

RELEVANT LESSONS IN APPLIED THEOLOGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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01

**CURRENT CHALLENGES IN
PREACHING PREACHER'S SPIRITUAL
LIFE. EXPOSITORY PREACHING**

Lungu Doru

INTRODUCTION

Preaching has been and always will be Satan's focus point for attack and distortion. XXI century preaching challenges are much the same to the ones experienced in the past but with different tendencies nowadays. The evolution of modern technology comes with a major influence in our church preaching activity. These influences are both positive and negative.

My work is divided in two chapters: Preacher's spiritual life and Expository preaching, in which we'll study the challenges of preaching. In the first chapter discussing spiritual life without spiritual discipline is in vain. Spiritual discipline including prayer, fasting, bible study and Holy Spirit's guidance.

Within the current preaching challenges, you'll notice nothing new but challenges coming in different forms. For this reason, I am pointing out some arguments as well as puritan's preaching provocations.

A preacher's spiritual life and not only, I will discuss as a sum of all sincerely practiced disciplines, with a clean heart which reflects in a spiritual and humble relationship with the church members and society as a whole.

Before discussing reasons in favor of expository preaching, I would like to explain what expository preaching is. Simply, expository preaching is exposing the Word of God. Using different interpretation methods of the bible text and then how we can apply it to our lives. Is the type of preaching where we look for God's will to be revealed to his people. Through this way of preaching we desire hearing the clear message from Scriptures more than anything else. Exposing the bible text, we acknowledge the authority of God over his church, authority that begins and ends with the Bible.¹

¹ Mark Dever, *What is a healthy church?* (Crossway Books, 2007) 64.

1. THE PREACHER SPIRITUAL LIFE

Preaching cannot be separated from the preacher, from the intended listener, from the Bible where the inspiration comes and from the Holy Spirit's guidance. Taking out any of the four elements will result in an empty speech, a false preaching, with no echo, morals and unable to change lives, to bring the listener closer to God and unable to glorify Him. Blending the four elements in a profound and balanced manner is ideal in bringing a real outcome for the preacher as well as the intended listeners.

To get a clear image of a preacher's character, a few minutes or even hours in front of the congregation won't suffice, but when the preacher is alone you are able to see who he really is. An intense prayer life combined with fasting is the norm for a spiritual preacher. The Scripture study under the Holy Spirit guidance should be the standard for every man who wishes to have a clear and clean exposure of the Word of God.

In the first chapter of the book *The reformed pastor* by Richard Baxter², he is asking questions every preacher should address himself. Soul searching starts with the question, each puritan took very seriously *Am I saved?*. The preacher should firstly make sure he is saved, born again, before anything else.

In the book of Acts, Paul is spreading awareness to the Ephesians to *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.* The accent is strongly falling on the preacher himself, as we are

reminded of the blood given for his flock. Pastoring a church involves being part of the flock himself, part of the nation won by the Lord Jesus at Calvary.

The cultural, social, economic and virtual context we live in has changed not only the our interest for the spiritual things but the individual identity too, so much so that we as people don't regard God as The One who established the moral standard, but regarding each other in the defining the decanonization which has marked not only the godless people's lives but the believers too. As a consequence, preaching became some motivational speech, psychological massage, mental exercise, oratorical art, amusement, cheap moralistic and a club for self development.

In this first chapter, I would like to address in detail one of the most important challenges in preaching and that would be the key elements of a preacher's spiritual life. Prayer, fasting, study of the Scripture and Holy Spirit's guidance are the four elements of a spiritual life. Through these elements we identify some spiritual disciplines.

1.1. THE LIFE OF PRAYER

One of the most determinant spiritual disciplines is prayer. The puritans said that a servant of the Gospel has to have a servant's heart, be devoted to the Scripture, have the capacity to preach it and last but not least a life fulfilled with prayers.³ The prayer is wrongfully simply defined as being our communication with God. But, if we take in consideration all a prayer implies we'll soon reach a more complex and profound perspective. John Piper in his book *Thirsty for God* is referring to the prayer as being one of the ways God is mostly glorified through.

² Richard Baxter, *Păstorul cu viața înnoită* (Perla Suferinței, 2013) 43 – 51.

³ John H. Armstrong, *The Compromised Church* (Crossway Books, 1998) 264.

So how is God glorified? The prayer is openly recognising that without Christ we are nothing and can do nothing. And the prayer symbolizes our repentance from ourselves to Christ, believing He is caring for us and our needs. The prayer should humble us, the needy ones and lifts God as the most rich.⁴

In preparing a sermon and its delivery it is very clear the need of prayer from the preacher, the one who is preparing it. There is no worldly wisdom in the preparation of the sermon, nor the worldly desire of the preacher but the divine intention and God's will to reveal Himself to the people. Hence why all glory should be given to the Worthy One and that's what a preacher does through prayer.

Pride doesn't skip preachers nowadays and the virtual world seems to be the most fertile terrain where our ego grows. This is why prayer is most important. The strength of a true servant of Christ comes from prayer. Being vigilant on our knees is a challenge in a superficial world where pleasure is highly regarded. The time spent on our knees in the closed room is crucial for a humble presence in front of the congregation, the cameras.

The prayer life is not authentic if the closed room is unknown and the knees are not bruised from private devotion. Coming before Christ and acknowledging we are powerless without Him, that our eyes are looking up waiting for His rescue, will qualify us to be in front of our brothers in Christ delivering the Scripture.

In his book, Leonard Ravenhill has an entire chapter where he talks about fire leads to fire.⁵ In other words the people of prayer, behind closed doors, will spark a fire of prayer in others too. Same with people filled with the Holy

⁴ John Piper, *Însetat după Dumnezeu* (Neemia, 2005) 157.

⁵ Leonard Ravenhill, *De ce întârzie trezirea* (Perla Suferinței, 2010) 63.

Spirit, they will bring the blessing of the Holy Spirit over others too.

1.2. FASTING

More and more theologians nowadays believe that sin has reached the highest level in church and society. More people are found living for this worldly world and taken as a living example by the weak Christians. The utmost Christians are tempted by the false teachings and influences by giving virtues a new face. The book *Strange fire* talks about the dilemma one journalist of African news has found himself in, when after doing his research on a charismatic event, has reached the decision that the Holy Spirit can't be behind those people at the event but another spirit.⁶

Our Lord Jesus teaching his disciples who were wondering why they could not heal the sick, said in Matthew 17:21 that *this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting*. The act of serving in itself can't be separated from a life of fasting. The secret to finding spiritual strength and the ability to enjoy heavenly peace is by ignoring our physical pleasures. The power lacking sermon and preacher is a result of an absent fasting life.

1.3. STUDYING THE SCRIPTURE

If there is a real calling in the preaching field, that's to stay close to the Bible. The fellowship of theological intellectualism has widened so much that the very subtle spirituality of everyday life is excused by the most refined biblical arguments. Caleb Colton said:

To know the one who studies people is like a soulless body, and the one who studies books only is like the soul with no

⁶ John MacArthur, *Foc străin* (Agape, 2016) 22, 23.

body. But the one, that adds the observation to the scenery, and to what he reads, meditates, is on the right path of knowledge, with the condition of, when searching other hearts, not no forget his own.⁷

Richard Foster defined study as the experience of thorough observation which transforms the mind of the one who studies. The Old Testament accentuates the Law being written on the doorsteps, on gates, on the hand so it's always before the eyes of Israel's children. This would shape the way of thinking of the ones who would repeatedly and regularly see it, and then their way of life. In The New Testament the hard material where the law was written has become the heart walls.⁸

Studying the Word of God as a way of life for a preacher nowadays is lacking in many ways. Being dedicated to Bible study is a huge challenge in this century where the Christianity is trying to please the majority. Apostle Jacob 1:25 reminds servants of God and not only that *the one who peers into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, and is not a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, such one shall be blessed in what he does.*

Being trapped into the pride of sin nowadays is mainly caused by the lack of an intimate study life.⁹ To have the wisdom Jesus had we need to get to know the Father, and to be able to discover Him we have to look in the Scripture. Getting deeper in the Scripture involves hard work and sacrifice not only to prepare some sermons but for a healthy spiritual life of the preacher too.

⁷ Richard Foster, *Disciplinele spirituale* (Logos, 1996) 82.

⁸ Richard Foster, *Disciplinele spirituale* (Logos, 1996) 84.

⁹ Richard Foster, *Disciplinele spirituale* (Logos, 1996) 147 - 148.

1.4. HOLY SPIRIT FULFILLMENT

In this chapter we won't discuss controversial subjects related to the Holy Spirit baptism and its role, but the importance of being fulfilled with the Holy Spirit as a servant of God. In Ephesians 5:18 the verse is bringing to light the necessity of a complete guidance by the Holy Spirit. The wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit that drives a servant of the Lord is much needed in the preaching, when pride is so highly regarded.

Before His departure, our Lord Jesus Christ, has made it clear that the Holy Spirit's role is to guide us, show us and open locked doors. John MacArthur explains Holy Spirit fulfillment as:

...let's surrender our hearts to Christ's authority, allowing His Word to shape our attitudes and actions. His thoughts to become our meditation subject, His standards to become our goal and He becomes our heart's most desired wish. When we obey His truth, Holy Spirit guides us to live our lives in a way that glorifies God.¹⁰

2. EXPOSITORY PREACHING

The reality of preaching just before the great spiritual awakening in the XVII and XVIII centuries in England and the United States can be related to the one in the XXI century. The common desire for an attractive message, even commercial, moralist and based on a foundation lacking spirituality, was one of the characteristics for the vast majority of evangelical churches around the world.

Another essential element used by preachers very often is creating a pleasant experience, unique, for each sermon. That's why the question: *Have you enjoyed church today?*

¹⁰ John MacArthur, *Foc străin* (Agape, 2016) 249.

Experiencing pleasure from sermons that adhere more to clubs like than church is what the pastor is looking for. This concept is not found in the Bible, it is an earthly concept. The Bible is talking about experiencing soul searching and Holy Spirit guidance through the preaching.

If, until few years ago preaching was based on the Scripture, once modern technology came out, the power of image appeared too, and many preachers found themselves lacking the capacity of delivering Jesus Christ crucified, by using different images with Bible impressions. This new way of preaching using Powerpoint or any other visual materials is making a huge difference to the way belief is received and is replaced by what meets the eye.

The Word of God is the main source of life and health. At the same time the Bible is our food, which causes our growth and protects the life of a person and the church's life. The way the Scripture is presented is crucial.¹¹ There are many ways of preaching, like the subject preaching, the narrative preaching, biographical and expository preaching. One type of preaching should be in the center of God's church and that is the expository preaching, exposure of the Word of God which should feed the heart and soul of the listener. In this chapter we are discussing the importance of expository preaching, the reasons behind it, the obstacles and the effects of expository preaching.

2.1. REASONS FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING

One of the first reasons that should motivate us to come back to expository preaching is the fact that this specific type of preaching has been abandoned. The preaching method used by the first church was the expository preaching and as per Martin

¹¹ Mark Dever, *What is a healthy church?* (Crossway Books, 2007) 63 - 64.

Luther's saying, preaching of the Gospel is the only way to a reformed church.¹²

Preaching the Scripture is the center of the worship.¹³ The singing is biblical, prayer should be part of communal worship, but none should take the place of the Word of God. Only through the revelation of the Scripture's truth is born the song, prayer, generosity, sacrifice, helping others and any other form of worshiping. The biggest challenge is the time and space given to the expository preaching as the most important act of worshiping for the local church.

The Truth found in the Scripture should be exposed so people would get to know Him, to get released from sin and saved from eternal death. In his book Hosea 4:6 is bringing up the reason for which the people are dying, and their children are forgotten by God, which is the forgotten Law by the people, they departed from it.

2.2. CHALLENGES OF EXPOSITORY

All spiritual disciplines have their challenges, no matter what the discipline is, Satan and his army of demons aren't resting at night but looking to swallow and destroy the herd as much as possible.

The first difficulty we'd like to mention is the preacher himself. Some preachers don't use expository preaching willingly or don't spend enough time preparing the sermon for a clear message of the Gospel. Other preachers aren't born again and do not know the importance of a clear exposition of the Scripture. The church members and guests are not prepared to sit and listen for an hour to the sermon. The Word of the Bible is happening when it comes to preachers placed in their role to fulfill their congregations' worldly needs.

¹² Martin Luther, *Cele 95 de teze de la Wittenberg - Sola Scriptura*.

¹³ Mark Dever, *What is a healthy church?* (Crossway Books, 2007) 65.

2.3. THE EFFECTS OF A BIBLICAL PREACHING

David R. Helm in the introduction of his book 'Expository preaching' is mentioning some of the principles in Charles Simeon's preaching, who has served fifty-four years in a clear, simple but powerful way the Word of God. The scope of his preaching was to humble the sinner, glorify God and promote a holy way of life.¹⁴

If the Truth of God has survived to today is because of preachers like him, who have taught in a simple, clear but powerful way the Gospel. Christians got to know the Lord Jesus through a perseverance and coherent Bible presentation.

Protestant reformation and its effects happened due to the dedication in the study and expositive presentation of the Gospel. Understanding the doctrine and teachings in a clearer and logical way was one of the stepping stones in the reformation.

Understanding the whole plan of salvation is possible when the bible text is followed and explained in its truth. Recognising the sovereignty of our God in all aspects of our lives is easier when the Word has been exposed simply and clearly.

CONCLUSION

Following this study, we've learned some things that clearly affect the lives of the servants who are preaching the Word of God and the life of the local church as well. First and foremost, the conclusion deduced is that every preacher and believer has a calling to a life of prayer, fasting, Bible study and Holy Spirit guidance.

Secondly, we noticed the lack of spiritual disciplines in the life of the servants of God affects not only them but the congregation they serve too.

Last but not least the decreased curiosity for an expository preaching of the ones who are teaching the Scriptures has transformed local churches in some society clubs and charity events.

The two large challenges studied, the spiritual life of a preacher and expository preaching, have serious results in the XXI century affecting the life of the local church who has been called to be salt and the light in a decadent society.

¹⁴David R. Helm, *Expositional preaching* (Crossway, 2014) 13.

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02

PROPHET MICAH THE MODEL OF MINISTRY

Ilie Sorițău

Today, there are many so called preachers or communicators of truth. Yes, indeed there is much preaching, but not at all Biblical preaching. Indeed, the church finds itself at very critical point, due in major part to the crisis found in today's pulpits. Quoting Mark Dever, the authors of the book *Engaged Exposition*, Danny Akin, Bill Curtis and Stephen Rummage agree on the fact that "preachers of the gospel have jettisoned a word based ministry that is expository in nature."¹ However, way before the book mentioned has been published, it was Mark Dever, who in multiple occasions have stated that "the first mark of a healthy church is expository preaching. It is not only the first mark: it is far and away the most important of them all, because if you get this right, all of the others should follow."² Even though the advice is correct, there is a visible crisis in the pulpits and churches.

According to John MacArthur, "in an effort to appeal to people's interest, the church today emphasizes a great many different programs, methods, and approaches."³ The small group activities, the influence of a desire to be "culturally relevant" and too much music and drama have become increasingly popular and without one's realizing they become detrimental to preaching, correctly said, to biblical preaching. The proclamation of any kind of message other than the gospel message which is the truth of God revealed in the Bible and especially in Jesus Christ, is not preaching.⁴

¹ Daniel L.Akin, Bill Curtis and Stephen Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*. B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, 2011, p.1

² Mark Dever, *Nine Marks for a Healthy Church*. Wheaton: Crossway Publishing, 2004, p.39

³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Acts 1-12*. Chicago: Moody press, 1996, p.47

⁴ Ibidem.

During someone's overall ministry, the preacher will end up preaching to both converted and the unconverted.⁵ The scope of preaching is to clearly communicate God's Word, the Truth, to the hearers with the desire for them all to be able to understand it and then apply it to their daily leaving. For the converted, the sermon aims to use all Scripture as means to "teach, reproof, correct and train in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" NKJ 2 Timothy 3:16. For the unconverted the aim is to present the Word of God and its full content in such a way that the hearer comes to understand the need for a Savior and a saving faith.

Without any doubt, preaching is an essential aspect of ministry and it should be treated with all diligence and in all seriousness. However, there is another aspect of ministry that has been not necessarily rejected, but neglected and that is the pastoral aspect of ministry. More and more pastors call themselves pastor-teacher, forgetting that the call to pastorate includes not only feeding the flock but also care for the flock, be that providing healing, nursing, protection, etc.

There is no better way to understand pastoral ministry than to look at the life and ministry of the prophet Micah. Force by the nature of pastoral ministry to be a voice for the people of God, one must learn how to approach life with all of its issues and problems. Be that joy or sorrow, a minister of the Gospel must learn how to live among these people and be there as an encourager, defender, promoter and sustainer. Probably this prophet is the one of the best if not the best examples of how to handle ministry. His message and method is well described and

⁵ William Barclay, "A Comparison of Paul's Missionary Preaching and Preaching to the Church," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1975, p.165-175

will stand as a lesson for all to learn. The prophet Micah "ministered during the "golden age" of Hebrew prophets in the latter half of the eighth century B.C."⁶ Micah has come to symbolize the man of God who became the spokesman for the mistreated, the downtrodden, the abused and oppressed people of all the ages. Micah lived with the pain of the people. Yet he boldly predicted a day of glory and hope to come in the future. He was a constant promoter of true justice. He was a moral conscience to the nation as he pled the cause for people who suffered so terribly at the hands of corrupt people in power.

G. Campbell Morgan says, "Oppression and violence, corruption, bribery, robbery dishonesty, pride were the factors that stirred the prophet to utter his prophecy." He adds that the prophet saw the ultimate hope not in a reform program but in a person. "The hope of the nation, according to this prophecy was in the coming ruler. The great central statement of the prophecy is this: "This man shall be our peace"."⁷

Having given this broad view of the prophecy of Micah let us now look more closely at the minor prophet and the book we call Micah under the following headings:

An analysis of the prophecy considering authorship and examine the contents with the great themes. Additionally, the prophet and his burden will investigate the man and his personality and calling from God. The discussion around the times in which he lived and preached is very appropriate here. And the final heading will deal with the value and the uniqueness of this book and this prophet to the Bible as a whole.

⁶ Miles T. Bennet, *The Book of Micah*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, p. 11.

⁷ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Minor Prophets*, New York, USA: Fleming H. Revell, 1980, p. 79.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROPHECY OF MICAH

In order of Jewish tradition Micah stands without challenge as one of their prophets. It is widely thought that the name Micah is a shortened form of a longer name Micaiah which was commonly used in Hebrew. If this is a source, then the prophet's name means "who is like God?"⁸ It was not until the 1800's that anyone challenged the integrity of this book.⁹

There was little debate or question that Micah was the prophet. Micah wrote the first three chapters and that the latter half of the book was composed by later writers. While there are those few who question the book, there is a long list of great Biblical scholars who maintain there is no question about authorship or unity. One example, Dr. J.L. Green says, "External evidence clearly points to Micah's authorship of the entire book. In places, internal evidence argues for unity, in other sections it is neutral; in a few passages it points toward composite authorship."¹⁰ He adds on the basis of his exhaustive study of style and language, "The book is certainly not the patch work of interpolations that is sometimes said to be. It is a great book with a timeless message coming from a power peasant preacher, Micah, the Morashitite."¹¹

⁸ E. J. Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Erdmans Publishing House, 1956, p. 211.

⁹ E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Erdmans Publishing House, 1956, p. 250.

¹⁰ Kyle M. Yates, *Preaching from the Prophets*, Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1942, p. 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

AN OUTLINE AND THE CONTENTS

Several scholars argue that the Book of Micah is a largely logical arrangement of notes from sermons and addresses given by the prophet. Three major headings might be:

A. Judgment and salvation - chapter 1-2

1. The places named to be judged (1:2-16)
2. The reasons for the coming judgement (2:1-11)
3. The promise of a saved remnant (2:12-13)

B. A Revealing of sins and sinners. The rules and prophets are corrupt and condemned - chapter 3:1-12

C. The picture of coming grace and glory - chapter 4-7

1. The promised Messiah (4:1 - 5:15)
2. The controversy God presents to Israel (chapter 6)
3. The eventual victory of grace and mercy (chapter 7)

As has been shown throughout the book the themes of judgment and correction, sin and guilt, salvation and hope are constantly before the reader. Campbell Morgan maintains the easier way to understand the book is to divide it around the "calls to hear (1:2, 3:1, 6:1)."¹²

Yates says that in Micah's prophecy: "Captivity and exile are inevitable. Social injustice is rebuked. Unfaithfulness and dishonesty are denounced, and a new city and nation are foretold."¹³

In his book, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Sellin comments: "His exhortations to repentance addressed to the

¹² Morgan, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 76.

