in homilecclesiology. With God as the chief exemplar for all Christians, we are reminded that the preacher is not the only one called to a posture of touch in cathedral. Rather, the aim is to model the posture for the priesthood of all believers.

⁴⁷⁴ Josef Pieper. *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 31.

⁴⁷⁵ Suchocki, *Whispered*, 16.

Most preachers today have invested in a unique way in the call of leadership of the church. If she has a Masters of Divinity, she has poured three-five years of her life into study of the Christian movement. She has interacted with theological systems, engaged in critical tools for biblical study, perhaps even learned how to read the Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek. She has taken a preaching class, worship class, a class on pastoral care.

Sociological studies of networks reveal that in “a network, interactions can begin from a variety of points or perspectives rather than one central control or gatekeeper.”⁴⁷⁶ In the old world order, the preacher with her depth of knowledge of Church tradition could easily serve as the local gatekeeper of truth. Listening to listeners, she still could control how multiple perspectives and points became manifest and active in the sermon. The pulpit could be the space where messages began, the preacher choosing the starting point, text, and doctrine week after week. The M.Div. under the clerical paradigm prepared preachers for this gatekeeping work.

It may seem as though this project pulls the rug out from under the clerical paradigm and the structure of theological education that has revolved almost exclusively around the distribution of the M.Div. degree. But even if we are not training leaders as gatekeepers of historical, theological, and biblical knowledge anymore, we still need theological education. It is true that there is an effective center to most networks, some connector or presence in a network that serves as a connectional focal point for those in the network. They are not given this authority *carte blanche*, but they become authorizing forces by the quality of their connection and capacity to offer meaningful connection. Every network has a hub. Within every network, certain leaders arise to guide the formation, communication, and identity of those who are in the network.

Ordained and/or theologically trained leaders in homilecclesiology emerge as a unique hub of connection that can help the network lean into the depths of the M.Div. curriculum. The theologically trained and called leader has a unique and focused connection to tradition, doctrine, and history as well as tools such as exegesis, communication, and pastoral care that other Christians in various other vocations may not have. But those other Christians have their own depths to bring to homilecclesiology,

⁴⁷⁶ Campbell and Garner, 5.

ones that add relief and contrast to our areas of strength. How much richer could our proclamation be if more preachers served as hubs of connection, bring various experiences, knowledge, and wisdom into dialogue with one another?

Preaching in Cathedral is sermonical activity truly without end or beginning. In Web 3.0, conversations are multivalent and do not adhere to geographical, denominational, or hierarchical lines. This is the nature of the network. We do not have power over our messages, to keep it from being spread, commented on, etc. We then have the task of letting go of perfectionism and letting God-talk infuse the platforms we engage on social media. A back and forth rhythm is at work: the preacher offers life-giving connections to God, through scripture, tradition, and theology. Then she helps those in the network experience life-giving connections to one another. The rhythm should sound familiar. The preacher embodies in the digital cathedral the great commandment to love God and to love neighbor as yourself.

The Role of the Church in Cathedral: Remaining in Touch, Resisting a Fall into Grasp

Our technologies are sometimes critiqued for allowing or even encouraging individuals to isolate themselves from real community. The platforms of Web 3.0 can allow the individual to cater to only her needs and wants without concern for those who may see the world differently from her. She can pick and choose her network, and only affiliate in order to get something out of her social connections. At the same time, algorithms are at play in social media in order to filter out conflicting opinions of friends in our networks without our knowledge.⁴⁷⁷ There are in fact tactics, in the form of tech products, that can be used to resist this grasping and sorting that undergirds our social media experience. One such extension is that of “FlipFeed.” This Twitter plug-in created by M.I.T. researchers allows you to flip your newsfeed to show the tweets that stream on the feed of someone algorithms determine is on the other side of the political aisle from you.⁴⁷⁸ Once you have scrolled through the feed, a window pops up to ask if you would

⁴⁷⁷ See Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

⁴⁷⁸ Amanda Hess, “How to Escape Your Political Bubble for a Clearer View,” in *The New York Times*, March 3, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/03/arts/the-battle-over-your-political-bubble.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone&smid=nytcore-iphone-share> (accessed March 22, 2017).

like to reach out to the anonymous person whose feed you have viewed for further conversation. It is yet to be determined what the emerging extensions of this genre will mean for the filter bubbles we exist in, but it is encouraging to know that social media and its public are becoming slightly more aware of the “bads” that result from algorithms which further promote partisan politics.

Campbell and Garner, without citing Kranzberg, also highlight strikingly the ways in which technology is not neutral. When speaking of the risks of Web 3.0, Campbell and Garner argue “the network is a social system that privileges the individual in ways that can either encourage innovative interactions and relationship building or lead to possibly isolating patterns of being.”⁴⁷⁹ This is not the reciprocity that homilecclesiology encourages. Within many social media, this isolation feeds on our tendencies to grasp hold of stable, well-buttressed identities. Within a theological ethic of touch, however, participants in the network are encouraged to stay in touch with elements within all perspectives that have the potential to respond to the lure of God, to nurture more complex forms of community in X-reality. This means keeping in touch with the concerns and needs of those beyond our individual homes, neighborhoods, beliefs, and worldviews. This also means resisting and working at odds with social media consumerist algorithms designed to isolate and silo persons within online ghettos of taste and ideology.⁴⁸⁰

Though we may have best intentions of being co-conspirators with God, there is also in human nature a possibility for sinful and tragic choices to be made, at times intentionally and at other times unintentionally. We do not always make decisions without pause, with time and space to listen to God’s whisper and lure. We can be reactive out of selfish and self-centered (narrow) spaces of our soul. It is often the case

⁴⁷⁹ Campbell and Garner, 9.

⁴⁸⁰ See van Dijck, 49ff. Proprietary algorithms EdgeRank, utilized by Facebook, use data from users in order to shape what they deem “a meaningful stream of information for that user.” If you spend more time on the profile of a particular person, EdgeRank notices, and then you will find that user’s stream more present on your own newsfeed. In other words, this algorithm “provides a filter that implicitly ranks the importance of friends” without our knowing. This phenomenon is how many account for the shock of some at the election of Donald J. Trump in November of 2016. EdgeRank and GraphRank effectively lodged us into silos of like-mindedness, Echo Chambers, that amplified opinions and worldviews apart from opposition and counterpoint. Losing the quality of diversity in these networked relationships makes it difficult for those wishing to inhabit social media with a theological ethic of *touch* to achieve the intensity and complexity required to truly discern God’s whispering activity in the world.

that this woundedness leads to desperate grasping for and of an other rather than maintaining the posture of touch. In some cases, benign differences tragically drift into becoming malignant conflicts. A theological ethic of touch encourages patience, listening, and compassionate awareness of the many wounds that shape online discourse.

Grasp is especially harmful in relation to the process view of ever-changing actualities. It is against the nature of reality in process thought to stay put. Grasp, a desire to keep something or someone in its place, is a force against life and so can be a violent or constricting act. This kind of grasp can affect our approach to sacred texts. On one end of the spectrum, skepticism leads some to attack the text with our tools as if it is a graspable object for knowing. On the other end of the spectrum doctrinal certainty and inerrantist views of the text encourage some to insist that the text must grasp us in a univocal fashion. Grasping the Bible or allowing it to grasp us in these ways can do violence to the church and to the Bible. Viewing the Bible as the living word, Christians do not approach the text to grasp, it control it, dissect it, nor to use it to grasp others who need to be put in their place. Rather, they come near in order to be touched by an encounter with it, the desire to wrestle from the word that which is life-giving in the face of death.

Grasp can also affect the ways that we use language and how we communicate. One common way in which we grasp as preachers is through a slight change in posture from dialogue to debate. Anytime one side seeks to win and for the other side to lose, we as preachers and ministers to the living Word, have fallen out of touch and into grasp. Wesley Allen nuances the distinction between dialogue and debate for the sake of his conversational homiletic. At the root of this distinction is the posture of the partners in the event of communicative encounter. One who enters the communication event with certainty that is closed off from the possibility of conversion will be a grasping, violent force in the conversation. We see how it only takes one grasping posture for the whole conversation to shift from dialogue to debate. Allen continues:

- *Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.* Debate is oppositional: two sides opposed one another and attempt to prove one another wrong.

- *In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.* In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its argument.
- *Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.*⁴⁸¹ Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.
- *Dialogue reveals assumptions for reevaluation.* Debate defends assumptions as truth.
- *Dialogue creates an open-ended attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.* Debate creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
- *Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks not to alienate or offend.* Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.
- *Dialogue remains open-ended.* Debate implies a conclusion.⁴⁸²

These points mirror much of the nature of process theology as a creative-responsive partnership between a dipolar God and the world. At the core of process theology is a God who is in deep dialogue with each of us, taking into account all that we are and what we will, listening and responding and being impacted by that response. Process spirituality is a nurturing on our end of the conversation, nurturing our capacity to listen for God's whisper all around and within us, to respond to it, to be open to it, to let it shift our point of view. Process preaching embodies this spirituality of holy dialogue with God and one another.

Perhaps our stumbling block to this profoundly relational vision for the priesthood of all believers and ministry to the Living Word is that it calls for long, slow, work of remaining connected to people and connecting people to the Living Word of God. We prefer to preach a message that is perfected, completed, and spoken with the power to grasp us firmly and without ambiguity. Within process theology, however, God does not grasp at us with omnipotent constrictive or interventionist power from a timeless and perfect realm. Rather, the palm of God's hand is open, inviting us into a future that is emerging and in which we play a vital role. Is it difficult to cultivate the patience and persistence to be in touch with each other and with the whisper of God and to wait and

⁴⁸¹ This notion in particular sounds a great deal like Loomer's "S – I – Z – E and Stature." See chapter 2, "God's Power Under the Traditional Schema-Capacity to Impact," for an earlier discussion of this aspect of process theology.