¹³ Yates, *Preaching from the Prophets*, p. 117.

rich, the judges and the prophets are inspired by deepest moral earnestness; he is in this respect an Amos Redivivus."¹⁴

The finest tribute paid to the greatness of the prophet's life theme may have come from Merrill who said: "... to him it was given through the inspiration of God to state as no other has ever done the simple majestic unalterable essentials of true religion."¹⁵

THE PROPHET AND HIS BURDEN

How does one explain such a person as a prophet? What makes a man of such character? Let us consider his heritage and background. One explanation for Micah was offered by Cohon who said: "the cry of the poor woke prophecy in his soul."¹⁶

One scholar suggests that Micah was a country man who looked with distrust on great power in the hands of arrogant people. He could agree with the axiom that "Total power corrupts totally." Because of his lowly background he was able to see things through the eyes of common men who were often abused by an immoral system. British commentator J.M.P. Smith says, "Knowing his fellow countrymen intimately and sympathizing profoundly with their sufferings and their wrongs, his spirit burned with indignation as he beheld the injustice and tyranny of their oppressors."¹⁷

¹⁴ J. R. Sellin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, New York, USA: Harper and Brothers, 1937, p. 178.

¹⁵ J.H. Merrill, *Prophets of the Dawn*, New York, USA: Fleming H. Revell, 1948, p. 78.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p 156.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

His hometown was only about 20 miles from Jerusalem, and therefore he seems to have had a love of his nation's capital.¹⁸ Additionally, he seems to be fully and actively aware of the significance of world events.

Respected scholars place Micah alive between 738 B.C. and 698 B.C. or in the early part of the reign of King Hezekiah. Bennett says from 735 B.C. to 700 B.C. using as his source a book entitled *Prophecy and the Prophets*.

Adams Clark's commentary on Micah gives emphasis to the unique elements found in his "elegance of diction, animation of language, strength of expressions, and pathos of emotion."¹⁹ Yates says, "Micah used a vigorous, vivid, fresh straightforward style that clearly pictured the tragic situation about him. He indulged frequently in dramatic interruptions and answers. He used good, terse, classic Hebrew."²⁰

To better understand the prophet and his burden, a brief look at the times in which he lived is essential. Historically, the prophet's homeland was in unrest and turmoil. The nation was overrun by Assyria. The two regional powers were King Pekah of Israel and King Rezin of Syria who longed to break the power of Assyria but failed. When Hezekiah came to power, he turned to Egypt. In the end and in the face of disaster, the Assyrian King Sennacherib suddenly left Israel, and Hezekiah and his people honored God.²¹ Socially, humans were mere toys in the hands of

¹⁸ Raymond Calkins, *The Modern Message of the Minor Prophets*, New York, USA: Harper and Brothers, 1947, p. 28.

¹⁹ Adam Clark, *Commentary*, Abingdon - Cokesbury Press, 1948, pp. 709-710.

²⁰ Yates, *Preaching from the Prophets*, p. 118.

²¹ T.K. Cheyene, *Micah in The Cambridge Bible Series* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1882).

the great powers. Great social wrongs were common, callous greed and cruelty were everyday events in Micah's world.²²

Additionally, religion was infected with the influence of the Assyrians with their cult practices. True religion was almost extinct. Greed and corruption were all mixed with religious practice which God saw as totally worthless.²³

This was the world of Micah, and these were the factors that produced his character and convictions.

THE VALUE OF THE PROPHET AND HIS MESSAGE

The lasting value of the prophecy of Micah seems to lie in two areas especially:

First, the prophet sees God as the God of high moral conduct and ethical righteousness. For Micah, He is the God who never lowered standards or compromised His righteousness to accommodate the mood of the times. Micah reminds us that God is the God of uprightness, of truth, of morality and fair dealing, of honesty and consideration of the lowly. The God that sent Micah was the God who said, man's abuse of his fellow man could never be overlooked. Cruelty and oppression are condemned in every situation. No Old Testament said with more force. The prophet pleads for true worship, true morality, and

true behavior. He believes in both inward character and outward conduct as essential to true religion.²⁴

The prophet thinks of God as the one who becomes angry over abuses of the powerless and the defenseless mass. We are indebted to Micah for telling us that God has His own tiny remnant who will not be forgotten or forsaken and who will be defended. This remnant may be mistreated and rejected by the world system, but not forgotten by God Himself.²⁵ The prophet sees God as the one who hates abuse of high privilege and covetousness and greed.

Secondly, the value of the prophet's message is that we are told of a God who is working out His eternal purpose among men. He speaks of the certainty of the triumph of God's purpose. He is the God of mercy and the one who bestows undeserved favor on the people of a broken heart, reclaiming and redeeming them. He will come as deliverer and protector. He will quire His own to safety while He brings judgment upon the wicked. The cause of God will ultimately win, and evil will be judged and crushed. Wickedness and injustice are doomed to fail. The prophet believes the great purpose of God will be realized despite all the power that evil can amass. God was ceaselessly at work but never in a hurry.²⁶

Micah's God was the ultimate conqueror who would invade the world. The anointed one would come on the human level through birth in the tiny town of Bethlehem, and yet, would in

²² B.A. Copass and E.L. Carlson, *A Study of the Prophet Micah* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1950).

²³ A. D. Peisker, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah in Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1966).

²⁴ James H. Gailey, *The Book of Micah in The Layman's Bible Commentary*, Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962, p. 114.

²⁵ F.W Farrar, *The Minor Prophets*, London: James Nisbet and CO., 1927, p. 210.

²⁶ Roland E. Wolfe and Harold A. Bosley, *The Book of Micah in The Interpreter's Bible*, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1956, p. 309.

time emerge as the King of Kings and the undisputed power and authority.

Micah has given us the heart of true religion in a verse that is considered to be one of the great verses of the whole Bible. The Old Testament scholar Eugene Merrill says about Micah the following, “He gathers up in a single sentence the gist of the message of the other three prophets. Micah 6:8 is the perfect ideal of a perfect religion.”²⁷ The verse says, “He hath showed thee, o man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and the walk humbly with thy God?”

Nothing in the Old Testament surpasses this statement as a summary of the prophetic view of the requirement that Jehovah makes on His worshippers. These then are Micah's major contributions to the eternal message of the Bible and may we say, this is a model suggested to be followed.

²⁷ Merrill, *Prophets of the Dawn*.

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03

**THINKING OF QUITTING THE
MINISTRY?
WHAT EZEKIEL CAN TEACH US
ABOUT STAYING IN THE MINISTRY**

Corin Mihăilă

INTRODUCTION

A recent article in Christianity Today included the results of a Barna survey among the pastors in US. The survey found that 38% of the pastres “are seriously considering leaving full-time ministry.”¹ Among the reasons mentioned was emotional, spiritual, and mental burnout. The same article claims that the percentage has gone up since the pandemic and its persistence has made the burnout “endemic.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it many changes in the life of the church, which have placed a greater burden on the pastors, even in Romania. The pressure has come from different sources. We will list here a few:

- The hyper digitalization of the church services has forced the pastors to become familiarized with the online medium and with the online transmission of the services, and, thus, to keep up with technology, something that is not found in the pastor’s job description.
- The reality of sickness and even death from COVID among the church members and even ministers, has increased the ministers’ anxiety to the point of excessive fear, which has determined some of them to be very reluctant to physical gatherings and others to either moving online altogether or canceling all meetings for a period of time, especially when one member of the congregation was infected with COVID.
- The restrictions imposed through law upon the society at large and, more importantly, upon the church, because of the pandemic outbursts, by limiting the physical closeness and, thus,

Abstract: *More and more pastors are thinking of quitting the ministry because of the pressures of the recent changes brought about by the pandemic. One deterrent to such a thought can be the example of Ezekiel’s life and ministry. Though unable to choose many aspects of his ministry and despite his frustration with such a non-negotiable nature of his calling, Ezekiel did not quit. He did not quit because he could not quit. And he could not quit because of the irresistible vision of God’s majesty. Ezekiel could serve as a motivation to all pastors today to persevere in their ministry, by remembering that, when they received their calling, they received a non-negotiable calling, made by a God who’s call is irresistible.*

Keywords: *burnout, prophet, ministry, calling, Ezekiel, quitting, non-negotiable, pastors, preaching*

¹ See <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/november/pastor-burnout-pandemic-barna-consider-leaving-ministry.html>. Accessed 07.02.2022.

rendering impossible any type of agape meals and small groups among the church members, have led to physical and relational distancing, both among the members of the church and between the pastor and his sheep.

- The low physical attendance, when it was possible during the pandemic, and the increase of online attendance, has contributed to the minister's discouragement, since low physical attendance meant a threat to the pastor's salary and a temptation of his church members to "participate" in other churches' online services.

- The impossibility of some ministries to function during the pandemic, especially those that required physical gathering (e.g., choir rehearsals), has led to the accusation of conspiracy on the part of the pastor and his deacons to do away with such ministries and/or ministers who led them. They were blamed for finally finding the opportunity to get rid of so-and-so minister and such-and-such ministry.

- The manyfold eschatological interpretations and apocalyptic conspiracies that have sprung like mushrooms on the religious fertile grounds, after the start of the pandemic, has placed great pressure on the pastors' knowledge and interpretation of Scripture and some have been found ill prepared to face such an avalanche of teachings.

- The comparison with other churches and other ministers, whose ministries have flourished during such difficult times, has raised in the minds of many ministers a doubt concerning their capacity to cope with and adjust sufficiently to the changes brought about by COVID, or has shown the fact that they have adjusted inadequately to the new conditions.

All these changes, and others, have added to the pastors' frustrations and stress, which have taken different forms: anger

and irascibility within the family, relational distancing within the church, doubt and disappointment within his relationship with God. Confronted with all these recent changes and pressured by the need to adjust and do it fast, the almost natural reaction of many pastors has been: "Is this what I have signed up to? Is this what my calling is about?"

Such thoughts of despair and disappointment in ministry are not something recent. Some of the great servants of God along the history of the church and some of the giants of Scripture have faced thoughts of quitting the ministry. Of the many possible examples, Ezekiel is among the most telling. He is an example of a minister who persevered despite the major changes he experienced in his own life, of the many pressures he underwent, of the many disappointments he faced, and of the many times he wanted to quit. If we look upon the pandemic and feel the pressures of its challenges to the church's life, we need to understand that the changes that Ezekiel underwent were incomparably more dramatic than the ones we have experienced in these recent times. As such, he may be a lesson for us, pastors, on how to deal with changes in such a way that we do not quit the ministry.

Ezekiel grew up in a family of priests, being trained to enter the ministry of a priest at the age of 30. His life, however, took some of the most shocking turns.² We will list here just a few:

- Geographical, social, and political relocation—at the age of 25, in 597 BC, alongside other Jews, he was deported and taken into the Babylonian exile.

² For details on Ezekiel's life and ministry and the turns they took, see Daniel I. Bock, *The Book of Ezekiel 1-24* (NICOT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), chap.II.A "The Prophet Ezekiel." See also Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel* (The Bible Speaks Today, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 17-27.

- Job reorientation—at the age of 30, when he was supposed to assume his office as a priest, he was called to be a prophet, thus, from a man in the service of the people he turned into a man „against” the people.

- Physical immobilization—in the first few months of his ministry he was mute, most of the time, and in the impossibility to leave his house.

- Spiritual disorientation—during his first few years as a prophet, God revealed to him, through a vision, the idolatry of the spiritual and political leaders of Israel, taking place right within the precincts of the Temple, where God was supposed to be present and worshiped and from where His glory eventually left.

- Emotional suppression—shortly after the inception of his ministry as a prophet, his wife died, as a sign for Israel, and he was not allowed to weep.

- Religious disappointment—at the age of 35, the Temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed.

Considering these radical and shocking turns which Ezekiel’s ministry took, the adjustments we, as pastors, had to make during the pandemic seem insignificant. And yet, many ministers are contemplating leaving the ministry and some are acting upon that thought, whereas Ezekiel never quit. It is for this reason that we must reflect again upon the terms of our calling by looking into Ezekiel’s calling. Though the times, calling, and circumstances are different, and some things in Ezekiel’s ministry do not transfer to us straightforwardly, we may learn from Ezekiel some truths about our calling that may help us overcome the thought of quitting. It is with this hope that we will investigate three aspects of Ezekiel’s ministry: (1) the

terms of Ezekiel’s calling, (2) the nature of the calling, and (3) the God of the calling.

THE TERMS OF EZEKIEL’S CALLING

What were the terms of Ezekiel’s calling?³ The simple answer is this: the terms were non-negotiable. We see this from different aspects of his calling which he did not choose, nor could he choose, and neither can we.

EZEKIEL COULD NOT CHOOSE THE PEOPLE TO WHOM HE MINISTERED

God sent Ezekiel to the people of Israel, who are described as an obstinate people: “a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are *obstinate* and *stubborn*” (2:3-4); “they are a *rebellious* people” (2:5, 6, 7, 8); “But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me: because all the house of Israel have a *hard forehead* and a *stubborn heart*. Behold, I have made your face as *hard as their faces*, and your forehead as *hard as their foreheads*” (3:7-8).⁴ This characterization speaks of a people whose entire being was closed before the Word of God: forehead, face, ears, and heart were stubborn, hard, and obstinate.⁵ Their rejection of the Word of God was so outrageous that if God had sent Ezekiel to a people who did not speak his language, they would have stopped and listened, at least out of politeness, whereas Israel, who spoke the same language, did not even bother to pay any attention to

³ See Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel* (NIVAC, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), p.66-77, for a discussion of Ezekiel’s call.

⁴ We are using ESV throughout this article. Emphasis added.

⁵ See Christopher Wright, *Ezekiel*, p.54-57.

what he had to say; they walked right by him, ignoring him and his message (3:5-6). These were the people to whom God sent Ezekiel.

We can only imagine Ezekiel thinking: “God, could you send me to a different kind of people? Maybe more welcoming, with smiley faces. Maybe people who would come running to hear what I have to say, with open ears and eager hearts. Maybe we can even have a revival in the land as a result of the response of the people to my message.” But Ezekiel did not have the option of choosing a more welcoming audience. God chose the audience for him. Ezekiel was sent to them and he had no say in it. His audience was part of the package, part of the calling that was non-negotiable.

This was also true of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was sent by the Father to a people, the same people Israel, who did not receive him (cf. Jn.1:11). The disciples were sent to “the lost sheep of Israel,” but they met with the same rejection, having to turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). It was all part of God’s plan and calling.

It is true that, there are many situations when we wished we ministered to a different kind of church, that we preached to a different kind of people, and that we encountered a different kind of response from the audience.⁶ Many a times, we wished we could choose our own audience, but the truth is, God chooses

⁶ A few years ago, there was a teaching that said that we must “watch where God is working and join him in his work.” The reverse side of this is that if there is no movement of the Spirit of God, then we should not get involved. See Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God. Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1990; revised and expanded). Had Ezekiel followed this advice, from the start he would have refused to go to the Israelites, since God was not working among them in bringing revival.

the audience for us.⁷ Yes, we plan, we go, we speak, but the people who come and listen and the people who form our churches are beyond our choice. God chooses to whom he sends us and how they will respond.

Anyone who has had a job that involved people, dealing with people, relating to people, leading people, will tell us that working with people is difficult, because we have no control over how people react. This is more so when the pastor’s job is to speak to a people who can choose what to do with what he says. It is one thing to lead a people who are paid by one to listen to him and an entirely different thing to address a people who have and feel no obligation to listen; it is a volunteer audience.

The lack of choice of the people to whom we minister, on the one hand, and the rejection of the message we deliver, on the other hand, will certainly add to our frustration as pastors. But ministers must understand and accept that their calling includes a non-negotiable audience.

EZEKIEL COULD NOT CHOOSE THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH HE MINISTERED

God discloses to Ezekiel the harsh conditions in which he will minister. In Ez.2:6 God says that “briers and thorns are with you

⁷ This goes against another trend in recent years of “choosing your intended target audience.” This concept of “target audience” is particularly encouraged in the church growth movement. See, e.g., C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1984) and Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), chap.9 “Who is Your Target?”. Interestingly enough, very few pastors choose their target audience the poor, the old, and the socially marginalized people, the exact “target audience” of Jesus.

and you sit on scorpions.” In other words, the conditions of his ministry would be far from comfortable, neither physical nor emotional. He would face criticism and mocking. Moreover, God says in 3:25, that “cords will be placed upon you, and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people.” In other words, the people would seek to isolate him and get rid of him. They would seek to hinder him from speaking freely and, if possible, limit his influence. And if that was not difficult enough, God imposed upon him physical restraints. He was to lay on one side for 390 days and on the other side for another 40 days. While in that uncomfortable position, to say the least, he was tied with a rope, unable to move, he was to eat and drink rationally, and cook in the most unclean manner possible. No one would conclude that God sent Ezekiel on a comfortable and luxurious vacation. On the contrary, the physical conditions of his early ministry were the worst possible. And to add to that, he had no choice in them, but had to execute the orders of God, who called him.

But this should be no surprise to us, since our Lord Jesus Christ performed his ministry in similar conditions. At one time, he replied to a would-be disciple: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). Moreover, his ministry was characterized by opposition, criticism, and judgment. The multitude’s final decision toward him was death. Similar poor conditions were faced by his disciples as well. At one point, Jesus told his disciples: „let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack” (Luke 22:36), foreseeing the reality that they will not be welcomed into people’s homes and villages. The reality was clear in the lives of the disciples after the Pentecost, and most clearly in the life and ministry of apostle Paul. He faced many physical difficulties, of want and need, of persecution and imprisonment, and of isolation and loneliness.

This is, in fact, the destiny of a minister, to a greater or lesser degree. At least, the life of a minister is different from that of others, because it includes physical sacrifice, and at time opposition and rejection. Finding oneself in uncomfortable situations of life is part of the unwritten aspect of the minister’s job description. A pastor cannot say: “I want to minister and serve God, but I want to choose the conditions in which I will do my ministry.” When the minister answers the call, he assumes the conditions that God designs for him. This, of course, does not necessarily mean utmost poverty, nor the interdiction of having a comfortable life from an economic standpoint, nor the impossibility of having friends and people to appreciate his ministry. It’s just that a minister should not look for and serve with that purpose or expectation in mind. The conditions of his ministry come together with the calling; in other words, it is not his choice nor his responsibility to pursue a comfortable life. The pursuit of economic and social happiness is not for him an inalienable right; it is reserved for God to give as he pleases.

EZEKIEL COULD NOT CHOOSE THE MESSAGE WHICH HE DELIVERED

God sent Ezekiel with the His Word. God told him: „And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house” (2:4, 7). In 3:27, God told Ezekiel: „But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’”

The responsibility of Ezekiel was to speak the words of God. To illustrate the non-negotiable aspect of his message, God, in a vision, shows Ezekiel a scroll of a book... And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe. Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and

go, speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. And he said to me, “Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.” Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey...

This image communicates several non-negotiable aspects of the message.

1. THE CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE IS NON-NEGOTIABLE.

The scroll was written on the front and on the back. In other words, it was written beforehand. Ezekiel did not receive an empty scroll, waiting to be written by Ezekiel as he saw fit. He was responsible to proclaim, to herald an already existing message.

The apostle Paul saw himself in the same prophetic office, as one uttering a message that was given to him, not by men but by God himself (see e.g., Gal.1). In writing to the Corinthians, Paul states: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”⁸ Christ, himself, spoke only the words that he received from the Father: “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works” (In.14:10).