⁴⁸² W. Allen, 21-22, fn 9. Allen organizes this list based on a series of contrasts between dialogue and debate published by The Study Circle Resource Center and based on a paper by Shelly Berman (<http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-dialogue.html>)

work together for truth to emerge. At times, leaders seek to control wayward people, those who challenge their vision of the future and then they fall into grasp. Other times, laity grow weary in chaos of violence, debate, and apathy of our world and fall into grasp by seeking a charismatic figure to solve the problem for them, to make and fulfill a promise that alignment with Truth as they deliver it guarantees a tragedy free life. We fragile human beings fall into grasp and out of mutual connection in various ways at various times.

The emphasis in homilecclesiology is on building trust and perhaps gaining authority as a hub of connection to the Living Word. Authority is relational in nature.⁴⁸³ It is also kenotic, requiring the refusal to assume power-over, and the cultivation of creativity and pastoral sensitivity. In homilecclesiology, we do not persuade and manipulate, or broadcast and sell the gospel. Rather we seek to make connections in life between tragedy and hope, mundane and sacred. In sum, the aim of preaching in homilecclesiology is not to grasp the audience with our message of truth. Rather, truth is understood in way similar to Parker Palmer's pedagogical approach in *The Courage to Teach*, as "an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline."⁴⁸⁴ Homilecclesiology, like Palmer's subject oriented method of teaching, blurs the clear boundary between audience and speaker. It disrupts the binary by placing the subject, truth and its ongoing discovery, at the center. In homilecclesiology, we do not use technology to broadcast Truth as a static and timeless statement that is one size fits all and that begins and ends with the preacher. That is certainly still done by sovereign preachers under the guise of technological proximity and novelty. Though technologies make it possible for us to broadcast gospel and amplify our presence in ways unimagined before, homilecclesiology—a posture that is not rooted in technoculture yet open to engage and inform it—reminds us that such a goal is not fitting to the work of allowing gospel to emerge through dialogue and mutuality.

⁴⁸³ For more on emerging definitions of pastoral authority as relational and reflective in nature see Jackson W. Carroll, *As One With Authority: Reflective Leadership in Ministry* Second Edition (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011); also see pastoral relational authority as it operates in homiletic method via McClure's *The Roundtable Pulpit* and Rose's *Sharing the Word*, Ibid. This is also what Smith strove for in her *Weaving the Sermon*, Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007). 106.

Touch as Biblical, Contextual, and Technocultural Hermeneutic: Challenging the Grasp of 'Authorities'

Interpretation of all sources for knowledge and practice, be it scripture, tradition, experience, or reason, is both affirmative and critical in homilecclesiology. Being out of touch with our sacred text and traditioned dogmas is not an option. Nor is passive grasping of them as truths that are never-changing and never-challenged by changes in history and culture. To be in touch is to seek connection with the past and present, to allow the authorizing force of life lived today to speak to the authority of one who lived before.

We, the preachers, seek to model this in our engagement with sacred text, culture, and news in order to promote this posture in those we seek to care for and care for the world with. Rather than seeking to become the authority on everything for the church, we seek to cultivate in the laity a sense of their own authority and capacity to challenge the grasp of unidirectional authorities on their life. We do this within a tension between a hermeneutic of generosity and a hermeneutic of suspicion. In a spirit of generosity, process preachers anticipate the growth of Christianity in both size and stature. They cultivate the ability to affirm, embrace, and expect ever-growing complexity and beauty without losing Christianity's spiritual center and identity among different realities.⁴⁸⁵

Process-oriented interpretation also involves a liberation principle that will often challenge sources of authority as bearers of oppression and colonization. Thus, with generosity comes a spirit of suspicion that critiques sources of authority (Bible, Church, Theology) without essentializing them as ontologically oppressive. Although certain colonizing forces have rendered Christian sources of authority and the pulpit that relies on those authorities tools of the grasping oppressor rather than instruments of liberation, we affirm and critique the pulpit, the scriptures, our traditions in the hopes that we may reconcile these partners in ministry for ongoing prophetic Kin-dom building.

In solidarity with the previous work of Allen and Williamson in process homiletics, the underlying norm that guides the work of hermeneutics, the lens for our

⁴⁸⁵ Loomer expected this growth of size and stature to be personal but also applied it to theology and ethics. This also relates to our understanding of power dynamics and relationships, with God and one another. Power in process-relational theology is an ability to embrace all things in their diversity rather than coerce divergent realities into uniformity. This is the power of God in the world. For more see Epperly, *Ibid.*, 14-15.

work of affirmation and critique, is two-fold: God loves all of creation unconditionally and the command of God that justice be done to all of creation.⁴⁸⁶ When sources of authority run counter to this two-fold norm, critique will lead to communal wrestling with these sources until the fullness of the norm is achieved.

Of course, the norm—God loves all of creation unconditionally and commands that justice be done to all of creation—has not yet been achieved in actuality. With every success we meet another failure, another way in which we have fallen out of touch with the norm and allowed our prejudice and bias to shape-shift into other areas against other partners in the web. The good news in the face of this bad news is that preaching ministry keeps the word of God lively in every generation, and so is “necessary to and constitutive of the life of the church.”⁴⁸⁷ Preaching under the rubric of this norm strives to keep us in touch with the character of God. Thus, it is unlikely that we will no longer need to cultivate ministers for this work in cathedral anytime soon.

A new area of scholarship to be cultivated and promoted in relation to a process-oriented Christian hermeneutic is media literacy. As noted in the third chapter, the democratization of social media has allowed for the “fake news” phenomenon to spread globally. Academics are quickly cultivating guides to not only reveal fake news sources but to help their students be more discerning about the sharing of information on Web 3.0. We are learning to look for multiple sources reporting on a story rather than to assume the site is the only one that has the story. This is especially the case for stories that make us angry, for emotion is one of the aims of those who control these sites, hoping that a knee-jerk reaction will result in millions of shares online.⁴⁸⁸

Part of the task of preaching within homilecclesiology therefore, is becoming thoughtful, alert, and discerning participants in X-reality. Social media literacy is becoming as important as biblical and contextual literacy. If our technologies and technoculture allow anyone to claim and create truth, it will be our ongoing task to ask

⁴⁸⁶ Williamson and Allen, *Credible*, 76.

⁴⁸⁷ Williamson and Allen, *Adventures*, 197.

⁴⁸⁸ Melissa Zimdars. “False, Misleading, Clickbait-y, and Satirical ‘News; Sources.’” Available under a Creative Commons. 2016. https://docs.google.com/document/d/10eA5-mCZLSS4MQY5QGb5ewC3VAL6pLkT53V_81ZyitM/preview (accessed December 2, 2016). Zimdars is an assistant professor of communication and media who is currently developing this project to train her students in media literacy at Murrumbidgee College.

probing questions, not allowing for truth to be easily grasped, dis-orienting and re-orienting theological understanding in order to resist narrow and shallow truth claims that are rampant in our digital age. Trust in “fake news” and knee-jerk sharing and spreading of hyperbolic information is how the democracy and open-source, non-hierarchical nature of Web 3.0 falls into forms of authoritarian grasping and out of touch with the open hand of God inviting us into a future that can weave our differences into new, more complex, and beautiful forms of community. There is no room for dialog, no time given to substantive thinking. With this in mind, we might advocate and work for and with new algorithms and/or new social media platforms, driven less by consumerism and niche marketing, and more by truthfulness, diversity, and justifiable realities.

In Cathedral, we might cultivate leaders who are biblically, culturally, and media literate and who model for the community in X-reality what it looks like to challenge truth born of echo chambers with the complexity of reality beyond the echo chamber. These leaders will model the posture of touch, which is known by humility, openness, generosity toward other voices. But at the same time, they will not compromise on the two-fold norm of appropriateness for the Christian life: God loves all of creation and so demands justice for those who are not being loved in our glocal reality.

Getting in Touch with Our Neighbors in Cathedral

Related to an exit from the house of the sanctuary is another exit: from the neighborhood as constituted by the houses which share a zip code, fence post, and area code with me and my parish; and from the congregation (that is the gathered participants) as confined to the walls of the sanctuary. If we now find ourselves ministering in the context of X-reality, where “physical and digital worlds...often overlap in interesting and novel ways,” then it is the case that “the neighborhood in which we are embedded spans those worlds too.”⁴⁸⁹ Our understanding of who is a neighbor will change. For participants may enter into our spaces of homilecclesiology without invitation from anywhere. They may see others in their network consistently interacting with a TweetChat, Facebook live, church handle and be intrigued to chime in at any given moment to ask a question, contribute or challenge the conversation taking place.

⁴⁸⁹ Campbell and Garner, 92.

Sociologists now seek to understand the sociology of community in our present technoculture via “social network analysis.” According to Campbell and Garner, “This new approach to the study of community argues that communities are in their essence social structures and not spatial or geographic structures such as neighborhoods.”⁴⁹⁰ Depending upon the privacy settings on one’s platforms, messages have the capacity to go viral, that is, to be picked up and shared by perfect strangers in the network through mutual acquaintances. Even in my limited blogging experience, I can see from my dashboard on WordPress that I have had readers all over the world, not just in my metropolitan area. Key words and phrases people type into a search engine might just lift up my website. These readers may just skim the material but on occasion they will comment on my material, enabling me to do likewise, and a conversation takes place that will touch the message of proclamation.

The network also challenges the idea of “congregation”. Because the ministry of proclamation in Cathedral is in the context of a networked reality, we need to let go of the notion that our congregation is only those bodies who gather in the four walls of the sanctuary once a week. We can lean into ancient roots for the word and reclaim a sense of the gathering that is church, one that is more fluid and spontaneous in nature.