⁸ For a study of the background of such a statement, see Corin Mihaila, *The Paul-Apollos Relationship And Paul's Stance Toward Greco-Roman Rhetoric. An Exegetical and Socio-historical study of 1 Corinthians 1-4* (LNTS 402, London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 21-23, 82-93 and Duane Lipton, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (SNTSMS, 79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 248. See his most recent book *Paul's Theology of Preaching. The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, rev. exp. Ed., 2015).

Pastors today are in the same vein as Ezekiel, Christ, and the apostles. The responsibility of the pastor is not to compose, invent, create a message. The message is written in Scripture. The minister must only communicate it. We are servants of the Word and not lords over the Word. We do not choose what to preach but preach what has already been chosen by God and written in Scripture. We are mere heralds.

2. THE NATURE OF THE MESSAGE IS NON-NEGOTIABLE.

The scroll contained “words of lamentation and mourning and woe.” At least the first part of his message to the people of Israel (chaps.1-32) was a message of judgment. Ezekiel could not just say to God: “I would like to have a more positive message, one of encouragement.” Surely, the second part of his prophecy (chaps.33-48) was essentially positive, containing promises, hope, and restoration. But the first part is about punishment, judgment, and call to repentance.

Often, the call of the minister is to bring a message that does not sit well with the audience. We see this both in Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees of his day and in Paul's letters to the churches plagued with all kinds of problems and sins. Indeed, the pastor often must confront, call to repentance, and sometimes administer discipline and excommunication. That is just one side of the type of message he must deliver, but, besides encouragement, comfort, and admonition, the pastor cannot stay away from such message. Paul says to Timothy in 2 Tim.4:2 “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” This is the exact thing that the Word is said to do in 2 Tim.3:16 “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...” In other words, the nature of the message that the pastor must deliver is not his choice, since what he has to say is the Word of

God, which itself contains both rebuke and encouragement, both admonition and comfort, both discipline and training. No matter how unpalatable and unfashionable, the pastor must confront, and that is non-negotiable when there sin is present in the church.

3. THE IDENTIFICATION WITH THE MESSAGE IS NON-NEGOTIABLE.

Ezekiel was told to eat, feed with, and fill his stomach with the scroll, the sole purpose being to teach him that what was to come out of his mouth were the words of God that went in. There was such an overlap between his words and God's words, that whoever rejected him and his message, ultimately rejected God (cf.3:7). In fact, commentators say that Ezekiel was mute throughout the most part of his early years in ministry, speaking and being able to speak only when God opened his mouth to speak his words. But the most dramatic form of Ezekiel's identification with the message came when God announced to him the death of his wife that was to serve as a sign to Israel (cf. 24:15-27). Ezekiel's life and wife became actual part of the drama of Israel.

Such identification with the message was characteristic supremely of Jesus, who was called the Word and who died for the gospel of the Kingdom of God that he preached. Not the least, the apostles followed in the footsteps of Ezekiel and Jesus. Paul so much identified with the gospel he preached that he believed that whoever rejected him implicitly meant a rejection of the gospel. That is why we so often read of his apologia and defense of his own ministry (e.g., 2 Cor.10-12). His identification with the message led to much suffering for the message. He states in 2 Cor.4:10-11: "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being

given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

The identification with the message must also be something true of the modern minister. Peter said in 1 Pet.4:11 "whoever speaks, (let him do it) as one who speaks oracles of God." Thus, when one hears our words, they should be able to hear the Word of God. We are told that Spurgeon said of Bunyan:

Read anything of his, and you will see that it is almost like the reading the Bible itself. He had read it till his very soul was saturated with Scripture; and, though his writings are charmingly full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his *Pilgrim's Progress*—that sweetest of all prose poems — without continually making us feel and say, "Why, this man is a living Bible!" Prick him anywhere—his blood is Biline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God.⁹

Hypocrisy, saying something with our mouth that is not true of our hearts, is something drastically condemned in the Bible. The minister must be so filled with the Word that his thoughts are the thoughts of God, his words are the Word of God, his speaking is the speaking of God, and his life is in the service of the Word.

4. THE FORM OF HIS MESSAGE IS NON-NEGOTIABLE.

Ezekiel was called to use different forms of communication, which we can place into two categories: direct and indirect speech.

⁹ "Mr. Spurgeon as a Literary Man," in *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon, Compiled from His Letters, Diaries, and Records by His Wife and Private Secretary*, vol. 4, 1878-1892 (Curtis & Jennings, 1900), p. 268.

In direct speech, God spoke through Ezekiel directly, without allusions, cryptic and coded speech, and without irony. Direct speech is a well-structured, argued and logic communication. Direct speech has the purpose of convincing the mind and the reason.

In indirect speech, God directed Ezekiel to use other ways of communication, such as mime and parable. The mime is the portraying of a story with a meaning; through gestures one communicates a story that has a meaning. The parable is the verbalizing of a story with a meaning; through words one communicates a story that has a meaning. One says something so that others understand something else.¹⁰ Thus, the difference between mime and parable is the method by which one communicates the story. The mime uses gestures while the parable uses words.

Both these types of indirect speech are used by the prophets, especially Ezekiel. In his ministry, Ezekiel was called to stage at least 5 mimes, while he was mute, and to verbalize 10 parables, when God opened his mouth. Even Ezekiel was sick and tired of communicating to Israel through parables. He states in 20:49 “Ah, Lord God! They are saying of me, ‘Is he not a maker of parables?’” Both his mimes and his parables are among the most striking, because the purpose of indirect communication is to shock emotionally and to have an

¹⁰ See Andrei Pleșu, *Parabolele lui Iisus. Adevărul ca poveste* (Editura Humanitas, București, 2012), p. 13-19. Vezi dea semenea Joachim Jeremias, *Parabolele lui Iisus* (traducere din limba engleză de P. S. Calinic Dumitriu, Episcop Vicar al Arhiepiscopiei Iașilor, Pr. Prof. Dr. Vasile Mihoc și Dr. Ștefan Matei, Editura Anastasia, București, 2000), p. 9.

emotional impact upon the audience, engaging the imagination.¹¹

His use of indirect communication resulted in the rejection of Ezekiel’s message or the ridiculing of the messenger himself. Especially when he was using gestures and mime in the communication of his parables, people were coming as to a show. They were coming as to a theatrical display, like to a comedy; they were coming to satisfy their curiosity and to be entertained. The moment of the day when he was presenting his act was the attraction of the day. People were coming from all over the exile like unto a tourist attraction, to see the clown perform on the stage.¹² Here is how the text (i.e., 33:30-33 emphasize added) describes the reaction of the people in general to what Ezekiel was doing:

As for you, son of man, *your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, ‘Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.’* And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. And behold, *you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument*, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it. When this comes—and come it will!—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.

The master of parable telling, of course, was Jesus. At some point, Matthew, the evangelist, states in 13:34 “All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to

¹¹ See Gene Edward Veith Jr. and Matthew P. Ristuccia, *Imagination Redeemed. Glorifying God with a Neglected Part of Your Mind* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), chap.1.

¹² I owe this type of presentation to Christopher Wright, *Ezekiel*, p. 75.

them without a parable.” Surely, we do not see Jesus using the mime, nor the apostles; in fact the apostles don’t make much use of indirect speech at all, not even parables, exception being the allegory of Sarah and Hagar in Gal.4:21-31. It seems that in the NT times, beginning with the apostles’ era, the main type of proclamation was direct speech.

Nevertheless, the reception of this type of communication was similar to that of Ezekiel’s indirect speech: mockery and rejection. It is hard not to remember the words of Jesus spoken to the audience of his day in Lk.7:31-35, when speaking of John the Baptist and himself:

To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”

Jesus is referring here to different manners of their ministries, but it can also apply to the form of their messages: no matter what form it took, the message was met by opposition and indifference, just like in Ezekiel’s day.

Most telling, however, is the way Paul speaks of himself in 1 Cor.4:8-13, which reminds us of the mime that Ezekiel used. Paul states: “For I think that God has *exhibited* us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a *spectacle* to the world, to angels, and to men. We are *fools* for Christ’s sake...” (emphasis added). The terms like “exhibited,” “spectacle,” and “fools” are all taken from the theatrical

performances of the day, more specifically from mime.¹³ Paul describes himself and other ministers as mimes, clowns in a comedy on the theater stage, to whom people come to be entertained while they suffer. And Paul, gladly accepts this demeaning role.

But is this not the destiny of God’s ministers to serve among a people, who reject the message and mock the messenger? Indeed, the days of mime and pantomime in church are long gone and we mostly use direct speech as a form of communicating God’s message.¹⁴ But that does not preclude people to view the preachers as entertainers and clowns. Indeed, as apostle Paul says in 2 Tim.4:3-4 “the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having *itching ears*, they will accumulate for themselves *teachers to suit their own passions*, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (emphasis added).

So, we notice that Ezekiel understood that the message was non-negotiable; he was not given the choice regarding the content, the nature, the identification, nor the form of the message he proclaimed. All were chosen and pre-determined by God.

In the same way, a minister of the Word, must be a man who accepts the calling to communicate God’s Word, in the form that is given to him in the Scriptures, proclaiming all truth, and identifying with the Word. None of these aspects of the message are negotiable.

¹³ See the insightful study of Laurence L. Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1–4 in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition* (JSNTSup, 293; London: T&T Clark, 2005).

¹⁴ There is indeed a movement these days that seeks to encourage narrative preaching, preaching as a story telling. See, for instance, Austin B. Tucker, *The Preacher As Storyteller. The Power of Narrative in the Pulpit* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008).

EZEKIEL COULD NOT CHOOSE THE ROLE HE PLAYED IN THE MINISTRY

God assigns to Ezekiel the role of a watchman for Israel and reminded him of it both at the inception of his “negative” ministry (3:16-27) and at the inception of his “positive” ministry (33:1-9). The watchman’s role, in times of battle, was to sit in the fortress’ tower and announce when the enemy was approaching. The surprising aspect of Ezekiel’s role was that he was supposed to announce that the enemy was God. Thus, Ezekiel’s responsibility was a very difficult one. He was to warn that God, the former friend and protector of Israel against her enemies has turned into her most fierce enemy.¹⁵

Nobody, willingly, chooses such a role in the ministry. As we have mentioned earlier, a pastor prefers to speak of God as loving, forgiving, and willing to befriend people. But to speak of an angry God, who is against people, is not a choice any minister would make. And yet, the role of a minister involves warning the people. To be a pastor is not a just a title, meaning nothing or anything anyone wants; it is not a job that anyone can fill with whatever role one desires.

EZEKIEL COULD NOT CHOOSE THE CONSEQUENCES OF REFUSING TO ANSWER THE CALL

Ezekiel was called to warn Israel. If he did not do it, God told him, “the blood (of the wicked) will I require from your hand” (3:18). One can choose not to answer the call, but one cannot choose the consequences of refusing to fulfill one’s duty as a minister.

¹⁵ See Tremper Longman, *God Is a Warrior* (SOTBTS 1, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2010), chap.3 “God Is an Enemy: The Wars Against Unfaithful Israel.”

We may conclude from this survey of Ezekiel’s call that the terms of our calling, just as Ezekiel’s, are non-negotiable. One cannot choose the people to whom one minister, the conditions in which one ministers, the message with which one minister, the role in which one ministers, nor the consequences of refusing to fulfil his ministry. All these are non-negotiable.

But there is a thing that God allows his ministers to choose: one can choose the attitude with which one ministers. Either faithfulness or unfaithfulness; either with joy or begrudgingly; with courage or with fear. Such a radical calling with such strict terms inevitably raises one question, to which we now turn.

THE NATURE OF EZEKIEL’S CALLING

Why does a minister not give up such a ministry with such non-negotiable terms? The simple answer to such a question is: Ezekiel did not give up the ministry because he could not give up. The nature of his calling was such that he could not give up. The calling was irrevocable. He had hardly begun his ministry and he already wanted to give up but could not. That is how we explain Ezekiel’s reaction in 2:14 “The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me.” God presented Ezekiel with a non-negotiable, difficult, indeed impossible task, in all of its details, and then God told him: “you can’t refuse to do it.” We understand why Ezekiel was frustrated and angry.

If look at all the great leaders in the OT, we find, in fact, that none could give up their calling, though they wanted at times. Take, for example, Jeremiah. He states in Jer.20:9 “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.” Earlier in the history of God’s people, we read about Elijah, who wanted to die, but God did not allow him. The same is true of Moises.

There comes a time in one's ministry, sooner or later, when the thought of quitting creeps in, because the burden of the ministry becomes overwhelming. But what one finds is that the calling is irresistible and irrevocable. Christ, himself, before his crucifixion, knowing what he was about to drink, asked the Father to remove the cup from him, if it was possible (Lk.22:42). And yet, Christ knew that such a request would not be answered and so he adds "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." Apostle Paul felt of the same necessity of ministering and the impossibility of giving up the calling. Thus, he states in 1 Cor.9:16 "For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

When God calls, he calls irrevocably. And that is what all pastors must understand, when they undertake upon themselves this non-negotiable ministry. Too many enter the ministry thinking that they can enter and exit whenever they wish or get tired. Yes, most every pastor gets tired, feels the burden too heavy to carry, experiences burnout, and needs a break, a Sabbath rest, but must go on until God says to stop. We must adopt the biblical thinking about ministry: "Though I wish I could quit, I cannot quit!" But why a pastor cannot quit?

THE GOD OF THE CALLING

The answer is a simple one: God, who calls one into the ministry, is overpowering. Ezekiel's call to the ministry came after, or during, a most overwhelming vision of the greatness of God. The vision was so overpowering visually, emotionally, and spiritually, that, initially, he fell to the ground and, later when he was taken back to the exiles, "sat there overwhelmed among (the Israelites) seven days." The shock and the impact of the vision of the greatness of God were very powerful. Having been revealed the greatness of God, Ezekiel could not resist the

calling of God into the ministry. And once he entered the ministry, he could not quit and he could not negotiate. It all began with this experience of the revelation of the greatness of God.

If we think at some of the great men of God from the biblical times, we discover the same experience of a vision of God's majesty and holiness: Moses at the burning bush, Christ in the Jordan river, and Paul on the road to Damascus. Could it be that some pastors quit because they did not enter the ministry because of an overpowering revelation of God's greatness? There used to be a time when a person entering the ministry was asked two significant questions: "When did you receive the call to be saved and when did you receive the call into the ministry?"

CONCLUSION

Ezekiel's ministry may serve as a model for our ministry, though some of the details may not transfer. Yet, we have noticed that there are at least three aspects of his ministry that could help us get a more biblical view of the ministry: the terms of the call are non-negotiable, the call itself is irrevocable, and the God who calls is overpowering. Indeed, there are times when we want to quit, there are times when we are tired and feel burnout, and there are times when the going gets tough. Those to get going are not the tough ones but the ones who understand the terms of the calling, the nature of the calling, and the God of the calling.

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04

**THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH IN
CHARLES PETER WAGNER'S
THEOLOGY**

Bujorean Laurențiu

INTRODUCTION

The last few decades have been marked by confusing and contradictory descriptions of the church. Against this background, a movement called *The Church Growth Movement* emerged in America. This movement brought new interpretations of the nature of the church and of the concept of church growth, thus gaining an increasing number of followers in other countries outside America.¹

The forerunner of the concept of church growth is considered to be Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676 AD). However, the subject of church growth was crystallized by Donald A. McGavran between 1930 and 1955 AD, who was the modern father of the church's growth movement.² Then this movement was developed and its theology systematized more and more by the professor, theologian, missionary and writer Charles Peter Wagner, McGavran's disciple.

In this paper we aim to study the subject of church growth in the theology of Charles Peter Wagner. This study, however, is not exhaustive, but presents in detail Wagner's conception of the church and the need for its growth. The purpose of writing this paper is to understand the concept of church growth and the necessary mechanisms by which this growth can take place, from Wagner's perspective.

In the elaboration of this paper, the descriptive/analytical method is used. The paper consists of three chapters and each chapter is structured in two subchapters. The first chapter will

¹ Wayne Edward Neeley, "Theology of Ministry and Church Growth Principles" (PhD thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2003), 3.

² Elmer Towns et al., Ed., *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 12.

define the concept of church growth and will present some obstacles that stop this growth. In the second chapter we will mention some suggestions and principles recommended by Charles Peter Wagner through which a church can grow numerically. A brief critical analysis of the definition of the church and the concept of church growth, as well as a critical analysis of the pragmatism of this movement, will be the subject of Chapter Three. At the end of the paper, the conclusions will be drawn.

The decision to study this theologian comes as a result of his influence in the evangelical world due to his perspective on church growth. As for the sources used in this work, books written by Charles Peter Wagner dealing with this subject will be used as main sources. Books by other authors, both authors who support Wagner's position and authors who critically address his position, will be used as secondary sources.

THE CONCEPT OF GROWTH OF THE CHURCH AND THE OBSTACLES TO ITS FULFILLMENT

To understand the concept of church growth, it is first necessary to define the church. Once the nature and identity of the church is understood, the other principles of church growth can be developed.

In this chapter, Charles Peter Wagner's definition of the church will be presented. The content of this paper will also contain the definition and explanation of the concept of church growth and some obstacles that stand in the way of achieving this goal.

THE DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH AND THE CONCEPT OF CHURCH GROWTH

Charles Peter Wagner defines the church as the true body of the saved believers. Based on this definition, Wagner states that the church has a responsibility to grow and expand throughout the world. Wagner believes that the church must have influence and power, and this is possible only if it is governed by the five specific ministries described by Paul in Ephesians 4:11: apostolic government, prophetic office, dominionism, theocracy, and extra-biblical revelations.³

From Charles Peter Wagner's perspective, the concept of church growth is the most dynamic aspect that must take place within it. The growth of the church is likened to the upbringing of a child by his parents. Just as raising children is a gift, so does Wagner, and raising a church is a gift to pastors who lead the church. According to Wagner and his associates, when the church grows in number, God is glorified.⁴

Wagner maintains his statement using the words of the Lord Jesus spoken to His disciples before ascending to heaven: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature ..." (Matthew 28:19 and Acts 1: 8). Wagner states that his main goal in this endeavor is to expand the kingdom of God. Completing what Wagner says, Rick Warren says that since the church is a living organism, it is normal for it to grow, because this growth is something healthy. He also says that the church is a body, not a business. It is an organism, not an organization, and if the

³ Kelebogile Resane, "The New Apostolic Reformation: The critical reflections of the ecclesiology of Charles Peter Wagner", *HTS Theologies Studies / Theological Studies* (2016): 3.

⁴ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Tom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 25.

church does not grow, it dies.⁵ From this perspective, Wagner states that he will do whatever it takes for the church to grow numerically and will oppose the sociological and psychological conceptions that hold small churches and impotent evangelism.⁶

In *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, Wagner focuses on the numerical growth of the church. Its purpose is to be able to overcome the barriers of a 200, 400, or 1,000 members church through the recommendations and counsel it provides, Christians, and especially church leaders reading this book. He lists several types of growth that contribute to the health of the church as a body: internal growth, external growth, biological growth, transfer growth, and conversion growth.⁷

Wagner says any church that wants to grow must be healthy. He describes in his book *Your Church Can Grow*, seven signs of a healthy church. These are: a pastor who thinks about how to provoke and motivate the church to grow; a well-mobilized lay believer who develops and uses all his spiritual gifts for growth; a fairly large church offering a wide range of services to its members; an appropriate balance of the dynamic relationship between the holiday, the congregation and the small groups; a membership derived mainly from a homogeneous unit; effective evangelistic methods of making disciples and priorities set in the order required by the Bible.⁸

⁵ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 16.

⁶ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner and Tom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 37, 45.

⁷ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Tom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 23-24 (see also Donald A. McGravan's book *Understanding Church Growth*).

⁸ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Tom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 23-24 (see also Donald A. McGravan's book *Understanding Church Growth*).