This is not to say that appointed ministers need to focus energy away from their place of ministry. Some ministers who feel called to alternative ecclesiologies will in fact consider their congregation the fluid network that they serve as a hub for, but for the time being the first case is still likely to be the dominant form of ministry. The gift of X-reality to even the seemingly most rural and isolated congregation is the dissolution of boundaries of geography that once kept parts of the world out of view and prayer for so long. The low boundaries of X-reality allow for holy disruptions in our communal homiletic from those who may challenge and expand our Kin-dom view. This brings holy gifts but also could lead to conflict. Thus another important task of ministers in the Digital Cathedral is to learn how to *be* a neighbor to those people all over the world who may enter our conversation.

In our hyper-networked, globalized context we are more in touch with the energy of the world than ever before. In an unhealthy spiritual state, this reality can lead to

⁴⁹⁰ Campbell and Garner, 7.

various coping mechanisms on the spectrum of apathy—that is entering into a non-feeling state of being in the web of live—or grasp—that is seeking to violently control the others in the web so that they are more like ourselves, while painting others as enemies who must be marginalized or destroyed in order to maintain peace on earth. Thus it is vital for preachers in this age to promote a theology of touch that humanizes the many, honors difference, and challenges narrow systems that set humanity and creation at odds with one another. Our posture must be like that of God—who in a process understanding seeks to be ever-present to each of us in our lives without manipulating and overriding our passions and individualities.

The preacher in Cathedral must have a glocal hermeneutic: that is one rooted in her context of origin in collaboration with a care-full awareness of global realities that infuse every part of our local realities. In order to cultivate this hermeneutic for preaching we will turn to the homiletical work of Eunjoo Mary Kim, specifically the task of humanization.

Homileticians Challenge Preaching's Context(s): Tisdale to Kim

Eunjoo Mary Kim challenges the potentially myopic presentation of preaching as merely local practice in her 2010 book *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*. Kim illustrates just how swiftly the cultural context for preaching has been transformed since the wave of homiletical literature around ethnography and local context took hold of preaching classes a decade before. Perhaps the most quintessential work in that local movement was Lenora Tubbs Tisdale's 1997, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*.

In *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Tisdale rightly amends the dominant textbooks of preaching during the New Homiletic phase, Thomas Long's *The Witness of Preaching* and Fred Craddock's *Preaching*. While the New Homiletic ushered in the turn to the listener as a vital posture to preaching, it did not necessarily cultivate tools for this work. Long may "incorporate congregational concerns at each juncture"⁴⁹¹ of sermon preparation, says Tisdale, but he does so only under Long's undergirding theological claim that because "the preacher is a part of the congregation, a part of the

⁴⁹¹ Lenora Tubbs Tisdale. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997), 24.

culture in which the congregation lives,” she will inherently have an accurate grasp of the culture.⁴⁹² Tisdale’s underlying claim is that no one denomination can claim a universal culture. Each congregation, according to cultural anthropologists, is like some others, no others, and all others.⁴⁹³ Thus we need more than priestly imagination to be attentive to context.

Tisdale’s proposal is a second step to the exegetical process of Long. Just as we need exegetical tools to realize the complexity of the worlds of the people in the biblical text, we need tools to carefully exegete the complexity of the people we preach to each Sunday.⁴⁹⁴ It is not enough, according to Tisdale, to make the claim that since we are called from the congregation that we will rightly have the mindset and voices of the congregation in mind whenever we approach the biblical text. Rather, knowing the complexity of our congregation is a practice that must be taught and learned. Cultural knowing is not merely caught. Tisdale engages the tools of Clifford Geertz to design a homiletic that strives to organically emerge from and nourish a particular congregation through “thick description” of the congregation.⁴⁹⁵

Writing in 2010, Kim argues that the “complex phenomenon” of globalization in this postmodern age—manifested in economic, sociocultural, and ecological processes—has blurred “geographic boundaries” and confused “our sense of culture, identity, and other particularities” from within the local congregation.⁴⁹⁶ Kim argues that within local subcultures of the congregation are unavoidable manifestations of global culture that also are in need of the preacher’s attention. In other words, context—the locus of God’s revelation according to Kim—is not limited to local, self-contained culture in the postmodern age. Kim asks, “what does ‘local’ mean in our global world?”⁴⁹⁷ A new paradigm for preaching is required and according to Kim that paradigm is “transcontextual” in nature, rather than simply contextual or cross-cultural.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹² Long, *Witness*, 101.

⁴⁹³ Tisdale, 11.

⁴⁹⁴ Tisdale, 18.

⁴⁹⁵ Tisdale, 57.

⁴⁹⁶ Eunjoo Mary Kim. *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 43.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

Kim does not use the term “globalization” to describe an economic reality. Rather, she uses this term to describe the situation of those in the 21st century who cannot escape the interconnected web of global humanity.⁴⁹⁹ There is multiplicity in all our congregations due to this free flow and the preacher must be aware of this in her preaching. Her ethics and theology must be wary of going the way of turning globalization into a new form of colonialism.

Making use of Kim’s hermeneutic, social media content can be seen as both context-bound and context-free. Although social media content appears to be acontextual, on the surface, a human being is the source of the information, and that person is by nature a context-laden being with context-laden identity. The place of X-reality is a challenge in that contexts are interacting at rapid pace from all over social and geographical maps. In many ways, X-reality reflects the emerging “transcontextual” paradigm for preaching promoted by Kim. By this term, Kim means a paradigm “that goes *through* and *beyond* locality to engage in a global world, where local contexts become interwoven.”⁵⁰⁰ It can be said that the paradigm of social media is a world-wide web of interacting contexts that pass through one another and for better or worse become interwoven.

A Transcontextual Hermeneutic for Homilecclesiology

Kim’s hermeneutic is a gift to homilecclesiology for it anticipates the emerging technoculture and challenges, theologically, the limits of parochial theological hermeneutics. Kim’s four distinctive characteristics of transcontextual preaching are organic to the “touch” theo-ethic of homilecclesiology.

First, transcontextual preaching is able to move “beyond particularity to reach interdependent relationships between one’s own and the contexts of others.”⁵⁰¹ In other words, Kim’s hermeneutic models the Size and Stature of process theologian Loomer. The aim is not an erasure of particularity, nor is it a clinging to particularity. Rather it is ability to see and hold at one and the same time, that which is particular to one’s context

⁴⁹⁹ Kim, *Globalization*, xi.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

and that which is particular to another's. It is to allow for these realities to be in touch with one another through our preaching and our efforts to humanize one another.

Second, all preaching happens today in an unavoidably globalized context, what Kim calls a "web of interconnectedness,"⁵⁰² and it is in this globalized context where we must search for God's revelation today. Whether or not we engage in the Web/Internet, we all exist in an intricate web, in other words. Again, as I said earlier, we can ignore this with an apathetic stance, fight this with a grasping stance, or seek a posture of touch within the Web. Kim names three particular sites, though more exist, which constitute the global context.

One site where the revelation of God is contextualized Kim names is that of "*koinōnia*."⁵⁰³ Due to physical proximity, it is often the starting point in our sermon process as preachers who are discerning the revelation of God for our regular context. *Koinōnia* is the local congregational context. This is the gathering of regular attendees to a particular place who have cultivated a special fellowship out of their consistent gathering for worship together. I would challenge the notion that this *koinōnia* only exists in conventional reality. Gatherings such as The Slate Project and Thin Places Online proclaim a *koinōnia* fellowship in X-reality that Kim may not have imagined as being possible at the time of writing this book.

Preachers do not remain at this site if they wish to honor a transcontextual hermeneutic. Next, the preacher seeks God's revelation in "the whole world."⁵⁰⁴ The whole world includes realms of politics and social lives beyond the web of local churches. Kim argues that God is at work there. This is not a specialized God who only operates in and through the baptized believers. Kim's understanding is more akin to process theology, wherein God is active at all times and everywhere as the animating whisper and lure of the best and most beautiful reality. Nature is included in this category. Thus preachers in 2017 discern the groans of creation (melting ice caps, increasing storms and floods) as cries for help and so as lures to action. This is what it means to be a preacher who also looks for God in the whole world.

⁵⁰² Kim, *Globalization*, 41.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

Finally, Kim lifts up the need to discern God’s work at “the margins of the world,”⁵⁰⁵ for this is where God is especially present. These margins exist not only in the whole world, but also in the *koinōnia*. Often, marginality is defined by its relation to the center, and so in negative terms. Kim seeks to see beyond this binary to speak of the margins as also being places where “the potential to create a new reality through dynamic interaction between differing worlds.”⁵⁰⁶ Our preaching then can be a liminal space in Cathedral where worlds meet and mingle and new life-giving worlds emerge. As we will discuss toward the end of this chapter, many pastors have already experienced how emerging technologies and spaces in virtual reality have served as revolutionary spaces to reimagine religion free from the trappings of infrastructures that are slow to embrace change.

For instance, when mass media were largely silent on the Dakota pipeline, pastors and concerned citizens on the digital cathedral made it their mission to amplify the voice of those natives who were being marginalized. Eventually, the outrage in the network reached President Barack Obama⁵⁰⁷ who put a halt on the pipeline. This is the work of preaching in cathedral: to amplify the cries of the marginalized and to humanize them in their plight so as to form a network of allies to respond to those cries in action and amplification.

These three sites of God’s revelation lead then to a third distinctive attribute to Kim’s homiletic, one that has already been alluded to: “humanization.”⁵⁰⁸ The theological content of our preaching in this context centers on humanization. To see people as humans locally, globally, and at the margins is to honor difference and complication. It is to resist making strawpeople or scapegoats out of those who are different because of language, location, religion, or politics. This theological posture fits with the norm of appropriateness lifted up in homilecclesiology: God loves all of creation unconditionally and the command of God that justice be done to all of creation.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁵ Kim, *Globalization*, 23.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁰⁷ Unfortunately, in an act of top-down power, newly inaugurated President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order on January 24th, 2017 to allow for the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline through the sacred lands the Sioux tribe, Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota.