OBSTACLES TO CHURCH GROWTH

The barriers exemplified by Wagner that stand in the way of church growth are the stained-glass barrier, the cultural barrier, and the language barrier. The stained-glass barrier symbolically represents the things that keep outsiders from entering the church and hearing the gospel: a poor location, inadequate parking, poor or neglected facilities, different perceptions of a particular denomination, and so on. The cultural barrier is that some believers are not ready to accept people of another culture into their congregation, and this attitude hinders the growth of a church. The third barrier hinders the numerical growth of the church due to the ignorance of the believers of other languages outside their culture.⁹ Wagner notes that the barriers to church growth will be broken down when the purpose for which the church wants to grow is known. Moreover, he states that the barriers will be removed when the pastor together with the church make a commitment to apply the method in order to grow the church. In order to have such growth, Wagner argues that the church needs leaders who have the skills to engage in the issues people are going through, such as some tensions that arise as a result of removing barriers to growth by those responsible for implementation of this concept. From Wagner's perspective, a good leader needs service, relationship, and management skills. All those who want and know how to proceed in such a way that the growth of the church is visible, will have to pay a price and Wagner calls them aggressive individuals.¹⁰

After presenting the seven signs that characterize a church as a healthy church, Wagner lists eight diseases that hinder the numerical growth of a church. The first disease is called

⁹ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner și Tom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 17-18.

¹⁰ Elmer Towns, *The Complete Book of Church Growth* (U.K.: Tyndale House, 1982), 265-268.

ethnicity and is a deterrent to ethnic groups. The second disease is that of *old age* represented by those churches that become old and stagnant, with no movements from the inside out or vice versa. *Human blindness* is the third disease that prevents the church from growing. It consists of lack of vision of spiritual, social and community needs. The fourth disease is called *koinonitis*. It occurs when the relationship between believers in the church becomes so important to each other that they end up neglecting the people of the world. *Sociological strangulation* is the fifth disease presented by Wagner and it consists in the inability of the church to provide the physical facilities necessary for the growth of the church (the size of the building, parking, etc.). *Stopping spiritual development* is the sixth disease that causes the stagnation of church growth. The seventh disease is called *St. John's Syndrome* and refers to the faulty transition between a generation of believers who got involved and worked to grow the church and the next generation who stopped these responsibilities. The eighth disease mentioned by Wagner is *hypopneumonia*, a disease caused by a deficient presence and a weak manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of the church.¹¹

SUGGESTIONS AND PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH GROWTH

For the purpose of the numerical growth of the church, various suggestions and advices were proposed by some pastors and theologians. For example, Michael Fletcher says that in all churches, the transition period before reaching growth barriers requires internal changes in the invisible mechanisms of church

¹¹ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Tom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 18-23.

function, that is, between the relationship between the senior pastor and the team of church leaders or elders.¹²

Wagner also offers some tools and draws certain directions for those who face the small number of believers in the church so that they can overcome this situation. The suggestions and principles of church growth as described by Wagner will be presented below.

CHURCH GROWTH SUGGESTIONS

Charles Peter Wagner lists three basic steps that can lead to the growth of a church: a spiritually growing pastor will lead the church to growth, a pastor will initiate growth and members will follow the same path as the pastor. Wagner develops his idea by mentioning that only the pastor who grows spiritually will be able to produce a growth of the church. He then goes on to say that the misunderstanding of some pastors about this concept of church growth and the misunderstanding of God's life-giving principles in starting this process do nothing but block these pastors from manifesting the grace of their church growth. He disagrees with the idea of those who argue the need and importance of the church to separate itself from the world and sin by closing itself in and considers it absolutely necessary for the church to go and look for those outside it. Wagner also argues that a pastor must develop leadership skills, not just preaching or teaching.¹³

Wagner believes that for the numerical growth of a church, serious motivation is needed from both the pastor and the people as well. The price that the pastor has to pay to fulfill this purpose

¹² Michael Fletcher, *Overcoming Barriers to Church Growth* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2006), 15-16.

¹³ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner and Tom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 15.

is materialized by the need for responsible leadership of his church, which involves a lot of work accompanied by wisdom, recruiting leadership staff and the mobilization of lay ministers. On the other hand, the responsibilities of the members are as follows: the right of the pastor to be the main leader and the confidence of the members in his leadership, to be submissive and humble, financial contributions necessary for the advancement of the work, the development of new methods of collective organization with the aim of creating more intimate connections between believers (small home or study groups).¹⁴

In addition to the suggestions previously made by Wagner that contribute to the numerical growth of the church, he adds three more. So, the first suggestion proposed by Wagner is prayer. Although the role of the people is quite important in this mission of church growth, Wagner considers this work to be primarily a divine work. It is God who makes it possible for a church to grow, and He accomplishes this through the prayers of believers: prayer for the filling of the Holy Spirit and spiritual strength of the congregation, prayer for divine wisdom, prayer for the development of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, prayer for receiving and developing the gifts of the Holy Spirit. and prayer for a fruitful fruit in evangelism. The second suggestion proposed by Wagner in order to achieve the effectiveness of the church's goal of growth is to set great goals. For Wagner, setting great goals is relevant, measurable, meaningful, manageable, and personal. These goals must be set by faith.¹⁵ And the third suggestion proposed by Wagner to achieve the goal of growing the church is to overcome the barrier of 200 members in the first year since the implementation of a specific method specific to achieving

¹⁴ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Tom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 10-53.

¹⁵ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner and Tom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 54-56.

this goal. If growth does not occur in the first or second year, growth is likely to stagnate or decline.

PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH GROWTH

To achieve the goal of church growth, Wagner proposes the following six principles. The first principle is to choose the right person to be the right hand of the pastor. This person must agree with the philosophy with which the church operates in this endeavor, must have spiritual gifts to supplement those that the pastor lacks, must supplement existing gifts and also need to show total loyalty to the senior pastor. Wagner's second principle is the implementation and development of small fellowship groups. By implementing these groups, the church will be spared from functioning as a single entity and will grow into several groups that will work together for the same purpose. The mobilizing and not facilitating attitude of the pastor is the third principle stated by Wagner in favor of church growth. Wagner defines the mobilizing pastor as "a leader who actively sets goals for his congregation according to God's will, obtains respect from the people, and sees in each member the equipment and motivation needed to fulfill his responsibility in achieving his goals."¹⁶ The fourth principle described by Wagner for the growth of the church is to assume the pastoral attitude of the pastor instead of his pastoral attitude (the spiritual needs of each member are no longer in the care of the pastor, but depending on the size of the church). this need). Thus, the pastor no longer makes visits, does not call his members and does not offer advice to them, but these duties belong to other leaders. Renting space or buildings to facilitate the growth of the church is the fifth principle stated by Wagner. This principle can be applied to the point where the number of church members is large enough that they can then invest in their own building. And the

¹⁶ Charles Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1984), 79.

last principle in the series of six principles necessary for the concept of church growth offered by Wagner is the attempt of leaders to avoid drafting a statute for the church until it reaches the threshold of 500 members. According to Wagner, this attitude would avoid certain problems that traditional churches have come to face.¹⁷

Wagner also mentions that for the numerical growth of a church, a relatively new pastor is needed, endowed with the patience and wisdom to spend time building relationships with opinion leaders and those who give advice for certain church work. Then, the pastor must be endowed with a certain amount of courage through which he can face and solve, for as long as possible, the problems that arise within the church.¹⁸

BRIEF CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CHARLES PETER WAGNER'S THEOLOGY

The debates and controversies regarding the concept of church growth have their origin in the poor definition of the church proposed by the promoters of this movement. If the church is incompletely defined, the whole theological basis on which these theologians will build their arguments will be deficient.

In this chapter, Charles Peter Wagner's definition of the church will be critically analyzed. At the same time, the concept of church growth and the pragmatism advocated by Wagner and the followers of this movement will be critically analyzed.

¹⁷ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Tom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 56-58.

¹⁸ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner and Tom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 59.

CRITICISM OF THE DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH AND ITS CONCEPT OF GROWTH

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Charles Peter Wagner defines the church as the true body of saved believers, but does not develop or clarify this definition. As a result of a faulty or incomplete definition of the church, there will be tendencies toward anthropologizing or deifying the church. What is quite explicit in Wagner's writings is the tendency toward anthropologizing the church. It is clear that Wagner does not remove God from his theology, but bases his entire theology on the words of Scripture. However, the interpretive key that Wagner uses is one adapted to culture. This type of approach can be seen in Wagner's theology through the special emphasis he places on the quantitative (numerical) and not qualitative growth of the church. Also, the tendency towards the anthropology of the church is highlighted by the implementation of various methods aimed at streamlining the process of numerical growth of the church. The modern church growth movement has been influenced by the philosophy of today's consumerist culture and has even embraced some of its philosophy. As a result, the anthropology of the church is a product of this philosophy.¹⁹

Both Charles Peter Wagner and other followers of the church's growth movement start from the premise that this growth is undeniably good. But the numerical growth of a church does not guarantee the health of that church, as Wagner claims. Yes, growth is a sign of the existence of pulsating life in that church, but the size of the membership is not evidence of God's blessing or the spiritual health of that church. From John MacArthur's point of view, the signs of a healthy church are: good leadership, the adoption of biblical goals, the emphasis on discipleship, the

¹⁹ Martyn Percy, "Your Church Can Grow! - A Contextual Theological Critique of Megachurches," in *Handbook of Megachurches*, Stephen Hunt (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020), 114.

mobilization of believers for mission, their care for one another, the adoption and observance of family commitments, biblical teaching, desire for change, and worship. MacArthur also mentions that the biggest problem that those who support and promote the concept of church growth in terms of current culture have is anchoring and focusing their work on man and not on God.²⁰

CRITICISM OF THE PRAGMATISM OF THE CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT

Gailyn Van Rheneen is of the opinion that followers of the modern church growth movement, including Wagner, assume a biblical theology on this subject, but use this theology inefficiently to analyze culture, determine strategy, and perceive history and then using the information discovered in their study to implement it in their new theological current.²¹ Rheneen lists a few limitations that stem from the church's growing movement. He says that all this movement is focused on man by the fact that its supporters use different sociological methodologies to attract people to their community. Rheneen then points out that the church's growth movement has segmented practical theology, distorting the church's ministry.²²

Darrell Likens Guder raises an additional objection to Rheneen regarding this move. He states that the church's growth movement sees the church more as an organization than as an organism. Theoretically, the proponents of this movement do not recognize this objection, but from a practical point of view the objection raised to their theory proves the exact opposite.

²⁰ John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 187-194.

²¹ Elmer Towns et al., Ed., *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*, 157.

²² Elmer Towns et al., Ed., *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*, 163-174.

Guder points out that since the church is treated as an organization, its mission is to focus on techniques designed to maximize the production and productivity growth of its members. Objectives such as the number and number of members become an obsession, while the quality of the spiritual life of believers is neglected and underestimated. The church thus becomes a machine run by managers who judge their performance by the number of members added to the church community.²³

In response to the church's growing movement, the Catholic theologian John Fitzmaurice points out in his book *Virtue Ecclesiology* that the work of the church cannot be properly judged or evaluated in terms of worldly organizations or methods. Fitzmaurice continues his observation by stating that the existence of the church in the world is not intended to increase exponentially at any cost, nor is it in the nature of the church to compete with the world. Therefore, Fitzmaurice points out, the growth of the church cannot become a higher priority than the mandate that the Lord Jesus gave to the church, a mandate that contains in it the command addressed to it to make disciples and to show kindness to those around it.²⁴

The mission and ecclesiology promoted by Wagner is shaped by an amalgam of rational-pragmatic ideas such as science, engineering, management consulting, marketing, sales, group dynamics and communications.²⁵ These pragmatic ideas of the church growth movement are also opposed by John MacArthur. He believes that the church's acceptance of pragmatism has

²³ Darrell Likens Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 37.

²⁴ John Fitzmaurice, *Virtue Ecclesiology: An Exploration in the Good Church* (London: Ashgate, 2016), 46.

²⁵ Martyn Percy, "Your Church Can Grow! - A Contextual Theological Critique of Megachurches," in *Handbook of Megachurches*, 117.

paved the way for the commercialization of the church, and through this acceptance of pragmatic thinking, the church and the leaders of the church growth movement have removed biblical preaching as the primary method of church growth. MacArthur emphasizes the unbiblical nature of the teachings of those churches that promote entertainment as a way of growing the church more than preaching. MacArthur also totally opposes those who believe that humans could be brought to Christ by other people in a more effective way than the way used by the sovereign God.²⁶ MacArthur also adds that churches with this pragmatic mindset are more focused on entertainment and market demand and they will continue to flourish for a while but they will eventually end up abandoning biblical Christianity.²⁷

²⁶ John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 25-32.

²⁷ John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 194.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have focused on the growth of the church in the theology of Charles Peter Wagner. We have highlighted Wagner's definition of the church, the concept of church growth, and the obstacles listed by Wagner to this mission. At the same time, we have presented some suggestions and principles offered by Wagner that help the church to grow, and then, through a brief critical approach, we have analyzed Wagner's theology from the perspective of other theologians. This is followed by some conclusions that we have reached after studying this topic.

The growth of the church is biblical and it is a ministry that God does through His Holy Spirit. However, the church is also involved in this ministry, and the Lord Jesus has entrusted to it the responsibility to go into all the world and to preach the gospel to every creature.

The growth movement of the church has had and continues to make significant contributions to fulfilling the mandate commanded by the Lord Jesus. As we have seen in this paper, Charles Peter Wagner places great emphasis on mission and evangelism, but the methods he uses are outside the realm of biblical principles. However, a healthy and biblical growth of the church cannot take place without a biblical methodology. If the growth takes place through other methodologies, the quality of church members may be distorted and the testimony of the church compromised.

The true growth of the church is the product of the work of the Holy Spirit. The secular methodologies used in spiritual ministry detract from God's character and strip Him of the attribute of His sovereignty.

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ELEMENTS OF THE CALL TO SERVICE IN MOSES' LIFE

Adrian Giorgiov

INTRODUCTION

Abstract: *Moses was the most outstanding Old Testament spiritual leader. He had a special call from God to lead His people out of the Egyptian bondage, give them God's law, and shepherd them on their way to the Promised Land. An extraordinary life with an extraordinary call to service.*

In New Testament times God calls pastors to shepherd His people. Their call is special, and it has at least four important aspects: the call to follow Christ, the preparatory call, the inner call, and the external call.

It is the purpose of this study to examine the hypothesis that the same elements Christian theology speaks of regarding God's call to ministry can be discovered in Moses' case as of God's call to service.

Keywords: *calling, service, Call to follow Christ, Preparatory call, Inner call, External call.*

There were few spiritual leaders in the Old Testament like Moses. Theodore Epp rightly states: "From Adam to Christ none was greater."¹ Moses is among the few biblical characters whose life is presented from infancy to death. God had a special purpose with Moses and called him to service. The most outstanding feature of this service was bringing out God's people from the Egyptian bondage with the purpose of leading them into the Promised Land. No wonder the prophet Isaiah refers to him as shepherd of God's people (Isaiah 63:11).

Moses lived 120 years. The first forty years were spent at the Egyptian royal court, the second forty years in the Sinai wilderness, tending the flocks, and the last forty years attending to the service God called him to fulfill. These forty years of service were filled with a variety of events, joys and sorrows, victories and failures, tasks that seemed impossible, but accomplished with God's help. What was the secret of a life of service remembered with great respect by generations of millennia? Where and how did this life of service begin? Are there principles that are relevant for today's Christians who ponder on starting a life of service? Every believer should be involved in the ministry, but in this paper, when used in the New Testament's context, the term *service* or *ministry* refers to the specific type of service rendered by those church leaders who are shepherds or pastors of the church.

¹Theodore H Epp, *Moses*, vol. I (Lincoln, Neb.: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1975), 7.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament present the importance of God's call to service. This call to service is still relevant today. Some questions arise regarding the issue of the call to the ministry: is it possible to control the call to service in any way? Is it possible to examine the fact that God spoke to someone's heart and called him to service? According to classical pastoral wisdom, this is verifiable and even dangerous if left unchecked.²

At first glance, Moses' call seems to have been made at Mount Horeb when God addressed him from the burning bush (Exodus 3). However, a closer examination of his life reveals that his calling was much more complex. The purpose of this paper is to examine the hypothesis that the same elements Christian theology speaks of regarding God's call to ministry can be discovered in Moses' case as of God's call to service.

Synthesis of the elements of the call to ministry in evangelical theology

A survey of a number of Christian scholars and theologians regarding their understanding of the call to ministry shows that there are two to four elements that they attribute to God's call to ministry.

Calvin speaks of two elements of the call: an outer and an inner call. The outer call is a "solemn call which has to do with the public order of the church", while the inner call is a "secret call, of which each minister is conscious before God, and which does not have the church as witness."³

² Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1983), 18.

³ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: In Two Volumes* (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1960), 1093.

Similarly, Thomas Oden discusses the same two elements: the inward call, with a thorough list of self-examining questions, and the outward call, that "requires the affirmation of the visible, believing community."⁴ Actually, even the perceptions that stem from the inward self-examination need to be shared with others, submitting the preliminary internal conviction to the searching judgment of trusted people.⁵

Richard Niebuhr approaches the subject with a larger spectrum in mind.

A call to the ministry includes at least these four elements (1) the call to be a Christian, which is variously described as the call to discipleship of Jesus Christ, to hearing and doing of the Word of God, to repentance and faith, et cetera; (2) the secret call, namely, that inner persuasion or experience whereby a person feels himself directly summoned or invited by God to take up the work of the ministry; (3) the providential call, which is that invitation and command to assume the work of the ministry which comes through the equipment of a person with the talents necessary for the exercise of the office and through the divine guidance of his life by all its circumstances; (4) the ecclesiastical call, that is, the summons and invitation extended to a man by some community or institution of the Church to engage in the work of the ministry.⁶

The inner call is connected to a divine calling, as Frank Segler points out while delving into the dimensions of God's call to the ministry. "The Christian ministry is a divine calling. That a man of faith may, through personal communion with God, feel an inner compulsion to enter the Christian ministry is both

⁴ Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1983), 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶ Richard Niebuhr and all, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper, 1956), 64.

biblically and historically sound.”⁷ The divine call also includes a call to preparation, which “may be divided into four categories: inner character development, general culture, acquisition of professional knowledge and skills, and the development of proper emotions and attitudes.”⁸ Sumner Wemp contends that “a true call is not just a desire to see people saved or be used by God – such desires has every Christian – but it is a longing for a total consecration for service.”⁹

In summary, according to evangelical Christian theology, the call to the ministry has four aspects: a call to follow Christ, a preparatory call (circumstances, trials, experiences), an inner call (inner conviction), and an external call (the church also sees someone as called by God for service). Although these elements have been considered within the framework of New Testament ministry, it is the task of this study to determine how they took shape in the Old Testament, specifically in the life of Moses.

1. THE CALL TO FOLLOW GOD

In the days of Moses, following God and belonging to God's people had the same meaning. In the case of Moses, this started by being born into a Hebrew family. His Hebrew consciousness grew stronger over the years.

In his youth, his mother and family also influenced Moses because they strengthened in him the Hebrew identity that the New Testament writes about: “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:24-25).

⁷ Franklin M. Segler, *A Theology of Church and Ministry* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1960), 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁹ Sumner C. Wemp, *Ghid de păstorire practică* (Wheaton, Ill.: Societatea Misionară Română, 1994), 17.

Theodore Epp highlights that Moses’ call can be traced back to the impressions of his childhood in his family of origin: “Those early years made indelible impressions on Moses, as was evidence in later life. Just as his parents exercised faith, not fearing the wrath of the king, Moses later ‘forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king’ (Heb. 11:27)”.¹⁰

Moses grew up and the time came when he had to decide regarding his future allegiance: either Egypt, possibly including the throne, or his people, and the God of his people. The final decision was made at the age of 40, and Hebrews 11:24-26 sheds light on it from a New Testament perspective:

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

The first element of God’s call to serve is the call to follow Him. Faith is a much-needed ingredient of following God. “The key to Moses’ life was the simplicity of his faith.... Hebrews 11 provides a divine commentary on Moses’ life, and ‘by faith’ is a key phrase in this commentary.”¹¹

It is worth to remember that God’s call to Moses regarding following Him was not a one-time event, but a continuous call that cannot be limited to the first 80 years of his life. Following God by trusting Him in all circumstances earmarked Moses’ entire life. He was not the only one who experienced this type

¹⁰ Theodore H Epp, *Moses, Vol. I* (Lincoln, Neb.: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1975), 5.