⁵⁰⁸ Kim, *Globalization*, 44ff.

⁵⁰⁹ Williamson and Allen, *Credible*, 76.

A brilliant example of humanization in X-reality is the project known as *Humans of New York*. Brandon Stanton, bond trader turned photographer, moved to New York in 2010 and set a goal to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers. “Somewhere along the way,” says Stanton, “I began to interview my subjects in addition to photographing them.”⁵¹⁰ The result is an archive of images, thousands of them, with small stories capturing the essence of what makes us all human: loss, heartbreak, love, humor, anger. Over 18 million people follow Stanton on social media to get a peek into the lives of strangers and to be touched by their images and stories. Stanton has also undertaken special projects in countries like Pakistan, Iraq, and Jordan—countries that are in the national news almost every night yet without a human touch. One can see the faces of Iraq’s Yazidi minority—smiling, playing with a baseball bat and cans—humanizing the unnamed and faceless data shared on the news that ISIS has moved into their villages and taken their homes.⁵¹¹ The work of HONY honors the aim of homilecclesiology and of Kim, to be a force for liberation and care for all in our web of interconnectedness by connecting at the heart level with our fellow humans around the world.

Stanton’s HONY project models the form of rhetoric Kim calls for in her project: “The rhetoric of appeals.”⁵¹² According to Kim, the rhetoric of appeals is required in our current context of interwoven contexts to lure our congregations “to adjust their positions and to find affinity with someone who is different from themselves by invoking their imagination for a possibility of different reality.”⁵¹³ While Kim proposes an aesthetic of kaleidoscope for this preaching task, preachers in homilecclesiology have the tools of social media to share, spread, and promote the voices, faces, and stories of our neighbors all across the globe who share space with us in the world wide web. This extends Kim’s vision for preaching as “an art of public discourse, creating space,” no longer just in the sanctuary itself, “to judge...basic understandings and values of life and consider

⁵¹⁰ Brandon Stanton. *Humans of New York*, “About,” <http://www.humansofnewyork.com/about> (accessed December 20, 2016).

⁵¹¹ Brandon Stanton. *Humans of New York*, “Countries,” “Iraq” <http://www.humansofnewyork.com/post/94106855746/these-children-are-members-of-iraqs-yazidi> (accessed December 20, 2016).

⁵¹² Kim, *Globalization*, 87.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 90.

possibilities from divergent points of view.”⁵¹⁴ The daily discipline of reading stories on Humans of New York is one of many means for preachers in this digital age to appeal to our networks to love our neighbors by first seeing them as a fellow human rather than enemy or faceless victim.

In the digital cathedral, with the right tactics, the preaching ministry has the capacity to embody the unity of the Body, the truth that none of us is apart from or unaffected by the wounds of another human being or of creation itself. Exiting the house of the sanctuary not merely in terms of physicality but also in terms of spirituality, homilecclesiology engages Kim’s theology of humanization for preaching in a digital age. Web 3.0 is a place where humanization must and can take place through intentionality on the part of the church. We may hold up and share stories from parts of the world not geographically close yet vital to our life together on earth. The preacher acts as a hub of what makes us universally human, our shared desires and needs, our common value in God’s eyes. And so, the emerging technologies serve as partners in transcontextual preaching that can bring to our attention the whole world, the margins of the world, and *koinōia*.

With detailed reflection on the postures and capacities required for homilecclesiology in Cathedral, it is at last time to engage with some particular platforms in Social Media today where the way and what of preaching can be reimagined. The big three that we will turn to later in this chapter are Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. But before the constructive proposal, it is time to address an example of how not all novel forms of technologically aided preaching fit in the rubric of touch that homilecclesiology requires. The major example of this is the phenomenon of satellite preaching.

Ignoring the Gadfly: Sovereign Preaching in Technological Dress

We can say that global means you *can* be connected to everyone; the question is *are* you connected to anyone?⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁴ Kim, *Globalization*, 88.

⁵¹⁵ Arthur Asa Berger, *Media & Society: A Critical Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 143.

While the argument so far has been that our technological artifacts can be engaged for greater connectivity and give-and-take with the church in Web 3.0 using a rhetoric of appeals, there remains the truth that far too often these tools are used to impose and broadcast the message of one over another without allowing for the reciprocity required in conversation. As this project concludes, it is to these circumstances that we now turn.

Mass media is a term coined in the early 1940s by Harold Lasswell, though it has been in existence as a phenomenon since the creation of the printing press.⁵¹⁶ Lasswell used the term in the context of government, and related the term to propagandistic activities on both side of World War II. Mass media is the technical use of any media in order to (re)produce knowledge and information efficiently—reducing dialogical relations in order to amplify the mediated message at the expense of conversation.⁵¹⁷ Mass media is by nature a one-way message system privileging the distributor of the message. Distribution is not in the hands of the public. The flow of communication is top-down. The public is thus formed for receptivity and consumption of the message coming through the mass media pipeline.

Our technological advances have simultaneously introduced the technoculture of Web 3.0—a radically vertical and non-boundaried lifeworld for public conversations—and amplified means for mass mediation. I perceive one of the greatest divides in the United States to be between an older generation accustomed to and satisfied by mass media and a younger generation suspicious of mass media. Even though a growing number of people desire greater collaboration, conversation, and participation, we still have, in the guise of technological relevance, the older mass media model of grasping, hierarchical, Sovereign preaching.

Preaching practices such as satellite preaching and the phenomenon of ordering DVDs of great preachers to play in the church on Sunday go against homilecclesiology and its emphasis on the timely and organic nature of prophetic preaching. In process thought, God's whisper is present in particular places and particular people and more potent when leaned into in the moment. Using your voice to speak the words from

⁵¹⁶ Hanno Hardt, *Myths for the Masses: An Essay on Mass Communication*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 15.

⁵¹⁷ Hardt, 14.

another voice, another body, another place, is counter to the way of an omnipresent and omniemphatic God.

LifeChurch.tv has been a pioneer of the satellite church phenomenon for almost fifteen years. What is the satellite phenomenon? A sermon prerecorded in one local context is then sent out to campuses across the country and online spaces for use in their weekly worship “experience.” Sometimes the sermon is broadcast via live satellite feed. Most often these days the sermon is prerecorded to a DVD or placed in a file-sharing platform for the other ‘campuses’ to play during the sermon moment at their local worship service. Today over 1,000 churches have gone multisite across the country utilizing the “satellite” or “franchise” model.⁵¹⁸ Sometimes satellite churches are no further away than a metropolitan area—like the model Willow Creek uses with its campuses across the Chicago metro area or Church of the Resurrection in the Kansas City area. Other times satellite churches or campuses are placed across the country. Most campuses consist of a site pastor who builds local relationships along with a local worship team who help frame the satellite sermon from the ‘mother church’ each week.

The narrative from satellite church planters is usually something like this: *What once was seen as a setback...not being able to expand our building...the pastor not having the time and energy to drive back and forth between two campuses...became a Godsend that has allowed unprecedented growth through the satellite church model.*⁵¹⁹ The multisite model creates a church that is somewhere in between the megachurch and local church, according to LifeChurch.tv’s senior pastor and founder Craig Groeschel. Groeschel told *Christianity Today* in 2005, “People like the options and quality of megachurches, yet crave the intimacy of smaller churches. This model gives you both.”⁵²⁰ The auditoriums of satellite campuses range from populations of 200 to 1,000 and yet the total membership, of LifeChurch.tv specifically, is 45,000.⁵²¹

Glimpsing LifeChurch.tv’s homiletic situation, to make the choice to be present to a particular body and to hold traces in a sermon of the context from which it was made

⁵¹⁸ Bob Smietana, "High-Tech Circuit Riders: Satellite churches are discovering a new way to grow the body of Christ," in *Christianity Today* 49, no. 9 (September 1, 2005), 60.

⁵¹⁹ Such is the case for LifeChurch.tv. Craig Groeschel worked this narrative into one of the sermons I heard in my visits. But also read the testimony of Seacoast in South Carolina (Smietana, *Ibid.*).

⁵²⁰ Smietana, 61

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

might be a threat to making messages intelligible for the bodies dispersed elsewhere. Mass mediated messages must also appeal to the *masses*, across geographical distances, in order to be a “force for integration, positively through assimilation into a common culture.”⁵²² The flip side to this positive reception is a negative force of hegemony that incorporates individuals, preventing them from voicing their particularity.

Mass mediation is the mode of communication taking place in the LifeChurch.tv model. One senior pastor oversees 15 campuses—from Tulsa, Oklahoma to Wellington, Florida—and the number of campuses is growing. Sermons come through the pipeline every week, usually from Groeschel. The message is one way in this medium. Dialogue is impossible in the sermon event between preacher and people when it is prerecorded and played rather than embodied and performed. This stunts conversation and, in the frame of Hardt’s theory above, created congregants who are prone to be consumers of theological knowledge rather than producers.⁵²³

It is important to note from this analysis how the Western binary schema perpetuates itself in the guise of novelty with emerging technology. A glimpse at Satellite preaching reveals how the binary actually shape-shifts into nontraditional form using new media-like tools without adhering to the previously listed desires of technoculture, thus complexifying the issue of preaching and technology.

The preacher, seemingly present and available to the people in the pews (or more likely rows of chairs), is not just one body in the pulpit. He becomes one, two, three or more bodies projected on screens throughout the worship space. This is extreme monological communication as well, for there is no opportunity for the congregant in the satellite location to interface with the preacher on the screen. The preacher transcends the people. His power is power over and a technologically amplified capacity to reach without being reached. These sermons tend to be extremely intentional about putting on the dress of conversation—meaning pastor dressed in casual clothes, many illustrations pulled from personal life, even bulletins with fill in the blank orders of the message so

⁵²² Hardt, 14.

⁵²³ The argument can be made that congregants may “talk amongst themselves” in order to participate in the sermon, however, the preacher is not privy to these vital conversations. His sermons will not be mutually affected by them over time. The power is one-way. It would be interesting to study how, if at all, mega-satellite pastors like Groeschel use social media to bridge that gap, if at all.

that everyone can follow along. The authority of celebrity is pervasive. Preaching in this mold becomes a technologically enhanced version of pulpit over pew, preacher over people, God over and remote from world, etc.

Platforms for Proclamation in Cathedral

We now move forward to examine media platforms that are more appropriate to homilecclesiology and a theological ethic of touch. The following exploration of platforms for homilecclesiology is not exhaustive for two reasons. First, excellent books already exist to assist the social media novice in the task of becoming familiar with these tools. The one that I most highly recommend and use for students in my class on the subject is Meredith Gould's *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways*. There already is a Second Edition of the initial 2013 release. Gould is generous in her engagement with these platforms and she is not specifically speaking to the ministry of preaching per se, rather church communication and connection. Thus it is also important to read critical introductions to social media and how they came to be, so that we are equipped to inhabit these platforms creatively and prophetically, resisting algorithms that drive us away from complexity and intensity and into silos of like-mindedness.⁵²⁴

There is a second reason for not being exhaustive: the rapid pace at which social media platforms come and go. I have spent energy on the task of cultivating capacities for the person who engages these platforms. I will leave it to other experts to keep a pulse on the platforms themselves. Also, in this technoculture, the real experts are the people who learn through participation in platforms themselves. Rather than reading tutorials on social media, time with the platform and effort to engage in it are the best teachers.

However, I am teaching a course on this subject of preaching in the digital age. In this course, students are focusing their presence on three particular platforms for social media that have stood the test of time (so to speak). These three platforms are Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We will now briefly lift up the distinctive traits of each platform so that we have a base from which to propose novel means of sermon preparation and delivery in Cathedral informed by a theo-ethic of *touch*.

⁵²⁴ Fuchs, *Social Media* and van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, Ibid.

Facebook

There was a time when the Web was not social. This time was the time of Web 1.0, the time before Facebook. Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, created the platform in order to make the web more social by making “the world more open and connected.”⁵²⁵ Facebook’s director of corporate communications and public policy, Barry Schnitt, went so far as to say that “we’re expanding understanding between people and making the world a more empathetic place.”⁵²⁶ Facebook now boasts 1.79 billion active monthly users and 1.18 billion active daily users.⁵²⁷ No social media platform comes close to the network created and nurtured by Facebook.

Of the three platforms, Facebook is the oldest as well as the largest. Started in 2004 as a sort of updated yearbook format for the Internet, specifically targeting college students, Facebook also models the shifts that have taken place over the past decade from Web 1.0 to 3.0. When I joined Facebook in 2005, it was only open to college students. Universities and colleges across the country and then the world waited for Facebook to be rolled out at their institution. Slowly Facebook opened itself up, from requiring participants with .edu emails to allowing anyone with an email address to be a participant. It is one of the few platforms that to this point has maintained import as shifts occurred, likely due to the efforts of Mark Zuckerberg et. all to reformat Facebook to satisfy the needs of the prosumer. Its original purpose, a site to post thoughts, updates, pictures, and basic “about me” information, is still a part of the platform. However, we also now can share links, message one another, post videos, and livestream from the smartphones we have at our fingertips.

At this point in time, if people in the church have one social media outlet, it is likely to be Facebook. Even my 81 year-old grandmother knows how to access Facebook from her smartphone. She rarely posts, but the ability to follow the life of her

⁵²⁵ Dan Fletcher, “How Facebook Is Redefining Privacy,” in *Time* (May 20, 2010).

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1990798,00.html> (accessed January 25, 2017).

⁵²⁶ Marshall Kirkpatrick, “Why Facebook Changed Its Privacy Strategy,” in *ReadWrite* (December 10, 2009). http://readwrite.com/2009/12/10/why_facebook_changed_privacy_policies/ (accessed January 25, 2017).

⁵²⁷ Statistics as of 2016, <https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/> (accessed January 25, 2017).

grandchildren and great-grandchildren through pictures, posts, and videos keeps her checking in daily.

Individuals are not the only ones who can have a profile on Facebook. Organizations are able to as well. Even a tiny town and country church I served outside of Nashville had a Facebook page with contact information, directions, pictures, and links to sermons for anyone looking for a church in the area.

In the Digital Cathedral, Facebook is the most basic way to nurture a network through not merely reading the Newsfeed—a function of Facebook that shows the posts of your “friends”—but to “like” and comment, in other words, participate in the conversations taking place in community. However, if one is not intentional about the settings on a Facebook profile, algorithms are designed to promote interaction with those who Facebook—by noticing our data and habits on the platform—observes to think like you, share the same interests as you, and those who you spend more time interacting with. Even if you have a diversity of ‘friends’ in your network, Facebook is designed to silo you from those who do not align with your political beliefs. A small act of resistance to this strategy of the platform would be to change Newsfeed settings from showing “Top Stories” to “Most Recent.”

Aside from the trap of the narrow Echo Chamber of voices all aligned, it is very easy to use Facebook to either broadcast your life or to lurk without sharing anything about your life. Neither of these extremes would model the theo-ethic of *touch* that homilecclesiology promotes. Does one build community with people if all one ever does is talk about yourself and your interests? Does one likewise build community if all one does is to listen to other people without opening your mouth? Thus, the proper posture for inhabiting Facebook is to be reciprocal, striving to embody dialogue across algorithmic lines of difference, being present, and consistent as a member of and minister within your social networks.

Twitter

In terms of chronology, Twitter was the next major platform to emerge in 2006. It began as a “micro-blogging” platform, only allowing each post, or “tweet,” to be 140

characters or less, the amount of characters allotted for most SMS texting devices.⁵²⁸ Like Facebook, it began with a prompt for its users: “What are you doing?” That prompt eventually dropped away, allowing Tweets to derive from any number of states, emotions, or events. Users, who are identified by distinct “handles” such as @ctsig (my handle), may use Twitter to begin and join conversations, as well as to amplify and broadcast the tweets and news of others. On a Twitter feed, posts are shown in real time. Thus, rather than being characterized as a social networking platform, like Facebook, Twitter may be characterized as an *information* networking platform. As a registered user, you can post, re-post, and reply to any public tweet.

Twitter is a platform that is far more likely to lead to communication and contact beyond the network of people you know in conventional reality than Facebook. Tweets can spread without your consent in ways Facebook, with its various levels of privacy catered to each user, cannot. Of its over 1.3 billion registered users, 79% live outside of the United States with 35 languages supported by the platform.⁵²⁹ If one is intentional about who they follow, seeking after people beyond their geographical, political, ethnic, and/or religious affiliation, Twitter can be a powerful tool in becoming more in touch with the whisper of God in a global sense and nurturing that whisper through the minister’s Twitter feed. Because of the public nature of Twitter and its low barriers, digital strategist Meredith Gould sees Twitter as being a key platform for individuals to be “ambassadors” of their denomination, congregation, etc. in the midst of a diverse community of conversation. Gould then cautions Twitter users with a list of “don’ts,” ranging from not posting anything “you’re unwilling to address,” “cannot be verified with facts,” “jeopardizes your ministry,” or “will make Jesus weep.”⁵³⁰

Twitter is a platform that, more than Facebook, takes time and investment to reap any sort of benefit. The quality of conversation and information improves the more intentional individuals are about finding people to follow and engage with. It is unlikely that one’s congregation will have enough people to “warrant using it for broadcast or

⁵²⁸ Gould, 90.

⁵²⁹ “Here’s How Many People Are on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Other Big Social Networks,” *SocialTimes* (April 4, 2016). <http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/heres-how-many-people-are-on-facebook-instagram-twitter-other-big-social-networks/637205> (accessed January 25, 2017).

⁵³⁰ Gould, 91.

engagement with them” solely.⁵³¹ Thus a local church may not have its own Twitter handle. But members of the church could still serve as ambassadors through their personal profiles and feeds. Thus Twitter can become a platform that quickly leads to intersectionality beyond the limits of geography and tradition, for better or worse.

One of the most distinctive features of social media at present developed out of a Tweet posted in 2007: the hashtag, or #. Most tweets, and even many Facebook and Instagram posts, will be marked by a # as a means of sorting the post’s content with a sort of keyword. For example, the #blm or #blacklivesmatter is used by activists to stay in conversation with one another about breaking violence against black people or to organize protests and gatherings. At the same time, #sunset is a popular means to sort out the thousands of pictures posted on Twitter and Instagram each day of, well, the sun setting. Churches and denominations can create their own hashtags and handles for people to follow, to filter out posts that are specific to a central topic or identity marker.

Hashtags are also used to organize Tweetchats on Twitter. Two of the most prominent Tweetchats in North American Christianity at the moment are #SlateSpeak and #presbyintersect. On Thursday nights at 9pm EST, Twitter users can plug in the #SlateSpeak hashtag into a search and then follow live conversation from across the country around topics such as women in the Bible, sexuality and Christianity, or violence and Christianity. For one hour, participants show up to the chat, using the hashtag to keep their posts in the conversation feed, replying to one another, retweeting one another, and encouraging one another. #SlateSpeak originated out of The Slate Project, a progressive Christian movement of people who imagine wiping the slate of the church clean on matters such as White Supremacy and sexism. #presbyintersect originates from members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who hold weekly conversations on identity markers of the PCUSA. Their gathering takes place Wednesday nights, 9:30pm EST.

Not everyone who participates in Twitter is hoping to build bridges of understanding. “Trolls” are a real and threatening presence on Twitter. Troll is Internet slang for users who purposively start fights on social media platforms by posting controversial and ill-mannered comments for their own amusement. Trolls are agents of chaos and so it is vital that in our media literacy training we let people know that they

⁵³¹ Gould, 91.

exist and that they are not worth the time and effort to dialogue with them. More than likely, the troll is not interested in being converted to your way of seeing things. They will strive to push as many of your emotional buttons as they can in the hopes that you will respond likewise for your followers to see. Thus, so the saying goes, it is best not to feed the trolls. Another way to be counter-cultural under our theo-ethic is to not have an eye-for-an-eye posture toward these trolls, but to find creative and non-violent ways to engage them, if we engage them at all.