¹¹ Theodore H Epp, *Moses, Vol. I* (Lincoln, Neb.: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1975), 8.

of call. Abraham is another example, who was called by God a long time before Moses appeared on the scene of history. "Abraham heard the call of God—not just once, or initially—but as a continuing invitation and exhortation to follow and trust the one who had promised to be Abraham's 'shield'."¹²

The prophet Hosea refers to the people of Israel's exodus from Egypt: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son" (Hosea 11:1). Obviously, Moses was the leader of those called out of Egypt. He never forgot God's call. In Exodus 13:3, Moses reminds the people of Israel to remember that call. "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Similarly, New Testament believers are exhorted to remember their calling. Ephesians 4-6 describes in contrasts the old and new life, when "the believers are encouraged to remember their calling (4:1; cf. 1:4-10, 18,23) and the purpose of God with their salvation in Christ."¹³

In the New Testament, as the gospel is preached, true faith is expanded and it is connected to repentance and believing in Christ: "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15); "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31); "but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

Today's ministers, pastors, can enter the kingdom of God and, subsequently, belong to God's people, through repentance and rebirth. Repentance, a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, is

¹² Marianne Meye Thompson, "Turning and Returning to God: Reflections on the Lectionary Texts for Lent," *Interpretation* 2010-01, 64(1): 8; http://archive.org/details/sim_interpretation_2010-01_64_1_4.04.2022.

¹³ Gert Breed, "Ministry to the Congregation according to the Letter to the Ephesians," *Acta Theologica* 35(1) (2015): 42.

essential in the lives of pastors. Without it, one cannot talk about God calling someone to this service.

2. PREPARATORY ASPECT

When Moses was born, God's wonderful providence was immediately visible, for humanly speaking, he was born at the worst time (Exodus 2), yet God kept him alive because He had a plan with him. Perhaps many pastors today could report on how wonderfully God has cared for them since their birth because He had a plan with them. The believer sees God's work even in events and circumstances in which superficial hearts see only the blind coincidence.

God not only saved Moses from the Nile, but also prepared him for the service that awaited him. It was a thorough and long-lasting preparation that took two-thirds of his life: the first forty years in the court of Pharaoh and then another forty years in the wilderness. It seems like a long time, but when God takes the upbringing of a person into His hands, He does so in a way worthy of Himself and the holy service.

In modern times, three factors that contribute to the seasoning of an adult man have been commonly mentioned: workplace, military, and marriage. All three are found in the life of Moses.

As the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses received many kinds of training (Acts 7:22a). It is inconceivable that the science of warfare would have been left out. He was able to use his wide range of knowledge of warfare later in God's people's tumultuous years of wilderness, in organizing and directing their battles.

However, one must not forget that there is no substitute for the close relationship with God, because the schooling and training

happening within that relationship cannot be replaced even by all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Even before the burning bush experience it seems that Moses had a close relationship with God. Epp states that “the years of seclusion and quiet meditation with God in the backside of the desert as a shepherd had really prepared Moses for this moment” (that is, the interaction at the burning bush).¹⁴ Multiple and sometimes long periods (forty days) of fellowship with God on Mount Horeb were of great significance in the formation of Moses. It is worth noting that these events happened after he accepted God’s call (the Lord shapes His servants not only before they go into the ministry!).

Today’s ministers should keep in mind that even a perfect possession of the theological sciences is not enough to be fit for service. Only in sacred and intimate solitude in the presence of God can this qualification be obtained. This does not mean that theological sciences are useless, but they are valuable in the ministry only if there is a sacred, pure relationship with the Lord in the first place. Jesus Christ, though perfectly fit for the work He came to accomplish, spent thirty years in preparatory silence at Nazareth, the parental home, before His public appearance. Even after He started His public ministry, He often withdrew from the people to be in the presence of God.

The question may arise as to how the urgent need for workers can be met if such long-term education and preparation is required before starting the work. God can raise workers and prepare them in a short or a long time. It is up to Him to determine how long it takes to educate a worker. It is certain, however, that God will keep His servants in His immediate presence for a long time, both before and after their public appearance. Without this discipline and secret practice, one can remain apathetic, superficial, and wiseacre. Such a man is like a

¹⁴ Theodore H Epp, *Moses*, vol. I (Lincoln, Neb.: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1975), 85.

ship that sails for the sea with full sails without the required ship weight, and therefore the very first storm overturns it. If, on the other hand, the called person completes the school of God class by class, then depth, thoroughness, and perseverance will be manifested throughout his conduct. If somebody wants to learn from God, that person must also spend time with the teacher.

It is not always easy to leave a previous occupation, a position, especially if it appears that God’s providence placed people in a special position by which they may be useful to the cause of the Lord. In the case of Moses, following the wonderful chain of circumstances, he entered the court of Pharaoh, where he tried to help his people by his influence (Exodus 2).

Somewhere at the beginning of the second forty-year period, Moses married Zipporah (Exodus 2:21). As a husband and father, he was able to gain a wide range of experiences, and the benefit of the accumulated experience over the years in family life became obvious in shepherding his people, when spiritual guidance and settlement of a variety of affairs was needed.

A third factor in Moses’ seasoning was that by the time he returned to Egypt to begin fulfilling the great calling he had received from God, he had the advantage of forty years of experience in the work field. Many years later, the prophet Jeremiah stated that shepherding requires knowledge and understanding (Jeremiah 3:15). Moses gained much experience during his forty years of shepherding the flocks. According to Psalm 78:52, God led His people out of the bondage of slavery as their shepherd. Apparently, Moses could also use his shepherding experience in this great event.

The three factors in Moses’ life (military experience, marriage, workplace) were all part of the element of preparation regarding God’s call to service. This does not mean that one who does not have these three factors cannot go into the ministry, but it is

worth considering that an experienced, seasoned person can be an advantage to the Lord's cause.

A few words about Zipporah. She belongs to the category of those who, even at the time of marriage, did not know that the Lord would later call their husbands to serve Him. When Moses accepted God's call, Zipporah was ready to continue with Moses the new way of life to which God had called her husband. Although the Bible does not give much detail about her, one incident stands out regarding her. As they were returning to Egypt, Moses was attacked at one of the overnight lodging places and she did what was still needed for the family to be fully sanctified (the circumcision of their child — Exodus 4: 24-26). This underlines the truth that the extent to which a minister's wife stands by her husband matters a lot.

Sanctification is an important ingredient of the preparatory aspect of the call to ministry. God begins sanctification in a person's life as early as the process of calling. This is also seen in Moses, while he was shaped by the many trials, he had to endure during the first eighty years of his life. When the Lord told him that He had called him to holy service, He first called his attention to holiness: "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). He did the same with Isaiah, who saw the holy God sitting on his throne and who took up the service only after the seraph touched his mouth with the glowing coals (Isaiah 6:1-8). God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), not to devour His servants, but to devour all that is not in line with His holiness.

When God tells Moses that the "I am" is sending him (Exodus 3:14), He is emphasizing, among other things, that He is forever, and this is important not only for those to whom Moses goes, but for Moses himself. It is also important for today's ministers to go into service with the awareness that God is with them, that

they are not alone. This consciousness not only has a strengthening effect on them, but it has also inspired them to holiness: live so that the Lord may be with them! They should not serve without Him, because that cannot be called true service!

Moses did not make any concessions when it came to the request that his people leave Egypt to serve the Lord, although Pharaoh offered several variants (only men should go, not go far, children could not be taken, animals could not be taken). Salvation cannot be detached from a complete separation from Egypt. Sanctification to the Lord requires this, and Moses had consistently advocated this. God's servants must advocate this, not least by their personal example.

3. INTERNAL CALLING

Internal calling is the third aspect of the subject of this study. God not only prepares those who are called by Him, but puts in their hearts the thoughts, motives, and resolutions that show with clear certainty that He has called them to full-time service. It is not always easy, many times the vision and hearing are cleared after a long struggle. That is how it happened with Moses.

Moses did not face the idea of his call to God's service at the burning bush for the first time. Even before he fled Egypt, he believed that his brethren would understand that God was giving them deliverance by his hand (Acts 7:25). However, human nature is zealous in vain because God needs no human effort. Even proper training is not enough if one just wants to put human effort in the interest of God's people. The situation is quite different when God calls and summons to service at the right time.

Anyone can ask themselves whether the call to service is a continuous or occasional feeling or consciousness. If only occasional, it is not advisable to hurry; it is worth continuing to wait for stronger and recurring signals. If it is continuous, it is worth examining it with self-critical realism.

Studies have shown that there is a correlation between stress, calling vocation, and job satisfaction: "It is important to ... increase calling vocation in order to increase job satisfaction."¹⁵ This proves once again that the continuous aspect of the inner calling, because job satisfaction is desirable not only at the outset of serving God, but throughout the entire service.

When he met God at the burning bush, Moses did not immediately accept God's call. Moses, the man who forty years earlier thought that God was giving deliverance to His people by his hand, now finds himself completely unfit for the task. He raises several questions to God, and the Lord answers each one patiently, graciously, but without amending the fact that He called Moses to service. It is rather obvious that His grace transcends all difficulties and inadequacies and is sufficient in all the weaknesses and needs of His servants.

The inner call has its own struggles. One recurring thought is the well-known fact that God's service is not always free from difficulties and trials. Nor was Moses' ministry unencumbered. Moses, before eventually accepting the call, raises the question of what would happen if the message sent by the Lord through him is not accepted (Exodus 4:1). However, this could not be an obstacle for God. Similarly, today's pastor may encounter this question. There is no guarantee that the message of God will be

¹⁵ Hyoung-Woon Cho and Hyoun-Yong Kwon, "The Relationship Among Associate Pastor's Calling, Pastoral Stress, Self-Esteem and Job Satisfaction," *International Journal of Social Welfare Promotion and Management* 7, no. 1 (2020): 37.

accepted by everyone, but even then, His word must be proclaimed, and the word of the sender obeyed.

It is important to examine and verify the calling with the help of questions, but after a while that can be exaggerated. Despite all his objections and questioning, it was very clear to Moses that God had called him to service.

The inner call includes good motivations for service, and love plays an important role among them. God had not first researched whether the Jews were in a position to deserve His salvation. It was enough to know that they needed redemption. Similarly, Moses did not serve because his people deserved salvation. Here is the beautiful resemblance between Moses and God. Today's ministers should serve not because the church deserves it, but in the knowledge that people need salvation and spiritual growth. "The love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14), said the apostle Paul. When this love is in the heart of the pastors, they feel a burden of responsibility on their shoulders, and they cannot help but embark on the path of service. It is also worth paying attention to 1 Corinthians 13.1, which states that services performed without love are invalid.

The inner calling is very important because, together with the other three aspects, it provides a certainty that cannot be shaken by subsequent trials. The Old Testament prophets were certain of their calling, and this strengthened them in times of danger and discouragement (Jeremiah 1:4-8). Courage to serve stems from the certainty of the calling.

4. EXTERNAL CALL

New Testament believers are convinced that the purpose of an external call is to examine and strengthen the person who feels that God has called him to serve. Once the self-assessment has

taken place, it is important to consult with others about how they perceive that potential call to service. In such cases, the preliminary inner conviction can be shared casually but honestly with trustful people.

The church was instructed not to hasten to lay down their hands (1 Timothy 5:22). This is important because the flock is threatened by evil wolves who do not favor it (Acts 20:29). The long-term welfare of the flock should be considered in the evaluation. If one enjoys the support of the church, it will strengthen him and his awareness of his calling.

In the case of Moses, perhaps the aspect of external calling was the least obvious. His people did not receive him at first, because when Moses had at first reached out to Pharaoh the fate of the Jews had become even more difficult. However, calamities ensued, and the Hebrews became more and more convinced that Moses was indeed sent by their God. At the time of deliverance and forty years thereafter, most of the people were convinced that Moses was ordained to be their spiritual leader by God. Those who doubted this had to bitterly experience that they were wrong.

It is wonderful how God worked out the calling in the life of Moses, in every aspect of it. Although Moses did not know the length of the journey ahead of him and how many trials would await him in the next forty years, he accepted God's call and served Him faithfully. God rarely shows His will for the entire journey. The believer's life is walking by faith, step by step. Perhaps many would be frightened if God showed them everything at once as far as their service is concerned. Therefore, the call to serve and then performing the service is a process in which God gradually takes His servant step by step further.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CALLING

One of the important roles of the thorough conviction of God's call is to give strength during opposition and difficult times in the ministry. When Moses accepted God's call and appeared in Egypt, the most painful ordeal was not Pharaoh's rejection, for he could count on it, just as the people of the world today reject the servants of God. It was much more painful to be rejected by those whom he served. Even today it can be painful when the brethren misinterpret, disregard, or reject the one whom the Lord has called to serve. It is very important to stay close to the Lord at such times, just as Moses did. If one is not fully convinced of his calling, such circumstances can shake him strongly. Moses knew that God had called him to serve, and this certainty strengthened him amid adversity.

Opposition can come not only from God's people, but also from the enemy. The enemy did not like the service of Moses, who aimed to free the slaves. The mere mention of the name of freedom prompted Pharaoh to further afflict the oppressed Hebrews. This can still be expected in God's service today. The preaching of the gospel is not pleasing to the enemy, therefore attacks and all kinds of temptations can come, but this should not intimidate the servant of the Lord, for Jesus Christ is stronger than the enemy, and He strengthens His called servants.

SUMMARY

At the end of Moses' life, there is a summary of it in Deuteronomy 34:10-12. According to that, "since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses". The secret of this was that he met face to face the God who called him, talking to Him like a man with his friend.

It is a great honor when God to call someone to minister (1 Timothy 1:12). Jesus did not promise his workers that everyone would love and cherish them but spoke of the opposite (John 16:33).

The call comes from God. "You did not choose Me, but I chose you", he said unto his disciples (John 15,16). There is a sense of compulsion in the calling. Paul says, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (1Corinthians 9:16). If ministers are firmly convinced of their calling (and God did call them indeed), criticism and hardship will not shake them in their ministry. The dedicated pastor is constantly aware of his calling from God. Newer and fresher experiences only reinforce this awareness. His whole life is a call to service. May this certainty be strengthened again and again in everyday silence!

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06

**LORDSHIP SALVATION: AN
EVANGELICAL DEBATE
A SURVEY OF THE MAIN
THEOLOGICAL VIEWS**

Viorel Corneliu Ile

INTRODUCTION

Discussing the lordship of Christ, Donald G. Bloesch points out that the lordship salvation controversy among evangelicals brings into attention several theological issues. Thus, Bloesch comments, “among these is the relationship between the natural lordship of Christ and his redeeming lordship.”¹ The concern Bloesch voices inquires whether Christ is lord over man by virtue of the creation alone or by virtue of redemption as well. Although various theologians approached the issue and came to opposite conclusions, there is an agreement regarding the fundamental truth of Christ's deity, namely that He is Christ and Lord. Therefore, the controversy is not related to Christ's essential nature but whether saving faith implies one's commitment to follow Christ in submission as an inherent tenet of the very same faith. Given the soteriological nature of the debate it soon becomes clear that the controversy over lordship involves an endeavor to assert the heart of the gospel and the meaning of what salvation really is. The conclusions of such an undertaking are of utmost importance and affect nothing less than the eternal destiny of people. This paper seeks to present and assess the various alternatives concerning the Lordship Salvation debate and provide a balanced and accurate view of the overall controversy as well as a concise critique of the presented views.

Methodologically the paper is organized in three chapters. The first chapter introduces the terminology defining the Lordship Salvation controversy. The second chapter consists of a short survey of the history of the controversy while the third chapter examines three alternatives upheld by various scholars, pastors and laymen alike. The paper ends with several conclusions. The

¹ Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Saviour & Lord*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997), pp. 210-211.

essay mainly relies on the publications of several authors who engaged largely in the Lordship Salvation debate such as John F. MacArthur, Zane C. Hodges, Charles C. Ryrie, Michael S. Horton and others.

The debate over the matter will no doubt continue. However, it is crucial to provide the setting for future dialogue where much of the present confusion might be replaced by a clear understanding of the matter and the aim of this study is to contribute providing a better understanding on the subject.

1. THE LORDSHIP SALVATION DEBATE TERMINOLOGY

Much confusion overshadowed the debate since precise definition of key terms employed for the purpose of submitting the various positions concerning the lordship salvation controversy is lacking. All sides denounce the usage of terminology over their submitted views.

Thus, in his book *The Gospel According to the Apostles* John F. MacArthur indicates that the “lordship salvation” wording does not adequately describe his position.

I don't like the term *lordship salvation*. I reject the connotation intended by those who coined the phrase. It insinuates that a submissive heart is extraneous or supplementary to saving faith. Although I reluctantly used the term to describe my views, it is a concession to popular usage. Surrender to Jesus's lordship is not an addendum to the biblical terms of salvation; the summons to submission is at the heart of the gospel invitation throughout Scripture.”²

² John F. MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*, (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1993), p. 23.

MacArthur goes on to say that the purpose of these allegations is to place upon his teaching a charge that his view embraces a works-based righteousness. MacArthur strongly rejects this charge reassuring that his view is not “advocating a new or modified doctrine of salvation that challenges the Reformer's teaching or radically redefines faith in Christ.”³ He subsequently concisely presents the crucial points of his position in order to demonstrate his claim.⁴

On the other side, Robert N. Wilkin⁵ writing a review of MacArthur's book *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* charges the use of a pejorative “No-Lordship” label:

We call our position the Free Grace position. We call their position just what they call it: Lordship Salvation. Certainly, there is nothing derogatory in either of these designations.

MacArthur selects a cumbersome, misleading, and pejorative label for us. He has coined a host of designations, all of which include the words no-lordship.⁶

Among the terms used to describe what Wilkin calls Free Grace Theology the most offensive he identifies are “no-lordship doctrine”, “no-lordship theology”, “no-lordship teaching”, “the no-lordship gospel”, “the no-lordship position”, “no-lordship advocates”, “no-lordship people” and “no-lordship apologists”.⁷

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 23-25

⁵ Robert N. Wilkin is one of the Associate Editors Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society in Roanoke, TN.

⁶ Robert N. Wilkin, “The High Cost of Salvation by Faith-Works” in *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, (Autumn, vol. 6:11, 1993). <https://faithalone.org/journal/1993ii/faith-works.html>

⁷ Wilkin, “The High Cost of Salvation by Faith-Works.”

In addition, neither side claims that salvation is by works. On the contrary, both sides argue that, just as the Scripture plainly teaches, salvation is given freely to man as God's gift. Both parties claim to teach the biblical gospel as well as the historic Protestant faith. Within the Reformed camp there is now a consensus that justification is by faith alone but strong disagreement on the meaning of saving faith.

Justification and sanctification are also key words in the opposite approaches to the matter. "Easy-believism" stands as another term under the charge of assigning to Free Grace Theology supporters the idea of a mere intellectual consent to a dogmatic corpus. In order to settle the matter, a definition of controversy terminology is necessary.

2. A SURVEY OF THE LORDSHIP SALVATION CONTROVERSY

As far as MacArthur is concerned, the Lordship Salvation controversy can be traced back to the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, Lewis Sperry Chafer.⁸ According to MacArthur, Chafer's attempt was directed towards construing a "uniquely dispensationalist soteriology".⁹ His view was influenced by the relationship established between the law and the gospel. The new dispensation of grace was considered to be free of all the vestiges of the law. Therefore, MacArthur concludes, Chafer "embraced a kind of antinomianism".¹⁰

In fact, Benjamin B. Warfield pointed towards Chafer's defective soteriology claiming that "we hear of two kinds of Christians whom he designates respectively 'carnal men' and

⁸ John MacArthur, "A 15-Year Retrospective on the Lordship Controversy", <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A100/a-15year-retrospective-on-the-lordship-controversy>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

'spiritual men'".¹¹ This dichotomy allows, as MacArthur puts it, for the no-lordship gospel to sprout.¹²

The Lordship Salvation controversy took a step further in 1959, when *Eternity* magazine¹³ hosted a brief exchange between Everett F. Harrison¹⁴ and John R. W. Stott¹⁵. The issue expressed as "Must Christ be Lord in order to be Saviour?" emphasized the two evangelical camps regarding Lordship Salvation. Harrison followed the Free Grace Theology view while Stott defended the Lordship Salvation view.