Instagram

Facebook now owns another one of the most utilized social media platforms: Instagram. Instagram emerged in 2010 with the intent of reaching a niche of artsy social media participants who would prefer an image-based networking platform to word-based. Today, Instagram spans generations and niches, with 300 million monthly active users by 2015.⁵³² This led church social media experts to rank it as the #1 must-have-social-networking platform for churches in 2015.⁵³³

The function of Instagram is embedded in the elision of “instant,” “photograph,” and “telegram.” Instagram is a platform for sharing mostly pictures to either a private or public network. Videos may also be shared. Like Twitter, Instagram assumes real-time interaction, although people who are not posting a live photo can use the #latergram to let users know. Instead of newsfeeds of mostly 140 characters, one scrolls through a feed of photographs in reverse chronological order.

One of the draws of Instagram is its ease of use as well as its quirky filters that can be quickly added to any uploaded photo. These filters, such as—#Nashville, #earlybird, and #moon—alter the balance, contrast, and light for novice photographers to apply. “Stories” were added in 2016 to allow users to create 24-hour montages of events from the days, or a blend of photo and video, that will disappear and are not preserved on the users’ grid or in a feed. Instagram, more than any other platform, allows users to see what members of their network are up to day in and day out.

⁵³² Gould, 86.

⁵³³ Gould, 89.

As we move into some broad models for homilecclesiology, these three platforms surface over and again. Certainly other platforms will reveal themselves, likely by the time this dissertation becomes a book. However, it is also likely that the greatest number of participants will remain in these three primary platforms of social networking. At last, it is time for us to take these postures and platforms into the practice of preaching in the Digital Cathedral.

Preaching Under the Rubric of TOUCH: Homiletical Adventures with the Gadfly⁵³⁴

What follows are three levels of potential homiletical engagement within our technoculture, all appealing to the rubric of touch. We begin with the ground level for those who wish to dabble with the lure of this digital age from the pulpits in which they are ordained to speak each Sunday. With the vast majority of the church and the pastors we train being in this camp for now, this is an important starting point. The next adventure is what I call a hybrid engagement. Preachers begin the sermon in the pulpit but then use technology to allow for real give and take in the preaching moment during the worship service. The preacher can either allow the congregation to carry forth the sermon from here or she may wish to come around and talk back to comments and questions shared. Finally, we will explore preaching as it occurs entirely online, all participants gathering online from various geographic locations in real time. All options are explored under the rubric of touch established earlier in this chapter. If one does not see a form of preaching here, such as satellite preaching or posting sermons to YouTube, then they likely have not been discerned to meet the traits required to be under the rubric of touch.

Engaging the Gadfly for the Pulpit

Depending on where one is in the spectrum of risk, perhaps the first move in a paradigmatic exit from the house of the sanctuary is to explore the idiom of Web 3.0 for the sake of the monological Sunday sermon. This ground level work involves both engagement in social media through the week of sermon preparation as well as creativity

⁵³⁴ For living examples of these practices, follow my Spring 2017 “The Ministry of Preaching in the Digital Age” class at Saint Paul School of Theology on social media at #preachindigital17.

in the content of the sermon itself. The ministry of pulpit proclamation in the context of Sunday worship remains the norm, yet may be infused by technoculture in order to touch and be in touch with the congregation.

A former student of mine has played with the interpretation of scripture in the sermon event through the idiom of Twitter. Instead of rehashing events leading up to the pericope of the 32nd chapter, Carter Ellis, lead pastor of The Walk United Methodist Church, “scrolls through” the prophet’s “twitter feed.”⁵³⁵ Adhering to the rules of Twitter, she does not go over 140 characters. She also ascribes handles to key players in the pericope. Jeremiah’s handle is @prophetboy. The exiles are given the handle @frustratedexiles. Shemaiah is given the handle @falseprophet101. And of course YHWH is bestowed with a handle as well: @GODofIsrael.

Letter sent. Exiles will be mad in 2 weeks. #delayedreaction #snailmail
#bearerofGoodNews #Godhasadream

Just passing on a word from @GODofIsrael ... @Zedekiah I think your days are
numbered⁵³⁶

Then the frustrated prophets of Israel in exile begin to talkback in Ellis’ imaginary
Twitter chat.

Shemaiah (@falseprophet101): @Zedekiah and @CityofJerusalem imprison
@prophetboy already! What’s up with him? #madman #tiredofexile #homesoon

@falseprophet101 I’m right. You’re wrong. #sorrynotsorry #Godhasadream⁵³⁷

One could imagine how projecting this series of tweets on screens during the sermon could help the congregation, especially its more tech savvy members, lean into what can often come across as an outdated and historic event. Ellis has not altered the meaning of the text itself. Rather she translates to the best of her ability the tension of the historical moment through the idiom of our present technoculture. This is true of the content of the

⁵³⁵ Carter Ellis. “Jeremiah: The Land Deal” a sermon preached for The Walk United Methodist Church in Gibsonville, NC as part of the *Beautiful Change* sermon series. October 25, 2015.

⁵³⁶ Ellis, *Ibid.*

⁵³⁷ Ellis, *Ibid.*

sermon as well as for how it functions in the worship service. At the conclusion of the sermon, Ellis puts out an invitation for congregational response:

Friends, during our time of offering and in the remainder of our time of worship I encourage you to wonder: How is God calling you to step out in faith? How is God calling you to move from fretting to faithfulness? Where might you be an agent of God's change in your neighborhood?...I encourage you to join Jeremiah in posting them on facebook or twitter with the #GODhasadream #THEWALK As we join together singing and praying, you'll see these reminders of God's dream in our midst pop up onto the screen. You'll see these tweets and promises of your neighbors in the pews and partners in the Body of Christ pop up onto the screen.⁵³⁸

This leads to another aspect of this first level of engagement with the gadfly of our technoculture: the appeal to participation from the congregation through new media. Traditionally, congregational response follows the sermon in the form of song, prayer, offering, and communion. These participatory responses have always engaged the congregation, inviting them to be active in worship beyond the level of audience. Our tools also expand the pulpit, allowing the preacher to pass the microphone to the congregation to respond and dialogue together in light of the preached word. The sermon may continue to be preached throughout the week by doing what Ellis has done: offering up a shared hashtag that will help the congregation find one another on social platforms and to be in conversation.

Another way to develop sermons within our technoculture is to move the sermon feedback and feed-forward into X-reality. One way of doing this is to take the steps of sermon preparation into various digital platforms week to week.

The benefits of this weekly interaction are numerous. For one, it opens the preacher up to being influenced by congregants throughout the week and at various stages in the sermon process. Rather than a one hour meeting on a Wednesday with a text, a theme, and a pad of notes, the preacher can keep people posted on the moves of sermon preparation all week.

Imagine taking a snapshot of sermon preparation each day and posting it to Instagram. Perhaps Monday is a shot of the text in your Bible, clear enough for the

⁵³⁸ Ellis, *Ibid.*

community to see where the sermon is coming from. You could leave the image to speak for itself or you could post it with the full pericope. You could post a question to go along with the image, such as “When you read the telling of Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 6, what do you see/hear?” With a hashtag particular to the text, your followers could even post their own images in response.

Another benefit is the connection to the various levels of neighbor in our global context. Once the sermon is being played out on social media, it rarely remains behind the closed doors of a sanctuary. Congregants who share and comment on the preacher’s sermon preparation open the door to their network beyond the preacher’s. If the platform used is primarily Twitter, there will, if the preacher has developed an intentional web of connections, immediately be a global context of conversation rather than parochial. This adds to the kaleidoscopic quality of engagement with a sermon text, if we allow ourselves to be open to those comments, interactions, and disagreements.

Some preachers now establish weekly Facebook live sessions to share their thoughts leading up to the sermon. This typically occurs after initial days of study so that there is substance brought to the conversation. Congregants, but also shared contacts and non-members, see that the preacher is live in their feed and with a click of a button tune into your profile. They can listen but also are able to ask questions through a chat feed at the bottom of the video. These comments have a time stamp so you can see at what point of the conversation they arise. As the one broadcasting, you are able to watch the comments as they come in and respond in the live stream.⁵³⁹

Rather than imagining the questions congregants and neighbors, with or without Christian knowing, may ask of the text these platforms promote real dialogue. Space is given for the voice of the laity and non-church member to speak up. As the hub of connection, it is your role to respond under the rubric of touch, to promote reciprocity and keep the lines of dialogue open between text, tradition, and contexts through Web 3.0. Even if some of the people who participate in the sermon preparation do not go to

⁵³⁹ For example, see Rev. Amy Piatt, pastor at Portland First Christian Church. On her Facebook profile, she consistently hosts a Facebook live event in which she updates her network on her findings and musings for the text for the coming Sunday. Not only does she broadcast her thoughts, she goes through the comments made on the livestream and comments. At times these comments are replied to, creating threads of asynchronous conversation. The important thing is that she embodies the touch theo-ethic by hosting a space for these conversations, this preaching, to occur communally.

your church, their voice may be present in the sermon itself to the benefit of the community gathered on Sunday morning.

Engaging the Gadfly in the Pulpit

Perhaps one has made it a habit to share sermon preparation and processing through social media platforms throughout the week and wants to take conversational preaching to the next level of embodied conversation. Even before Twitter began, I encountered churches that, specifically for youth sermons, experimented in texting questions and comments from the pews around the sermon event. Sometimes texts were gathered by a point-person during the sermon to be shared (selectively) with the preacher at the conclusion of the sermon. The preacher then had the chance to answer the question or speak to the comment raised by a member of the congregation. But at that point in the technoculture, it was more difficult for the congregation to see the questions of their fellow congregant. The preacher was the bottleneck of that information.

With Twitter, the questions may be seen by more than the preacher. Some churches have introduced the voice of the pew in the preaching event through Twitter in a similar fashion to the former “send a text to the preacher” model. The church should establish its own hashtag in order for this to be organized. For example, First Christian Church of Kansas City could create and share the hashtag #firstcckc and then encourage people in the pews to share Tweets during the sermon with that hashtag. Folks in the pews could follow one another’s tweets—simply to see them or to respond and share. But folks at home unable to attend could also then be engaged in worship beyond overhearing the sermon on the radio or livestream online. The preacher could take a moment in the pulpit to look at her phone and comment on some of the tweets being shared. She could also engage in this conversation after the sermon event. One could even use technology to cast the TweetChat up on a screen for all to see, even those who do not use Twitter.

One method that I have personally experienced is that of the googledoc sermon participation. The practice of the nondenominational church I preached at was to create a public shared googledoc the morning of the sermon and to share the link to that page on

the welcome slide.⁵⁴⁰ As people entered the sanctuary, they plugged the link into the web pages on their phones. During the sermon, I could see people typing comments and questions into the doc as I was speaking. At the conclusion of the sermon, I grabbed my phone and refreshed the googledoc link and could see all of the contributions of the congregation. I then scrolled through and began to engage in the comments and questions they had shared. The congregation was small enough at about 150 that some of the anonymous contributors would feel safe enough to raise their hand and further flesh out their comment. While my monological moment of the sermon lasted about 30 minutes, the dialogical portion went on for 20 minutes. A wide portion of the congregation was engaged and clearly has become accustomed to this practice.

The church had the technology and capacity to project the googledoc page on a screen for all to see, but this was not the practice. One then could argue that this practice is still not perfect in its quest to pass the microphone from the solo preacher to a community of preachers. However, it is a step toward nurturing sermonic conversation within the context of worship every week. And nurturing this practice could lead to stronger threads of sermonic conversation throughout the rest of the week.

Obviously, there are many preachers who would never feel comfortable with this sort of risky, messy, uncontrollable practice in the pulpit. These are the same leaders who dread prayers of the people wherein a microphone gets passed around the pews. This level of embodied conversational preaching is where the neuroses of the control-freak pastor come to light. On the surface, the anxieties are around valuing order and sticking to a schedule. Deeper in the preacher's psyche may be distrust the opinions of people in the pews, even apathy. But in order for the church to grow in its witness, preachers must be willing to share the power of proclamation with the priesthood of all believers. This preaching form is a good start.

Engaging the Gadfly Beyond the Pulpit

Those who are up for leaving the pulpit altogether may indeed engage in preaching within the digital cathedral. In many ways, the novelty of X-reality and the

⁵⁴⁰ For example, the link should look something like this:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fUciUxrJSojiejJf9v41NbGrhe9LpIkT8gGmvuNfII/edit> But the link will not work unless it is made public and open to be edited by the one who created it.

unsettled nature of Web 3.0 promotes frontier like ways of doing church beyond the traditional ways. From the very beginning of the Internet, religious leaders have taken to it as evangelists seeking to spread the gospel by whatever means necessary.

Without the trappings of traditional infrastructure, the Internet has become a site for the reimagining and reorganization of conventional reality. This is the argument of Robert M. Geraci whose fascinating work *Virtually Sacred: Myth and Meaning in World of Warcraft and Second Life* challenges the branch of technophobes who accuse the Internet of being a site for unhealthy escape from the “real world” into “virtual worlds.” Participants in both scripted (such as World of Warcraft) and unscripted (such as Second Life) virtual worlds are, according to Geraci, acting on impulses to choose, create, affirm, and strategically orient themselves within a virtual world.⁵⁴¹ This action is not unidirectional, however. Geraci imagines how virtual worlds provide “feedback loops” to practices in conventional religious reality.⁵⁴²

For example, Geraci highlights the hopeful practices of participants in Second Life—a platform for a virtual world wherein participants can create their own avatars, vocations, habits, homes, and practices among other avatars engaged in the virtual world. Human actors in Second Life are not passive consumers of religiosity. They cannot be. The avatar does nothing without the energy of the human behind the computer screen. Often, Geraci argues, these practitioners are imaginative and engaged with the process of meaning-making. Christians, Muslims, and the not-yet categorized religious find in this unbounded space the opportunity to create and nuance religious practices in ways conventional religions with rigid hierarchies will not allow. Some occasional outlaws enter the space to torment and disturb the utopian play, but this is certainly not unique to virtual reality.⁵⁴³ Kimberly Knight’s Holy Heretic Pub and the Virtual Hajj allow those unauthorized to lead and participate in conventional religious spaces—because they are homosexual, queer, or theologically curios and skeptical—a voice. Geraci demonstrates

⁵⁴¹ Robert M. Geraci. *Virtually Sacred: Myth and Meaning in World of Warcraft and Second Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 203.

⁵⁴² Geraci, 165.

⁵⁴³ Geraci, 146.

how these online spaces are *actual* spaces “where ecumenism reigns and religious acceptance” and innovation “is possible.”⁵⁴⁴

Kimberly Knight no longer leads church in Second Life. As the platform of Second Life has waned in popularity, Knight has taken her ministry to Facebook and the community known as Thin Places Online. For over a decade, Knight has publicly owned the call to online ministry. She raises funds for her ministry through her social media networks. On Wednesday evening, she hosts Lectio Live with Facebook’s new live application. During the event, Knight will offer a reading of scripture or meditation as participants comment on a chat box below the video. Everyone can see each other’s comments, as well as Knight. Watching Knight, it is obvious who is a regular in this community and who is new. She will ask new names to say something about themselves, and will welcome them by name at some point during the gathering. Knight also will host dialogue by answering questions or responding to comments shared in the comment box. During Advent, Knight has been hosting candle lighting events on Sunday evenings with scripture reading and guided prayer.

On Twitter, one *koinōnia* fellowship in particular stands out as fitting Geraci’s argument that these virtual spaces are often the frontier where religious practices and beliefs can be challenged and hopefully lead to renewal in conventional religion. This organization is known as The Slate Project. The Slate Project was started as a mission of the Delaware Maryland Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). It continues to exist through “co-conspirators” across the world and online donations.⁵⁴⁵ Led by a variety of pastors, and co-founded by three ELCA pastors, the network imagines Christianity with a clean slate—erasing embedded white supremacy and patriarchy that have accumulated in so many religious structures. The Slate Project describes itself as “A new kind of Christian community, both online and face-to-face” and lists itself as being based out of Baltimore, Maryland.⁵⁴⁶ Participants in this gathering see themselves as

⁵⁴⁴ Geraci, 132.

⁵⁴⁵ The Slate Project, “About” section. Website. <http://www.slateproject.org/who-we-arewhat-we-do.html> (accessed December 20, 2016).

⁵⁴⁶ The Slate Project, homepage. Website. <http://www.slateproject.org/> (accessed December 20, 2016).

having conversations that will serve as energy for a movement to “change the church from the inside out.”⁵⁴⁷

I am not in geographic proximity to the weekly Baltimore gathering on Monday nights, however, I have had many opportunities to participate in @TheSlateProject’s weekly TweetChat known as #SlateSpeak. Every Thursday, for one hour starting at 9pm EST, communal preaching in the style of lament, confession, conversation, questioning, and imagination takes place among a network of lay and ordained pastors seeking renewal for the church and accountability in their walks with God.

The way the TweetChat operates is a bounded time and space for a guided conversation around a particular theme, question, event, or text. Each week, a different moderator selects the centering-subject. They will introduce themselves leading up to the start time and share ahead of time what the topic may be. As participants enter the chat on Thursday evening they will often offer short introductions, especially those who are new to the gathering. Then the moderator will offer an introductory prayer tweet to open the preaching event. The moderator likely has a series of 5-6 guiding questions in mind before the start of the chat, likely each one building on anticipated comments from the previous question. They will throw out the first question and wait as participants begin to respond. Strong moderators model dialogue by commenting on the comments of others, tagging participants in comments and connecting threads to one another. Once the first question seems to have reached an end of energy, another question is introduced and so on until the hour is through. At that point the moderator may summarize, call for prayer requests, and then close out the event with a benediction. Some may stay and continue the TweetChat but most leave and return the following week.

TweetChats only scratch the surface of novel ways of preaching made possible with social media. Once again, this network honors X-Reality by not limiting itself to boundaries of online and face-to-face ministry. The whole of the network and the fellowship of conspirators is itself The Slate Project. Is it a church? It studies the Bible together, breaks bread, and share life together through regular gatherings. It does not fit into the conventional, static definition of church that relies upon the pulpit and pew

⁵⁴⁷ The Slate Project, homepage. Website. <http://www.slateproject.org/> (accessed December 20, 2016).

binary, yet it exists and has a strong core of regular participants who thank God weekly for the space created by this ministry for those who feel on the margins of church.

All three levels of engaging the gadfly seek to disrupt the monological illusion and to bring conversation into preaching beyond a metaphorical level. Thus, each level strives toward greater inclusivity and activity from preaching's partners. Thus each level involves greater risk on the part of the preacher who no longer controls and filters *the* message of the sermon event. The practices briefly mentioned here rely upon the focused study and preparation of the ordained preacher in tension with the capacity to be an improviser. In the comedic sense, Improv relies upon the mantra of "Yes, and," meaning the capacity of fellow performers to listen to one another and to respond in ways that do not pull the rug out from underneath the proposal set in motion in the beginning of a scene. Successful improvisation promotes collaboration and the affirmation of the world being hosted through the collective imagination. One may even be surprised to learn that one of the keys to successful improvisation is generosity. Legends of North American improvisation Del Close and Charna Halpern put it this way: "A truly funny scene is not the result of someone trying to steal laughs at the expense of his partner, but of generosity—of trying to make the other person (and his ideas) look as good as possible."⁵⁴⁸ The end result is a story or scene greater than the sum of its parts, one that emerges from the synergy of the collaborating whole. If any one member decides to go against the grain, to radically shift the flow, the synergy falls apart. So it is with our preaching in homilecclesiology.