Evangelical theology, as noted above, hosted divergent opinions concerning fundamental soteriological issues. The time for a full and open confrontation regarding these opposite views was probably long due by the time John F. MacArthur wrote *The Gospel According to Jesus*¹⁶ in response to Zane Hodges's book *The Gospel Under Siege*¹⁷ released in 1981. While Hodges, former professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary, insists that the evangelicals mainly operate with a compromised preaching of the gospel in relation to grace, MacArthur, Senior Pastor of Grace Community Church and

¹¹ Benjamin B. Warfield, "A review of Lewis Sperry Chafer's 'He that is spiritual'", as published in *The Princeton Theological Review*, vol. XVII, no. 2, (April 1919), <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A100/a-15year-retrospective-on-the-lordship-controversy>

¹² John MacArthur, "A 15-Year Retrospective on the Lordship Controversy", <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A100/a-15year-retrospective-on-the-lordship-controversy>

¹³ Robert P. Lightner, *Sin, the Saviour and Salvation: The Theology of Everlasting life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), p. 203.

¹⁴ The first professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary at the time.

¹⁵ Rector of All Souls Church in London at the time.

¹⁶ John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1988).

¹⁷ Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1981).

President of The Master's Seminary, advocates for the Lordship Salvation view.

Following MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* other two other important books emerged. Hodges published *Absolutely free!*¹⁸ and Charles C. Ryrie¹⁹ authored the book *So Great Salvation*²⁰. Ryrie enters the controversy arena and forwards a nuanced view of the issue providing, thus, the opportunity for an alternative perspective which some commentators and theologians call “a moderate, middle of the road position”.²¹

Given the extent of the controversy a new book was published by John MacArthur in 1993 under the title *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* accompanied by an explosion of articles, comments and books on both sides.

3. HODGES, MACARTHUR AND RYRIE'S “MODERATE” ALTERNATIVE

According to Charles C. Bing faith is “the necessary response required of a person for eternal salvation”.²² In his view the heart of the controversy concerns the definition and content of the volitional aspect of faith. Since there is a common understanding of faith as *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia* the debate must solve the nature of the volitional aspect (*fiducia*).²³ Three distinct

¹⁸ Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely free!* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989).

¹⁹ Former Systematic Theology professor and dean of doctoral studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.

²⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989).

²¹ Gary Gilley, “Lordship Salvation”, <https://tottministries.org/lordship-salvation/>

²² Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2010), p. 13

²³ Ibid.

views assess the nature of saving faith with irreconcilable dissimilarities.

3.1. ZANE HODGES AND THE RADICAL NO-LORDSHIP SALVATION POSITION

Zane Hodges argues for the value of the believer's assurance as one of the most precious treasures. This treasure, however, vanishes the same instant it is correlated with a demonstration of real faith through works.²⁴ Therefore, according to Hodges, the Scripture does not present other conditions for salvation in addition to faith. Repentance, the lordship of Christ, life surrender, discipleship or baptism should not be added to the conditions for man's salvation.²⁵ Works, even as a necessary consequence of saving faith, are thought to be a betrayal of the gospel of grace since Hodges sees the willingness to surrender (a human work) as a pre-condition to salvation which inherently becomes a part of faith. Faith brings about a miraculous inner change which can under no circumstances be reversed but there is no requirement from God that this faith must continue.²⁶

Assessing Hodges's Free Grace Theology, Michael S. Horton points out several inadequacies of this position as well as some inconsistencies with Reformed theology which Hodges claims to safeguard.²⁷ For Hodges, the very essence of faith, as Horton points out, is synergistic or cooperative. It is fundamentally a response of free will to divine grace which indicates his confusion regarding his own teaching. In order to demonstrate his point Horton presents Hodges's case against MacArthur's

²⁴ Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1986), p. 1-2

²⁵ Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1991), p.

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²⁶ Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, p. 59

²⁷ Michael S. Horton, *Christ the Lord* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), p. 15

view on faith and spiritual sight as God's gift. For Hodges, Horton underlines, this is in fact "a formula for despair' since it leaves nothing for humans to do in the matter of their new birth and justification".²⁸ The human responsibility in order to be accepted by God is the *appropriation* of God's gift of eternal life.²⁹ This *appropriation* by man of the redemption accomplished by God is running in stern conflict with his claim that salvation is *absolutely free*. Facts presented in the Gospel are "saving facts. That is, they are *divinely revealed facts which are to be believed for salvation*".³⁰ A tremendous emphasis rests, therefore, as Riddlebarger points out, on the priority of intellect in Hodges's system.³¹

Consistent with his view on faith, Hodges holds a similar view on repentance. He rejects the idea that repentance is a gift of God maintaining that the decision to repent is necessary to the extent a believer desires to follow the discipleship path. Therefore, repentance is dependent on human free will rather than on divine grace.³² Moreover, his claim that neither Calvin nor Luther included repentance as a condition for salvation substantiates a misunderstanding regarding what the Reformers argued for. In their view, Horton states, repentance was equated with regeneration, but "*regeneration*, for both Reformers, was a synonym for *sanctification* rather than for the gift of the new life".³³ In this acceptance of the word, repentance is not a condition for justification. However, as Horton emphasizes, the Reformers differentiated between the instrument of our justification (the gift of faith) and the fruit of this justification (the gift of perseverance and repentance) and argued that both

²⁸ Ibid., p. 16

²⁹ Horton., p. 17

³⁰ Ibid., p. 83

³¹ Ibid., p. 83

³² Ibid., p. 20

³³ Ibid., p. 19-20

judicial declaration and spiritual transformation belong to the concept of salvation.³⁴

Furthermore, Hodges underlines that the believer's assurance of salvation must not be connected with his perseverance.³⁵ Morality, he claims, is not a ground for the believer's security but such a view totally disconnects justification and sanctification. As Horton writes, Hodges's believer "is free to become an atheist".³⁶ The wording Hodges prefers, arguing for *should* instead of *must*³⁷, when it comes to perseverance gives insight regarding his view on the concept of faith. Kim Riddlebarger examines the concept of faith as it is expressed in Hodges's theology and argues that, by concluding that it is an unproductive waste of time to work with the well-known categories (intellect, emotions and will) as a criteria for understanding the mechanics of faith, Hodges distances himself from the categories Protestants used since the Reformation. *Notitia*, *assensus* and *fiducia* complete the concept of faith in historic Protestant understanding.³⁸

Insisting that the Bible presents a simple concept of faith Hodges contends for taking God at his word as the sole biblical meaning of faith. Such a view differentiates between faith and unbelief but not between different kinds of faith. A view which even Hodges finds difficult to endorse consistently. Riddlebarger deals with this problematic approach by describing the dilemma and the confusion Hodges creates when he inquires, against his own theological system (namely that faith is intellectual, or

³⁴ Ibid., p. 20

³⁵ Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 52

³⁶ Horton, p. 22

³⁷ Hodges, *Absolutely free!* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), p. 63

³⁸ Horton, p. 85

taking God at His Word), whether faith operates within the human person as a matter of the mind, will or emotions.³⁹

3.2. JOHN MACARTHUR AND THE LORDSHIP SALVATION POSITION

The legitimate concern over the claim that believers can experience salvation without undergoing a spiritual and moral transformation, or, as Michael Horton renders it, the “no-effective-grace”⁴⁰ experience, convinced John F. MacArthur that a matter of such a tremendous importance needs to be addressed. In his first publication to engage the subject, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, MacArthur confronts several significant themes such as the abandonment of the gospel of Jesus, what it means not to rightfully divide the truth of the Word of God, the nature of true faith, the need of repentance, of surrender and discipleship, the need to become fruitful as well as the concept of perseverance.⁴¹ The aim of the whole enterprise is to provide and preserve a biblical position over the message the gospel must convey.

Rick Ritchie gives some useful insight in what MacArthur's view needs to stand corrected.⁴² Firstly, Ritchie analyzes the relationship established between law and gospel in MacArthur's interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. Although MacArthur offers sufficient proof that what his opponents call free grace is in fact lawless grace, a rampant antinomianism, his appeal to the Reformers to support his position is faulty. He maintains that Luther did not see the Sermon on the Mount as law but as gospel. However, Ritchie stresses that in Reformation theology “both

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 11

⁴¹ John MacArthur, *Evanghelia după Isus*, (Wheaton, IL.: Societatea Misionară Română, 1992)

⁴² Horton, p. 71

law and gospel are operative in both Old and New Testament times” since “law and gospel are not confined to distinct ages”.⁴³ Moreover, that does not imply that law and gospel hold the same role or function. Luther frequently drew an antithesis between law and gospel.⁴⁴ While the law demands, the gospel offers. MacArthur, Ritchie comments, brings considerable confusion interpreting the Sermon on the Mount for he does not properly recognize law as law.⁴⁵

Luther had the capacity to find both law and gospel in the same passage where the passage contained God's promises and demands, therefore to see the gospel in the Sermon on the Mount is not an error. However, MacArthur's understanding of gospel means that the Christian is called to live according to its demands and by living this way the Christian will be saved.⁴⁶ To read God's demands in the Sermon on the Mount as law is legitimate while reading those demands as the law which is the gospel is not.⁴⁷

Calvin also operated with a dialectic relationship between the law and the gospel. For Calvin there was a basic continuity between law and gospel with an ever present tension between the letter of the law and the evangelical proclamation. In his view “the law is always with the gospel rather than simply before the gospel. The right order is law-gospel-law. The law prepares us for faith in Christ, and the gospel sends us back to the law, enabling us to obey it in the spirit of love.”⁴⁸ MacArthur does not at all times clarify the distinction but sometimes leaves the reader under the impression of an overlap meaning. While

⁴³ Horton, p. 72

⁴⁴ Bloesch, p. 200

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 74

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Bloesch, p. 200

rejecting antinomianism MacArthur must also avoid the peril of moralism or legalism. As Bloesch renders it, “we are justified by grace alone but for holiness alone”⁴⁹ where only participation in sanctification authorizes the participant to assert his justification by grace.

Secondly, commenting on MacArthur's interpretation of the rich young ruler passage, Ritchie points out that the conversation “is a 'law' passage and is therefore rigorous, as the law demands perfection”.⁵⁰ Thus, reading the text with the hermeneutical key of the gospel turns the fulfillment of the law into the gospel. At the same time, Ritchie gives a fair warning against the perilous attempt to combine a supposedly preaching of law as gospel on behalf of Jesus with the imperfection of the Christian. Thus, MacArthur is drawn to the conclusion that the Christian must be *willing* to follow Jesus and *willing* to obey. The problem is still there when this *willingness* proves to be just as vulnerable to imperfection and such an “inner willingness” will turn out to be a tyrannical principle for the Christian who truly desires to be saved.⁵¹

3.3. CHARLES RYRIE AND THE “MODERATE” ALTERNATIVE

A new perspective seemingly occurred when Charles Ryrie published his book *So Great Salvation*. His work was well received by some who were in search of a moderate view in the Lordship Salvation controversy. However, Ryrie's view of salvation describes repentance as a change of one's mind concerning a certain matter. Ryrie does provide some grounds for terminology clarification his position although his definitions regarding faith and repentance confine him in the no-Lordship camp “moderate” as it may be. Faith, according to Ryrie, implies

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 209

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 77

⁵¹ Bloesch, p. 77

a receiving of truth beyond the ability to recognize it when the facts of the gospel are presented. Faith is the confidence that God can remove the guilt of sin and can give eternal life.⁵² Thus, placing a strong emphasis on the *assensus* Ryrie determines that there are two distinctive types of Christians: carnal and spiritual. It is well possible for the carnal Christian to live like the unsaved and therefore the word carnal can designate believers and unbelievers alike since they demonstrate the same lifestyle.⁵³ This leads back to the issue of “no-effective-grace” experience.

Regarding salvation, repentance solely involves a changing of mind concerning Christ.⁵⁴ As a matter of fact, repentance and faith are rather understood as synonyms since in his view repentance as a turning away from sin is nothing but an addition of a human work to saving faith.⁵⁵

A believer, Ryrie holds, might display a fruitful life or live in a stage of spiritual immaturity for a period of time when fruit will not be present.⁵⁶ Taking to the logical conclusion his argument, there is no reason to deny the possibility for a believer not to produce fruit through the end of his life. Although Ryrie's work is an attempt to voice the middle or moderate view in the Lordship Salvation controversy, the position he forwards can simply be labeled as a no-Lordship position.

⁵² Charles C. Ryrie, *Teologie elementară*, (Dallas, TX: BEE International, 1993), pp. 348-351

⁵³ Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 62

⁵⁴ Charles Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), p. 176

⁵⁵ Charles Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), p. 1950

⁵⁶ Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 45

CONCLUSION

The Lordship Salvation debate focused on several key soteriological aspects of the Christian faith. However, the issue presents a wider ramification for the theological field. The limitations of this paper do not allow for an extensive study of all issues affected by the position one takes concerning the Lordship Salvation controversy. A further study might take on the subject of what is the meaning of grace in the debate (its dynamic nature, its relationship with Christ's atonement for sin). There is also room for furthering the relationship between justification and sanctification, the sovereignty of God, assurance, faith, repentance, eternal rewards, human corruption and the role of the law.

The present study on the Lordship salvation controversy, however, surfaces the pressing need for a clarification of terminology which will bring the opposite sides to a dialogue. Thus far, each side managed to talk past the other. Clear definitions are necessary where significant terminology is involved.

A further contribution of this study rests on the conclusion that no one can afford the luxury of neutrality on the matter. It really is either Lordship Salvation or No-Lordship Salvation. There is no middle way or moderate position. If that is the case, the position one embraces must necessarily be grounded in the biblical teaching regarding saving faith. Zane Hodges and Charles Ryrie determined to reduce the discussion over salvation to justification and saving faith while John MacArthur may sometimes leave the impression that he is in the danger of preaching a gospel equated with the law. While Hodges and Ryrie do not succeed to avoid antinomianism and lawless grace MacArthur, however, does not fall into the trap of legalism.

The debate is far from its final echoes. Nevertheless, the importance of the matter at stake should leave no one insensitive but should invite to a new, fresh and diligent examination of the arguments for a better understanding and even greater satisfying life under Lordship Salvation.

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07

STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS IN PREACHING: SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MARTYN LLOYD-JONES AND THE PURITANS

Daniel Suci

INTRODUCTION

Two of the most remarkable and stimulating periods for studying preaching come from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, respectively, the twentieth century. The first includes the Puritans' preaching, and the second contains the ministry of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a preacher with medical training (hereafter also *the Doctor*). Joining the Puritans and Lloyd-Jones could seem odd. Still, this paper aims to prove that the Doctor was truly a Puritan, though ministering two hundred years later than the culmination of the Puritans' period.

The present paper argues that, under the influence of Puritanism, Martyn Lloyd-Jones did similar strategic investments in the work of preaching, namely: practicing preaching as often as possible, publishing sermons, and training ministers. The first part will provide a broad historical background of the Puritans and of the Doctor, and will show the connection between Lloyd-Jones and his mentors from a different century. The second part will provide evidence for the three key investments in preaching.

1. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PREACHING

The first section will describe the two profiles under consideration. Respecting the historical order and the direction of influence, the Puritans come first, and then Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

1.1. THE PURITANS' PREACHING PROFILE

By way of setting the stage, the paper will describe the Puritans' preaching, then will highlight the impact of their preaching upon England. In the 1560s, the term *Puritan* was a reference to the English Protestants who regarded incomplete the reforms under

Queen Elizabeth.¹ They considered the Church of England filled with corrupt and unscriptural practices. Their desire and actions to purify the Church brought them this label. Though initially rejected, the term Puritanism “was quickly embraced as a positive description of the reform movement which sought to bring the Church of England into greater conformity to the Word of God.”²

As a result, the Puritans developed a robust and well-articulated biblical doctrine for all aspects of life. Historians agree that their doctrinal success “in creating a lasting tradition of worship, preaching, and lay spirituality make it a tradition of permanent importance in English-speaking Christianity and in the wider Reformed churches.”³ One of the most extensive descriptions of Puritanism comes from J. I. Packer:

A total view of Christianity, Bible-based, church-centered, God-honouring, literate, orthodox, pastoral, and Reformational, that saw personal, domestic, professional, political, churchly, and economic existence as aspects of a single whole, and that called on everybody to order every department and every relationship of their life according to the Word of God, so that all would be sanctified and become ‘holiness to the Lord.’⁴

Inside such a complex profile of Puritanism rests a narrower profile of the typical Puritan preacher. John Bunyan, in his allegoric work, *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), describes that, at the Interpreter’s House, the Christian saw “the picture of a very grave person hang up against the wall; and this was the fashion

¹Joel R. Beeke and Nicholas J. Thompson, *To God’s Glory: Lessons on Puritanism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 5.

²Beeke and Thompson, *To God’s Glory: Lessons on Puritanism*, 5.

³Ian Breward, “Puritan Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. S. B. Ferguson and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 553.

⁴J. I. Packer, *Puritan Portraits* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2012), 159.

of it: It had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon its lips, the world was behind its back; it stood as if it pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over its head.”⁵ Bunyan’s portrait includes what the Puritans valued in an excellent minister: having an eternal perspective, studying intensely, speaking biblically, renouncing worldliness, preaching powerfully, and laboring for heavenly rewards.

Such a profile does not mean that the Puritan preachers had a uniform style. On the contrary, they had different styles as they had different personalities. Sinclair Ferguson emphasizes that, as expected, they “varied in personality, gift, burden and sphere of calling. Indeed while they shared the same heartbeat, and while the family likeness in their ministries is obvious, there was a great diversity of style among them.” Ferguson substantiates his affirmation with three examples: “The dramatic features of a John Rogers of Dedham, who at times would virtually ‘act out’ his preaching in a dramatic way, involved a different use of the imagination from the preaching of, for example, the story-telling of a John Flavel, or the deep-reasoning John Owen.”⁶ But, despite the variety, their style communicated a seriousness in dealing with God’s Word, which had an enormous impact.

The effects of the Puritans’ preaching were obvious on multiple levels. One surprising outcome was in terms of the economy. According to Christopher Hill, “a good preacher was an economic asset to a market town because it drew crowds to town

⁵John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 1995), electronic edition, Logos Bible Software.

⁶Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Some Pastors and Teachers: Reflecting a Biblical Vision of What Every Minister is Called to Be* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017), 168.

to listen to the preacher's market-day lecture."⁷ Also, the Puritan preaching impacted the religious life in England. At the superficial level, many Anglican churches emptied during Sundays because the parishioners attended a neighboring one which had better preaching, namely a Puritan preacher. One popular preacher was William Dyke – "many absent themselves from their own parish churches on the Sabbath day, yea, refuse to hear their own ministers... and repair to Dyke to hear him, and many of this gadding people came from far and went home late."⁸

But at a more profound religious level, the effects of their preaching on the spiritual life of England were wide-ranging. Iain Murray states that despite the weaknesses of the Puritans, it is undeniable that "it was their activity that had let to a period in which theology was valued, when sound doctrine and fervent gospel preaching were esteemed, and when Bible reading and spiritual hunger were characteristic of large portions of the common people."⁹ Their ministry generated a powerful spiritual movement in their land. During their times, "the Holy Spirit worked in power in England throughout the Puritan period, so that the impact of gospel preaching, conviction of sin, demands for repentance, and the fear of divine rejection, went very deep."¹⁰

One can appreciate the impact of the Puritans' preaching when he considers what happened after "The Great Ejection" (1662) when 2.000 Puritan preachers had to leave their pulpits. England entered "an age of rationalism, of coldness in the pulpit and

⁷Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 94.

⁸Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 94.

⁹Iain H. Murray, ed., *Sermons of the Great Ejection* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), ix.

¹⁰Packer, *Puritan Portraits*, 136-7.

indifference in the pew, an age in which skepticism and worldliness went far to reducing national religion to a mere parody of New Testament Christianity."¹¹ Two Anglicans describe in poignant terms what the Ejection meant for their nation J. B. Marsden states that "within five years of the ejection of the two thousand Nonconformists, London was twice laid waste, first by pestilence and then by fire." He adds, „But other calamities ensued, more lasting and far more terrible. Religion in the Church of England was almost extinguished and in many of her parishes the lamp of God went out."¹²

J. C. Ryle, the former bishop of Liverpool, adds that the Ejection was "an injury to the cause of true religion in England which will probably never be repaired... a more impolitic deed never disfigured the annals of a Protestant Church."¹³ It seems that the divine favor withdrew once the ministry of the Word diminished. But despite the sad outcome for England, after three centuries, another preacher inspired by their zeal for preaching started to impact the capital once again.