With the subject in the center,⁵⁴⁹ the quest for truth and beauty in light of what we know of Jesus and God's two-fold mandate that we are all loved unconditionally and that we are called to promote justice in light of that love, we do our best to nurture dialogue, expecting Gospel to arrive and emerge from the many rather than the one. The Holy

⁵⁴⁸ Charna Halpern and Del Close. *Truth in Comedy: The Manual for Improvisation* (Colorado Springs: Meriwether Publishing, 1994), 16.

⁵⁴⁹ See Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, *Ibid.* A whole chapter could be written on the method of Palmer in and its parallel in homilecclesiology. In fact, I plan to add this chapter to a book form of this project and to title it "The Courage to Preach." I believe that new way of preaching that organically emerges from homilecclesiology is one in which the preacher steps to the side in order to carefully place the subject at the center of communal proclamation and to guide the conversation for the good of the whole. This sort of preaching is seen in TweetChats, but certainly also seen in dinner church preaching and other forms emerging in non-traditional ecclesiological gatherings.

Spirit of the perichoretic is given space to work her magic as we all strive to be in touch with one another, suspicious of the desire for anyone to grasp or be grasped without consent and so to shut down conversation, to shut down the sermon.

Conclusion-A New Reformation?

A half century ago, Reid anticipated the shifts we have seen in our present technoculture. Looking at his technoculture in the 1950s, Reid argues in the 1960s that the church needed to transform from a hierarchical model in which an expert delivered cognitive information into the minds of the laity into something altogether novel. He could not envision this church at the time. But it has been my joy in the years of developing this project to stumble upon glimpses of ways of being church and preaching in the church beyond the monological illusion.

Homilecclesiology emerges around the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. This Reformation exploded on the heels of a church leader who was innovative in his engagement with the new media of his time. Martin Luther consistently utilized print and image, with a novel tool known as the printing press, to get his revolutionary message about the church across. He also commissioned paintings and music to get his messages into the ethos of the people. John T. McQuillen, assistant curator of printed books and bindings at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York, called Luther's campaign "one of the most successful media campaigns in history."⁵⁵⁰ He called for a revolution to the way in which ecclesiology exists, influenced by changes in technoculture that led to a more literate society across class and gender, the freeing of liturgy and Bible from the imperial language of Latin into the vernacular of the local culture, and the nature of authority in church leadership. For this reason, Tomoko Emmerling, project manager for "Here I Stand' ...Luther Exhibitions USA 2016, likes to say "if Martin Luther was alive today, he would use Twitter."⁵⁵¹ What seems anything but new in terms of media today was once the new media of another generation, with its own controversies and challenges to the traditional way of doing things. A critical eye to history normalizes change.

⁵⁵⁰ Tanya Mohn, "Long Before Twitter, Martin Luther Was a Media Pioneer," in *The New York Times*, October 28, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/30/arts/design/long-before-twitter-martin-luther-was-a-media-pioneer.html?mwrsm=Facebook&_r=0 (accessed November 3, 2016).

⁵⁵¹ Mohn, *Ibid.*

In the hundreds of years that followed Luther's moment in time, we have seen novel forms of church emerge that have continued to contribute to a kaleidoscope of ecclesiologies, distinct and diverse. Ecclesiological revolutions have happened before. With the Reformation came profound changes to preaching—the practice became a main event when for years it had been eclipsed by the drama of the liturgy, pulpits became the center piece of architecture in the Reformed church as a technology to amplify the proclamation, eventually, the pulpit even opened up to women as churches began to ordain them. Changes will happen again and again to the way church is done, who gets to lead the church, and what it means to be church. Preaching and preachers will be caught up in these revolutions. Indeed, now we find ourselves in the midst of the badlands of a revolution we know not in its fullness. We swat at significant but elusive gadflies—globalization, climate change, cloning, secularism, challenges to gender roles and the simplicity of a binary system to define which gender is which. The gadfly that has presented itself as a sign of this revolution and the one we have engaged throughout this project in particular is technology—as artifact and agent of cultural change.

Regardless of technology utilized in the preaching event—computer, microphone in static pulpit, lavalier on the moving preacher, hologram preacher—preaching in the framework of homilecclesiology will ultimately need to allow for synergy and mutual response-ability *in the preaching event(s)*. Homilecclesiology imagines a future for preaching with investment from the wider church. It imagines not just conversational preaching from the pulpit. It imagines there being as many pulpits as there are people in our congregations. It casts the preacher as a theologically formed and theologically capable facilitator of theological conversation and proclamation. Preaching, as a practice, is freed from the bind of clerical office so that the priesthood of all believers can take on more of the responsibility of proclamation. In the spirit of our current technoculture, this preaching ministry of all believers is radically collaborative, shareable, public and connective. In resistance to some aspects of this technoculture, this preaching ministry will seek to build bridges of empathy and conversation where echo chambers are established. It is a posture of preaching ministry that is not solely dedicated to the Sunday sermon, but is open to engagement across multiple networks in X-reality, be it dinner church, Facebook live, Twitter or local parish.

Engaging the gadfly of our present technoculture, this project encouraged novel ways of preaching and being church to emerge. Technological artifacts do assist in hosting preaching events that allow for novel means of mutuality. At the same time, I posited a general norm of appropriateness for the novel practices that emerge, so it is not an argument of ‘everything goes.’ We discover this norm by returning to process theology and its description of a God of possibility/touch not purpose/grasp. Although other norms may be argued going forward, from a process perspective I want to argue that homilecclesiology, as I have outlined it, requires a preaching ecology of *touch* with regard to the technological tools we may utilize in preaching ministry.

It is a holy challenge to keep the ministry of preaching holy and God-breathed rather than self-indulgent and narrow-hearted. Indeed, we must believe that ministry to the Word is one that requires call and commitment of the one serving as an amplifier for God’s whisper in the ordinariness of our days. It requires training, mentoring, flexibility, and humility. It is a powerful position. It has been abused and will be abused through linear conceptions of power amplified with technological innovation. It has been transformative and will be transformative through relational power amplified with technological innovation.

This project sought what is trans-cultural (the defining essences of a practice that transcend cultural shifts) about preaching so that it could dialogue—not debate—with digital culture in particular but ever-changing communication culture in general. With a trans-cultural enduring core for the practice of preaching, preachers and preaching could faithfully play with technological changes occurring in recent years—subverting the claims of those changes at times but certainly not ignoring them and the suggestions they make to our practice of preaching.

We began by deconstructing the dominant paradigm of “pulpit and pew” as that which defines “real” preaching. This was a risky and so slightly frightening exit from the house of the sanctuary, and all of the security our residence in that home has provided. But once we see preaching as a practice not *essentially* linked to pulpits and pews, we may dance with—rather than swat at or ignore— the gadflies of our digital age: social media and the democratization of information, X-reality and the blurred lines between online encounter and off-line, the emphasis on timely response rather than lengthy response, just

to name a few. Ultimately, this digital age, like previous ages of technological change such as the Reformation, presents problems as well as possibilities, to the study and practice of preaching.

Now it is time for homileticians to experiment, from their own traditions and institutions, with the gadfly of technoculture for the sake of the preaching ministry and the formation of Christ's Body in the world. So much of our teaching has centered on the delivery of the sermon on Sunday that most syllabi will need to undergo some reformations. However, at the heart of those renovations are daily practices of interaction via social media platforms as a means to expand the where and when of proclamation. There is also the parallel formation for ministry that is the teaching of digital natives and immigrants. Our classrooms will have a mix of students who are savvy with social media, apathetic toward it, ill-equipped and unable to engage it, and some serious skeptics. We need to create space for all and nurture encounter with emerging possibilities in preaching nonetheless.

As pertains to philosophical systems, process proposes that all metaphysics, including itself, are propositional. That is, we can never be too certain about the truths we have deduced. Whitehead says, "Philosophy has been haunted by the unfortunate notion that its method is dogmatically to indicate premises which are severally clear, distinct, and certain; and to erect upon those premises a deductive system of thought."⁵⁵² Thus our errors in philosophy, theology, and homiletics are twofold: that we can ever map clear boundaries and hierarchies for our subjects and that the systems we do build upon these foundations are finalized, with only slight tweaks here and there. Rather, Whitehead claims that all are categories "are tentative formulations of the ultimate generalities."⁵⁵³ In the words of Huffaker, Whitehead set up the system to be "capable of self-correction on this score: the theology is no more static than its deity."⁵⁵⁴

I have made a proposal of norms of appropriateness to guide the ministry of preaching, beyond the bin(d)ary of pulpit and pew, in this networked technoculture under the banner of homilecclesiology. This is a call to preaching lives that are holistic,

⁵⁵² Whitehead, *P&R*, 8.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁴ Huffaker, 187.

attentive, collaborative, and persistent in the setting of X-reality. Some may apply this proposal to radical ways of preaching in Web 3.0 that revolve around engagement within our emergent technologies predominately. Others will find that this proposal also serves as a reaffirmation of their call to preach beyond the pulpit in dinner churches and house churches, and to name such dialogical activities as real preaching among preachers. Most will dabble somewhere in between.

Still some will ignore the proposal in order to live out their offices of Word and Sacrament in churches that are still safe in the Sanctuary model of ecclesiology. Time will tell what impact this engagement with the gadfly of disruptive technological innovation will mean to our discipline and our ministry. But a proposal is all that it is. And it awaits the refinement of proposals and conversation partners that are to come.

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