1.2. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES' PREACHING PROFILE

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was that preacher, and this is the second element of comparison of this paper. The present section will provide an overview of his preaching and his Puritan influences. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) pastored two completely different churches: a small church located in a poor area and a big, urban congregation. From 1926 to 1938, he ministered at Bethlehem Forward Movement Hall in Sandfields, Aberavon, Wales. His preaching had a massive impact in that church: "congregational

¹¹Murray, *Sermons of the Great Ejection*, x.

¹²Iain H. Murray, ed., *Sermons of the Great Ejection* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), x.

¹³Iain H. Murray, ed., *Sermons of the Great Ejection* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), x.

strength soared tenfold from the original eighty worshippers who greeted him when he entered the Sandfields' pulpit. The membership went through the five hundred limit. On one evening, forty people were baptized."¹⁴

Between 1938-1968, the Doctor ministered at Westminster Chapel, London, where he attracted thousands in the audience. That was the pulpit from where he delivered some famous preaching series, such as the Exposition on Romans and Ephesians. *Moody Monthly's* edition of October 1955 gives an account of his Westminster preaching period. After spending six Sundays in London, Dr. Wilbur M. Smith writes:

It is commonly said among evangelicals in London that he is the outstanding preacher in Great Britain today. I have heard it stated since coming to London, not by anyone connected with Westminster Chapel, that no less a person than Brunner himself, the Continental theologian, has stated that Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones is the greatest preacher in Christendom today. This would be a great deal for Brunner to say about anyone, and especially about this person, because Dr Lloyd-Jones is a staunch defender of the plenary inspiration of the Holy Spirit. After hearing him again, twice within three weeks, I am easily persuaded that both of these statements are probably true.¹⁵

After his retirement, Lloyd-Jones continued to edit his sermons, preparing them for publication. His last sermon was on June 8, 1980.¹⁶ But his preaching exceeded the limits of his two congregations, as he traveled extensively and preached

¹⁴Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing: The Preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 53.

¹⁵Quoted in Iain H. Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: 1899-1981* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2013), 320.

¹⁶Jason Meyer, *Lloyd-Jones on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 41.

evangelistic sermons almost weekly, and also delivered various addresses to students and ministers.

Lloyd-Jones started his ministry at Westminster Chapel in a religious landscape devoid of Puritan influences. According to John Dogget, "in 1938 Dr Lloyd-Jones came to a city and to a country in which the Reformed Faith of Calvin and the Puritans, of Whitefield and Spurgeon, was almost extinct."¹⁷ But he put on the Puritans' mantle, and "although technically not a Puritan in the historical sense of the term,"¹⁸ the Doctor carried it almost alone during the twentieth century.¹⁹ Reading a biography of Richard Baxter in 1925 impacted his whole life and ministry:

From that time, a true and living interest in the Puritans and their works has gripped me, and I am free to confess that my whole ministry has been governed by this. I am interested in Puritanism because it seems to me to be one of the most useful things any preacher can do. Nothing so encourages a true ministry of the Word because these men were such great exemplars in that respect.²⁰

Speaking on Puritanism in March 1926, at The Literary and Debating Society, Charing Cross, he admits: "I cannot claim, unfortunately, to be a real Puritan, because an analysis of my life finds me seriously wanting, but there have been moments, unhappily infrequent, when I have felt that I could move mountains."²¹ Later in life, he encouraged preachers to read the

¹⁷Quoted in Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1990), 776.

¹⁸Beeke and Thompson, *To God's Glory: Lessons on Puritanism*, 122.

¹⁹James I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 281.

²⁰Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1996), 237-8.

²¹Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1983), 98.

Puritans, as they are useful in understanding and enjoying the Scriptures and preparing the pulpit.²²

He sought to spread the love for the Puritans in many ways, but three stand out. The first one was by organizing an annual conference with J. I. Packer between 1959-1978. The Doctor's first lecture was on 'Puritan Preaching.'²³ The second way was by helping with the founding of *The Banner of Truth Trust*, intending to publish Reformed and Puritan authors, who became obsolete. "His assistant and one of his members were the founding trustees," and, in the beginning, the books were stored and dispatched from the Chapel's premises.²⁴

The third way was by supporting *The Evangelical Library*, which was started in the 1920s by Geoffrey Williams out of love for the Puritans' writings. The Doctor later became its leader. In his 1955 presidential Annual Meeting address, he emphasized the strategic role of Puritan literature: "It is of supreme importance for the future of the Christian faith in this country that we should experience a revival of interest in the literature of the great Puritans of the seventeenth century."²⁵

But Lloyd-Jones did not emulate the Puritans without discernment. He offered few times sharp words of caution. In a sermon on Ephesians 6:16, he dismisses following blindly the Puritans' by preaching their sermons word for word, employing their sermon structure, or adopting their manner of preaching:

We need the old truths in a modern suit. You must not clothe them in the old staid terminology or manner or method that was appropriate in the past. The moment we become slaves to any

²²Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 173-4.

²³Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 288.

²⁴Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 355.

²⁵Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 352

system – I do not care how good it was in its age and generation – we are already defeated, because we have missed this whole principle of adaptability. So we do not need gramophone records, not even of the Puritans! We need the truth that was preached by the Puritans, but preached in a manner that will show its relevance, its adaptability to the most urgent modern situation. God forbid that our methods should deny the very message we are trying to preach, either by imitating the latest methods of worldly entertainment or by methods that are so archaic as to make our message irrelevant.²⁶

Repeating verbatim Puritan sermons refers probably to ministers from the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church, in which he grew. They "would quote from them [the Puritans], and indeed at times were charged with having preached some of their sermons."²⁷ Also, he witnessed during his ministry an unhealthy admiration for the Puritans: "he lamented that some men were emptying the churches because of an attempt slavishly to copy the Puritans. 'A preacher should be his own man,' was advice which Lloyd-Jones frequently gave."²⁸ Indeed, he saturated his life with influences from such noble predecessors, but he was himself in preaching.

2. THE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT IN PREACHING

The Puritans and the Doctor believed in the primacy of preaching. As a result, they adopted strategic ways to promote the ministry of the Word. Joel Beeke states that "the Puritans' love for preaching enabled them to focus on establishing an

²⁶D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-20* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 290-1.

²⁷Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, 237.

²⁸Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing*, 36.

impressive program for comprehensive reform of the church.”²⁹ Three of the most significant were preaching itself, publishing books of sermons, and ministerial training.

2.1. BY PRACTICING PREACHING

Both the Puritans and the Doctor sought to promote preaching by displaying the importance of preaching in their own lives. At a concrete level, they preached biblically, and they preached often. For the Puritans, preaching biblically meant that their message came from God’s Word. For them, “the sermon is not just hinged to Scripture; it quite literally exists inside the Word of God; the text is not in the sermon, but the sermon is in the text. [...] Put summarily, listening to a sermon is being in the Bible.”³⁰ The Puritan Edward Dering stated that “the faithful Minister, like unto Christ, [is] one that preacheth nothing but the word of God,” and John Owen declared that “the first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word.”³¹ Their biblical knowledge was profound and all-embracing. As such, a typical page of a Puritan sermon “contains five to ten citations of biblical texts and about a dozen references to texts. Puritan preachers were conversant with their Bibles; they memorized hundreds, if not thousands, of texts. They knew what Scripture to cite for any concern.”³²

For Lloyd-Jones, as well, it was clear that the preacher must proclaim the Word of God, and not his ideas. In his lectures on preaching, he affirmed that “the content of the sermon is what is called in the New Testament ‘The Word’. ‘Preach the Word’, or

²⁹Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 699.

³⁰Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism: A Biblical Approach*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 9–10.

³¹Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism: A Biblical Approach*, 9.

³²Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism: A Biblical Approach*, 12.

‘preach the Gospel’, or ‘the whole counsel of God.’”³³ He used terms like vehicle, channel, instrument, representative to indicate that the preacher must only deliver to others what he has received, not to offer them his thoughts and ideas.³⁴

Moreover, the Doctor was following the footsteps of the Puritans in immersing in Scripture. He used as a daily Scripture reading the Robert Murray McCheyne system with two Bible passages in the morning and two in the evening. Those closest to him said that “He knew that Bible inside and out!”³⁵ But such an assessment was not a subjective one, rather one that mirrored the reality and confirmed by others as well. Someone who took part in some meetings that the Doctor chaired remarked his impressive scriptural knowledge: “The knowledge of the Scriptures which he revealed was truly amazing; he seemed to know not only the chapter and verse of every quotation made, but the exact context, and the precise meaning of every phrase.”³⁶

The Doctor acquired a thorough scriptural knowledge by reserving his mornings for study, something that encouraged other preachers to do. For him, safeguarding the mornings to study was an absolute rule.³⁷ His consistency in Bible reading and sermon preparation was a strong foundation for his public proclamation of the Word of God in numerous places and at an enviable rate.

³³D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2013), 59.

³⁴Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 60.

³⁵Steve J. Lawson, “Striking Similarities Between Two Extraordinary Expositors,” *MSJ*.22, 1 (Spring 2011) (n.d.): 53., <https://tms.edu/m/msj22e.pdf>.

³⁶Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 174.

³⁷Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 165.

The Puritans and the Doctor did not only preach biblically; they strived to preach as often as possible. Regarding the frequency of preaching, the Puritans used all the opportunities, during the week or on Sundays, to preach. Moreover, every place was suitable for proclaim the Word of God: at home or far from home, in public or in private homes, in barns and remote places. No wonder that the usual Puritan minister would preach five times a week.³⁸ One remarkable example from the London of the 16th century was Richard Greenham. “He always preached twice on a Lord’s day, and catechised the young people of his parish. He usually preached four times and catechised once, during the week.”³⁹ For his people's convenience, they met five times during the week at six in the morning. So, he would rise at four to prepare.⁴⁰

The Doctor was as well a prolific preacher. The number of his sermons is telling of his high view on preaching. When he became a minister in Aberavon, “part of his contract was to have 13 Sundays per annum free. This habit was a feature throughout his ministerial life, namely the freedom to preach in many other places.” In the first year of his ministry, he agreed to preach in 52 other churches, usually on a Tuesday or Thursday evening.⁴¹ Usually, in other places, he would preach evangelistic sermons.

Iain Murray makes this comment about Lloyd-Jones ministry at Westminster: “Those who heard him in his own pulpit on Friday evenings had no idea that, since the previous Sunday, he might have been preaching two or three times in almost any part of the

³⁸Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, 699.

³⁹Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans* (London: James Black, 1813), 1:415.

⁴⁰Jl Packer, “Puritan Portraits: Jl Packer on Selected Classic Pastors and Pastoral Classics” (2012): 22.

⁴¹Erroll Hulse, *One in a Thousand: The Calling and Work of a Pastor* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2014), electronic edition.

United Kingdom.”⁴² As stated previously, Martyn Lloyd-Jones served in Sandfields, Aberavon, between 1927-1938. Then, from 1938-1968, at Westminster Chapel. That means 41 years of full-time pastoral ministry. If one considers three services per week and at least one sermon in some other place in Britain, the result is four sermons a week! Keeping the same frequency for 52 weeks means 208 sermons a year! And that for four decades! The result is a minimum of 8.528 sermons! But a more accurate number would be around 10.000 sermons since he would preach each week two or even three times in other places. Moreover, the Doctor continued to preach after his retirement until one year before his death, which leaves another period of 12 years!

One of the huge legacies of the Puritans and the Doctor was that their sermons did not vanish but rather found their way on a printed page. Publishing sermons is the next point of comparison and also one that displays the priority of preaching.

2.2. BY PUBLISHING SERMONS

The Puritans’ view of publishing books was an extension of their preaching ministry. Their vision was to deepen the impact of the Scripture in the lives of their local parishioners and to widen its force as far as possible from their churches. For them, the role of the press in England was strategic. But they were not professional writers, rather ministers who wrote their sermons and published them for the eternal benefit of souls. “The bulk of Puritan devotional writing appears on inspection to be lightly edited versions of material that was first written for the pulpit.”⁴³ According to some statistics, “in the 1560s, nine volumes of Puritan sermons were published; in the 1570s, sixty-nine

⁴²Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 323.

⁴³Packer, “Puritan Portraits: Jl Packer on Selected Classic Pastors and Pastoral Classics,” 22.

volumes; in the 1580s, 113 volumes; and in the 1590s, 140 volumes.”⁴⁴

One of the forefront Puritan preachers and authors was William Perkins. Since he was a prolific preacher, he also became a prolific writer. Latin, French, Dutch, Spanish are some of the languages in which Perkins works became available, and they also spread in various European countries. One explanation for his publishing success was that he dressed erudition in simple words. Of Perkins’ books, Bishop Hall remarked that “he excelled in a distinct judgment, a rare dexterity in clearing the obscure subtleties of the schools, and in an easy explication of the most perplexed subjects.”⁴⁵ The plain style of writing reflected the plain style of preaching, one of the hallmarks of the Puritan ministers. Their homiletic idiom was that “the plainest words are the profitablest oratory in the weightiest matters.”⁴⁶

What can be said about Perkins describes the Puritan movement as a whole. Many Puritans were excellent preachers and prolific writers and benefited from a wide readership in many European countries. J. I. Packer’s conclusion is suitable: “Puritanism’s most significant contribution to the ongoing life of the church was, and is, without a doubt its literary legacy.”⁴⁷ The recent massive reprinting of Puritan volumes brings this historical movement closer to the contemporary generations and will pave the way, undoubtedly, as it has been the case so far, for many works which analyze the Puritan authors.

⁴⁴Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, 704.

⁴⁵Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans* (London: James Black, 1813), 2:131.

⁴⁶James I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 285.

⁴⁷Packer, “Puritan Portraits: JI Packer on Selected Classic Pastors and Pastoral Classics,” 21.

As was the case for the Puritans, for Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the ministry of publishing books was also secondary to and an extension of his pulpit ministry. His sermons appeared first of all in the *Westminster Record*, the monthly bulletin of Westminster Chapel. The written form facilitated in some cases the publishing of messages in different volumes. For example, the five sermons preached during October 1939 became Lloyd-Jones’ first book, *Why Does God Allow War?* (December 1939).⁴⁸ Curiously enough, Lloyd-Jones did not make a priority of publishing his sermons during his active pastoral ministry. Notable exceptions were *Studies on the Sermon on the Mount* (1950-51 – vol. 1, 1951-52 – vol. 2), *Faith on Trial* (Psalm 73, 1953-54), *From Fear to Faith* (Habakkuk, 1950), and a series on John 17 (1952-1953).⁴⁹

Most of his publishing efforts were obvious in the last period of his life, after concluding his ministry at Westminster Chapel, in 1968. Most of his working hours in private focused on editing his manuscripts of sermons from his Westminster pulpit ministry and preparing them for publication.⁵⁰ In the year of his retirement, on July 6, in a personal letter to Philip Hughes, Lloyd-Jones express his burden for the next stage of his life: “I have felt increasingly that I must put into book form more of the material that I have accumulated – for example, I am anxious to print what I have tried to do on the Epistle to the Romans among others.”⁵¹ The vision was translated into reality by the publication of the Ephesians series and half of the volumes on Romans.

⁴⁸Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 22.

⁴⁹Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 800–801.

⁵⁰Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 635.

⁵¹Iain H. Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: 1899-1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2013), 420.

It is worth point out that “the Doctor never actually wrote a book. All of his books are edited sermons or lectures he gave. His family members have continued this labor of love after his death,⁵² and *The Banner of Truth*, which published most of his books, continues until the present day to publish his works. Following the Puritans’ model, Lloyd-Jones displayed a wonderful simplicity of style, being “a populariser in the best sense of the word.”⁵³

In one of his early volumes, *Studies on the Sermon on the Mount* (March 1959), he expresses one of the main reasons for retaining the sermonic form: “I am profoundly convinced that the greatest need of the Church today is a return to expository sermon.”⁵⁴ He indicates that many people have asked him to lecture on expository preaching, but he preferred to show what expository preaching is rather than teaching about it. In his words, “the best way of doing this is to give examples of such preaching in actual practice. It is my hope that this volume with its many faults may help somewhat in that respect.”⁵⁵

His desire for all his volumes, and especially those on Ephesians and Romans, was to stir new interest in expository preaching. But his main aim seemed inconsistent with the publishing world in the mid-twentieth century. At that point in England, volumes containing consecutive expository sermons were an unfamiliar literary genre. The sermonic style seemed inadequate for the written form and unappealing to those who did not hear him in

⁵²Meyer, *Lloyd-Jones on the Christian Life*, 41.

⁵³Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 776.

⁵⁴D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, vol. 1 (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1959).

⁵⁵Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, vol. 1.

person. The skepticism vanished once he had published the sermons on the Sermon on the Mount.⁵⁶

The result of retaining the sermonic form of exposition that displayed logic, fire, and simplicity, as the Puritans did, is that the Doctor remains relevant for future generations. According to his biographer, “in years to come Dr Lloyd-Jones will probably be remembered chiefly on account of his books. They will go on being read when much else from the present century has been forgotten.”⁵⁷ Besides practicing preaching and publishing sermons, the Puritans and the Doctor displayed the essential role of preaching through another means: training ministers.

2.3. BY TRAINING MINISTERS

Training Ministers was one of the key methods by which the Puritans sought to set and preserve a high standard for preaching. Many of the English Puritans received their college education at Cambridge, Oxford, or Trinity College in Dublin. Writing about the first two schools and the high numbers of Puritan-minded London lecturers, Paul Seaver indicates that “59 percent received training at Cambridge and 56 percent at Oxford—several being trained in part in both universities.”⁵⁸ Focusing on Cambridge, Joseph Pipa points out that

Christ’s College led the way with a long list of Puritan fellows and tutors, led by Laurence Chaderton. St. John’s and Trinity, as well, produced many with Puritan convictions. In the early days of Elizabeth, these colleges produced a veritable “Who’s Who” of Puritan divines. Later in Elizabeth’s reign the Puritans established two colleges of their own in Cambridge. In 1584

⁵⁶Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 636–37.

⁵⁷Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 776.

⁵⁸Quoted in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, 705.

Walter Mildmay founded Emmanuel with Laurence Chaderton as its first master, and in 1596 the Countess of Sussex established Sidney Sussex.⁵⁹

Another example that proves the strategic importance of ministerial training for Puritans comes from New England. After just six years from their arrival in Massachusetts, the Puritans founded Harvard College. They dread of leaving “an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust.”⁶⁰

William Perkins, an erudite and powerful preacher, expressed the Puritans’ view on the essential place of seminaries. Consequently, he asks Christian rulers to support those institutions. According to Perkins, “good ministers are one in a thousand. If therefore their number is to be increased, training institutions must be well maintained,”⁶¹ both by the support of the national leaders and those of the colleges. For William Perkins and the Puritans, theological education was essential but was not an end in itself. The purpose was serving the Church:

As students aspire to this rare and excellent calling, they must learn to equip themselves with the best helps and means they can, in order to become true ministers and able interpreters. They must not delay too long in those studies which keep a man from the practice of this high office. For the calling is not to live in the university or in the college and to study, however eager an individual is to devour learning. It is, rather, to be a good minister. That is what makes a man ‘one of a thousand.’⁶²

⁵⁹Quoted in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, 705.

⁶⁰Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 96.

⁶¹William Perkins, *The Art of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2016), 92.

⁶²Perkins, *The Art of Prophecy*, 95.

Out of the importance of preaching sprang the crucial task of solid theological preparation. The purpose of these two values was the purification and the strengthening of the Church.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones shared the Puritans’ burden for training ministers, even though he was in a category by himself in terms of his background. Educated as a medical doctor, he gave up a promising career to become a pastor. Upon receiving his call to the ministry, his initial intention was to pursue formal theological training. In preparation for admission, he even started to take some Greek lessons. In March of 1925, Lloyd-Jones had an interview at the denomination’s Theological College at Aberystwyth. Dr. Owen Prys, the principal, was delighted to meet him. But on his way back, the Doctor became convinced in his heart that regular theological training was not the right step for him.⁶³ In his estimation, such a program would have led to serving an established church, and maybe one with a solid financial condition, whereas his heart aimed at an evangelistic work among poor, working-class people.⁶⁴

Despite his lack of formal theological training, Lloyd-Jones’ previous medical studies, his intensive personal study and his remarkable gifts attracted after just a few years into pastoral ministry some important invitations. For example, in 1931 and 1932, he spoke to ministerial students at the Calvinistic Methodist training college at Trevecca. Then, in 1939, the leadership of Calvinistic Methodist College at Bala, North Wales, invited him to deliver a series of addresses. He presented lectures on subjects related to the pulpit and the pastoral office. “The Minister as Pastor” and “The Minister as a Man,” “The

⁶³Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), 85.

⁶⁴Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939*, 105.

Minister in Private” are just three examples.⁶⁵ At the closing of his ministry in Sandfields, some of the leaders in his denomination considered him the perfect fit for leading Balla College. They regarded such a position “suited to Dr Lloyd-Jones’ gifts, for it was at the Balla College that all students for the ministry did a year’s course in pastoralia.”⁶⁶ But things did not materialize.

When he became pastor at Westminster Chapel in London, some of the most prominent evangelical leaders discussed the possibility of uniting their efforts to start an interdenominational theological college with conservative staff. Lloyd-Jones was part of that discussion. The project materialized, and one year later, in 1942, the Doctor received the invitation to assume the principalship of London Bible College. But interdenominational complexities, which made him feel like an outsider, determined him to refuse.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, the Doctor put his mark on the start of another theological school. As in the case of the Puritans, the initiative came from a deep concern for the ministry's future. Approaching the end of his life rapidly, he became the decisive factor in the establishing of London Theological Seminary, a culmination of twenty years of thinking. The Doctor was the chairman of a sponsoring committee which met in 1976. On October 6, 1977, with four ministers' faculty, the new school opened its doors at Hendon Lane, Finchley. He gave the inaugural address and was also the chairman of the board until his death. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' burning desire was for the school not to be “a mere

⁶⁵Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939*, 287–88.

⁶⁶Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939*, 335.

⁶⁷Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: 1899-1981*, 231. See also Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 740.

modification of the present system and the present position.’ There had to be a fresh start, a new approach based upon the New Testament itself.”¹

Such a statement resumed some of the ideas Lloyd-Jones had affirmed previously in his preaching lectures from Westminster Seminary, USA (1969). Describing the person of the preacher, he expressed in categoric terms his position: “My view is that the whole question of training for the ministry needs to be reviewed urgently, and that drastic and radical changes are needed.”² The newly founded seminar from London represented the desire to do things differently in terms of preparing men for the ministry, with a view that the Church will have a future. In such a place, preachers train for the highest calling to which the Puritans and the Doctors labored all their lives: preaching the sacred Word of God.

¹Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 712.

²Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 113.

CONCLUSION

The paper aimed to prove that Martyn Lloyd-Jones followed the footsteps of Puritans, some of his greatest heroes from the history of the Church. Although unique in his personality, style, and ministry, he displayed some obvious common elements with the Puritans.

The first part provided a broad historical background of the Puritans and the Doctor. The Puritans intended to reform the Church of England of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and preaching was their most strategic tool. Their ministry of the Word generated an impressive spiritual movement in England of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. On the other side, Lloyd-Jones was an influential preacher from the twentieth century, who not only absorbed the Puritans' influence but passed on their legacy with discernment.

The second part presented three strategic means by which they displayed the priority of preaching. Firstly, the Puritans and the Doctor practice preaching biblical and often. Secondly, publishing sermons was an extension of their pulpit ministry and one that provided a lasting legacy. Another strategic investment in the ministry of preaching was preparing ministers. The Puritans considered theological schools essential for the future of their churches. Lloyd-Jones had the same view, being involved in ministers' formation and starting a theological seminary in London. These key investments extended the influence of the Word of God in England and beyond, and are legacies worth passing on to the next generations.

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08

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES AND GOD'S GLORY: ROOTS AND FRUITS

Daniel Suciu

INTRODUCTION

When J.I. Packer reflected on Martyn Lloyd-Jones's [ML-J hereafter] preaching, he declared: "I have never heard another preacher with so much of God about him."¹ The present paper argues that the doctrine of God's glory was the cornerstone of ML-J theology, life, and ministry.

The defense of the thesis comes by way of the metaphor of a tree. As such, the following pages will indicate the specific roots and fruits of God's glory manifested in Lloyd-Jones' ministry. The first chapter will deal with some brief preliminary matters, namely a brief profile of ML-J as a preacher and a succinct definition of God's glory according to his words.

The second part will indicate the two specific roots of God's glory for Lloyd-Jones. The paper will indicate that for this preacher with medical training (hereafter also the Doctor), the discovery of the doctrine of God's glory meant the discovery of Calvinism. He familiarized himself with John Calvin's theology by reading the Puritans and the help of the denomination in which he grew, the Welsh Methodism.

The last part of the paper will present three important fruits of ML-J's understanding of God's glory: his reverent approach to God, his majestic preaching of the Word, and his preparation of the heavenly glory.

¹Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 325.

1. PRELIMINARY MATTERS: PROFILE AND DEFINITION

1.1. BRIEF PROFILE OF MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was born on December 20, 1899, in South Wales. At sixteen, he was accepted at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London to study medicine. He became a junior house physician for Sir Thomas Horder, the king's physician. His conversion happened in 1923, under the preaching of dr. John Hutton. Feeling God's calling to the ministry, he left the medical field to become a minister of the gospel.²

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) pastored two completely different churches: a small church located in a poor area and a big, urban congregation. From 1926 to 1938, he ministered at Bethlehem Forward Movement Hall in Sandfields, Aberavon, Wales. His preaching had a massive impact on that church. A report indicates that "congregational strength soared tenfold from the original eighty worshippers who greeted him when he entered the Sandfields' pulpit. The membership went through the five hundred limit. On one evening, forty people were baptized."³ The Doctor was an example of seeking the glory of God by thinking big but starting small. He expected to spend the rest of his life and ministry there.⁴

Between 1938-1968, the Doctor ministered at Westminster Chapel, London, where he attracted thousands in the audience. That was the pulpit from where he delivered some famous

²Jason Meyer, *Lloyd-Jones on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 33–35.

³Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing: The Preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 53.

⁴D.A. Carson, "Seekest Thou Great Things for Thyself?," *Themelios* 41.3 (2016): 408.

preaching series, such as the Exposition on Romans and Ephesians. After his retirement, Lloyd-Jones continued to edit his sermons, preparing them for publication. His last sermon was on June 8, 1980.⁵ But his preaching exceeded the limits of his two congregations, as he traveled extensively and preached evangelistic sermons almost weekly, and also delivered various addresses to students and ministers.

1.2. BRIEF DEFINITION OF GOD'S GLORY

For Martyn Lloyd-Jones, God's glory of God means God's greatness, splendor, majesty, might of His being.⁶ He views it as the summative attribute: "everything else that is true of God – all His attributes – are summed up in His glory."⁷

In a sermon on Ephesians 1:15-17, on *The Father of Glory*, Lloyd-Jones admits the limits of human language and then helpfully states again that "glory is the summation of all the excellences and perfections and attributes of the Lord God Almighty Himself." He adds "The ultimate characteristic of God is glory. He is that in and of Himself. His essence is glorious. It is unutterable, absolute perfection."⁸

Martyn Lloyd-Jones sees the glory of God as the marvelous destiny of all Christians. When he discusses matters of eschatology, he affirms that what is important for believers to know is that they will be forever with the Lord, which means "ever enjoying the glory of God, basking in it, reflecting it,

⁵Jason Meyer, *Lloyd-Jones on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 41.

⁶Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible: God the Father, God the Son*, 68.

⁷Lloyd-Jones, *The Righteous Judgement of God: An Exposition of Romans 2:1-3:20*, 80.

⁸D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 334.

growing in it. That will be our eternal state, our final destiny, our everlasting and eternal condition.”⁹

The sons of God will share in His glory. Lloyd-Jones reflects upon the title “The Father of Glory and states: “God the Father is not only glorious, and the source of all glory, and the summation of all glory in Himself, He is also prepared to manifest and to impart that glory. He is a Father, and as a Father He gives.”¹⁰ He adds: “God does not keep His glory to Himself, if I may express it; He manifests it, He imparts it [...] This is a thought which staggers us because of its immensity, but it is true to say that, because He gives His glory to the Son, He is ready to give it also to us. We are in the Son because He is *our* Lord Jesus Christ.”¹¹ Given all these superlative descriptions, no wonder that, in Lloyd-Jones’ view, the neglect of a glorious perspective on God accounts for many of the Christians’ problems.¹²

2. THE ROOTS OF ML-J’S UNDERSTANDING OF GOD’S GLORY

Lloyd-Jones discovered the doctrine of God’s glory when he discovered Calvinism. The Doctor pleaded with those from James Clark and Co. to republish Calvin’s fundamental volume, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The affirmative answer

⁹Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible: The Church and the Last Things*, 248.

¹⁰Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1*, 335.

¹¹Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1*, 336–37.

¹²D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible: God the Father, God the Son* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 94.

came in 1949, and the publisher used his copy of Henry Beveridge’s translation for photo printing.¹³ Why did he value Calvin? The answer is that he delighted in the cornerstone of the great reformer’s theology: “For [Calvin] the great central and all-important truth was the sovereignty of God and God’s glory.”¹⁴ His theology impacted his ministry of the Word. John Calvin’s preaching proved that pastoral duties can drive horizontally one’s preaching. However, the most important dimension is the vertical standpoint, where the glory of God is the most important motivation for proclamation.¹⁵

In short, for ML-J, true Calvinists are “men dominated by a sense of the glory of God, and who are concerned about His praise.”¹⁶ He says the same thing in a more extensive manner when he links revival with Calvinism. He explains why an authentic Calvinist seeks spiritual awakening: “Because he is concerned about the glory of God. This is the first thing with him. Not so much that the world is as it is, but that the world is behaving like this, and that God is there. It is God’s world, and they are under God. The glory of God! This is the great thing which dominates all the thinking of the Calvinist.” Then concludes: “So he is waiting, and longing, and pleading with God to ‘show’ this glory, to show this power, to arise and to scatter His enemies, and to make them like the dust, and to show

¹³Iain H. Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: 1899-1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2013), 297.

¹⁴Iain H. Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: 1899-1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2013), 298.

¹⁵Carl A. Hargrove, “Implication and Application in Exposition, Part 3: Four Historical Examples of Application—John Calvin, William Perkins, Charles Simeon, D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 31.1 (2020): 27.

¹⁶D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 213.

the might of His almighty arm. This is Calvinism. They want this. They are zealous, and they are jealous, for His name.”¹⁷

ML-J identified with such a profile. In the evaluation of his biographer, he was “a Calvinist with every fiber of his being” in the sense that he had a God-centered theology and recognized God as the head of all things.¹⁸ However, ML-J discovered Calvinism by drinking from two deep wells. One was the Puritans, and the other was Welsh Methodism.

2.1. THE INFLUENCE OF THE PURITANS

Puritanism as a movement started during the reign of Elisabeth I. However, its historical roots are found “in continental Reformed theology, in a native dissenting tradition stretching back to John Wycliffe and the Lollards, but especially English reformers.”¹⁹ One of the proofs of the Puritans’ adherence to the Reformers is the making of the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1646, along with other documents, such as the Westminster Catechism. One historian described the resulting Confession as a “creed in a systematic exposition of orthodox Calvinism, in scholastic formulation.”²⁰ Following the Reformers’ theology, the Catechism evidences that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.²¹

Such a goal arranged the priorities of the Puritans’ lives. “Putting God first and valuing everything else in relation to him

¹⁷Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, 212.

¹⁸Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 764.

¹⁹M.A. Noll, “Puritanism” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1984), 898.

²⁰Dirk Jella, “Westminster Confession” in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, J.D. Douglas, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 1040.

²¹*Westminster Larger Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1996).

was a recurrent Puritan theme.”²² They saw God as “the great and ultimate object of religion,” and the purpose of each family was to glorify God.²³ Their preaching included many applications (or uses) to direct listeners to live for the glory of God and the good of the Christian and secular community.²⁴

When Lloyd-Jones started his ministry at Westminster Chapel, the religious landscape was devoid of Puritan influences. According to John Dogget, “in 1938 Dr Lloyd-Jones came to a city and to a country in which the Reformed Faith of Calvin and the Puritans, of Whitefield and Spurgeon, was almost extinct.”²⁵ But he put on the Puritans’ mantle, and “although technically not a Puritan in the historical sense of the term,”²⁶ the Doctor carried it almost alone during the twentieth century.²⁷ Reading a biography of Richard Baxter in 1925 impacted his whole life and ministry:

From that time, a true and living interest in the Puritans and their works has gripped me, and I am free to confess that my whole ministry has been governed by this. I am interested in Puritanism because it seems to me to be one of the most useful things any preacher can do. Nothing so encourages a true ministry of the

²²Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 223.

²³Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 224, 230.

²⁴Hargrove, “Implication and Application in Exposition, Part 3: Four Historical Examples of Application—John Calvin, William Perkins, Charles Simeon, D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones,” 41.

²⁵Quoted in Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1990), 776.

²⁶Joel R. Beeke and Nicholas J. Thompson, *To God's Glory: Lessons on Puritanism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 122.

²⁷James I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 281.

Word because these men were such great exemplars in that respect.²⁸

But the road was only at the beginning. After Baxter, he purchased other second-hand Puritan volumes. Later in life, he encouraged preachers to read the Puritans, as they are useful in understanding and enjoying the Scriptures and preparing the pulpit.²⁹

Moreover, he considered the Puritans invaluable influences not only for the ministers of the Word but also for the future of Christ's Church in England. In his address from 1955 at *The Evangelical Library*, ML-J emphasized the strategic role of Puritan literature: "It is of supreme importance for the future of the Christian faith in this country that we should experience a revival of interest in the literature of the great Puritans of the seventeenth century."³⁰

However, some ministers of his times developed an unhealthy admiration for the Puritans: "he lamented that some men were emptying the churches because of an attempt slavishly to copy the Puritans. 'A preacher should be his own man,' was advice which Lloyd-Jones frequently gave."³¹ Some who tried at times to imitate the Puritans were the leaders of Welsh Methodism, his denomination. However, one of their great merits was strengthening the Doctor in the doctrine of God's glory.

²⁸Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1996), 237-8.

²⁹Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 173-4.

³⁰Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 352

³¹Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing*, 36.

2.2. THE INFLUENCE OF WELSH METHODISM

Methodism started in Wales in 1735, with the conversion of Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland, who later became, along with George Whitefield, the main leaders. The Wesley brothers were their counterparts in the English Methodism. For a while, the two movements were one. After their split, some formed the Calvinistic Methodism, others Arminian Methodism. In Wales, all were Calvinist, whereas, in England, not all adhered to this theological camp.³²

The three main leaders of Welsh Methodism became Calvinists by studying the writings of the Puritans.³³ They fed on the Puritans' writings and placed them next to the Bible. The Calvinistic Methodists not only quoted heavily from the Puritans but at times even preached their sermons.³⁴ However, they went beyond a mere imitation of the Puritans and emphasized feelings, revivals, and the assurance of salvation.³⁵

In an authentic Calvinist vein, the Calvinist Methodists of Wales and England had a God-centered theology. William Williams was the theological mind of the movement. As an outstanding poet, he wrote many hymns by which he taught others the great truths of the gospel. As the people sang his hymns, they became "familiar with the great expressions of the New Testament doctrines of salvation and the glory of God."³⁶ Of Howell Harris, his first biographers affirm that often he repeated full of joy, "Glory be to God. Death hath no sting." He also expressed many times the beauty of his Saviour's glory and majesty.³⁷

³²Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, 194-95.

³³Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, 202.

³⁴Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, 205, 237.

³⁵Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, 205.

³⁶Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, 192, 203.

³⁷Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, 300-1.

The famous evangelist George Whitefield was also a strong defender of Calvinism. Historians consider him the champion of Calvinism in England of his times, and especially of the doctrine of predestination. Given his transatlantic ministries, Whitefield's mantle fell upon Howell Harris. In a letter sent on 16 July 1740 to John Wesley, Harris rebuked him for wanting to remove some Calvinists from their fellowship, arguing that if that were the case, then he would have to exclude Whitefield and himself as well.³⁸

ML-J grew up in the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church. The familiarity of its leaders with the Puritans aroused his interest in the Puritans.³⁹ In his early teens (1913), he read a booklet that described the ministry of Howell Harris. The acquaintance with Calvinism and with revivals through its pages planted the seeds of the doctrine of God's glory in his mind.⁴⁰ This first exposure to the history of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism prepared his mind for accepting Calvinism, and especially predestination, four years later at the age of seventeen. That was the moment when he started to view everything as being under the rule of God's eternal throne.⁴¹

The result was that the Calvinistic Methodist tradition became for ML-J a framework for his thinking.⁴² By his admission, two principles governed his decision-making process: "First, my understanding of Scripture and, second, my reading of the

³⁸Richard W. Evans, "The Relations of George Whitefield and Howell Harris, Fathers of Calvinistic Methodism," *Church History* 30.2 (1961): 181.

³⁹Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, 237.

⁴⁰Eryl D. Davies, "Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: An Introduction," *Themelios* 25.1 (1999): 41.

⁴¹Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), 60.

⁴²Ian Randall, "Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Methodist Spirituality," *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 5 (2013): 100.

Calvinistic Methodist revival of the eighteenth-century."⁴³ His further clarifications go beyond having a Calvinistic grid. As he details, he refers as well to the "high spirituality and the deep godliness of the Methodist Fathers."⁴⁴ Se refers to more than Calvinism, but not less than that.

The Calvinist Methodists also influenced him in matters relating to preaching. He admired in leaders like Whitefield and Harris the triumph of submission to God over egotism, which ruins someone's life. "Given the opposition between the sinful nature of man and the glory of God it was not surprising that he should find pulpiterism obnoxious because, in effect, it moved the focus of attention away from the message to the preacher and this was the reason for so few autobiographical comments in Lloyd Jones's preaching."⁴⁵ In light of all these elements, one will understand why ML-J explained at a conference that he was a Welsh Calvinistic Methodist and was there as the representative of George Whitefield.⁴⁶ Such deep roots produced some wonderful fruits. Three of them are in order.

3. THE FRUITS OF ML-J'S UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S GLORY

For Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the doctrine of the glory of God was not purely a matter of abstract reasoning. This scriptural teaching influenced his attitude toward God, his manner of preaching, the philosophy of his overall ministry, and,

⁴³Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939*, 195.

⁴⁴Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939*, 195.

⁴⁵John Frederick Brencher, "David Martyn Lloyd-Jones 1899-1981 and Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism" (PhD Diss., Department of History, University of Sheffield, 1977), 214-15,

<https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/3450/1/268279.pdf>.

⁴⁶Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 60.

unsurprisingly, how he prepared for passing through death to eternal glory.

3.1. A REVERENT APPROACH

For ML-J, humans must approach the God of glory with fear and trembling, giving Him the proper respect. When he starts to present the splendor of God in one of his sermons, he encourages his hearers to adopt Moses's reverent attitude from the burning bush.⁴⁷ Later, in the same exposition, he adds: "Let us never again attempt prayer without reminding ourselves that we are going to speak to 'the Father of glory.' We need not be terrified; we must go with reverence and godly fear because of His glorious character."⁴⁸

His utter deferential approach to God made him take a decision that some found odd. Dr. C. E. M. Joad, a well-known atheist from England, invited him to a public debate at the University of Oxford on the existence of God. Lloyd-Jones explained later his reason for refusal.

To discuss the being of God in a casual manner, lounging in an armchair, smoking a pipe or a cigarette or a cigar, is to me something that we should never allow, because God, as I say, is not a kind of philosophic X or a concept. We believe in the almighty, the glorious, the living God; and whatever may be true of others we must never put ourselves, or allow ourselves to be put, into a position in which we are debating about God as if He were but a philosophical proposition. To me this is an overriding

⁴⁷Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1*, 336–37.

⁴⁸Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1*, 336–37.

consideration which is enough in and of itself.⁴⁹

For the Doctor, God is glorious and must not become a trivial matter of discussion for people. He deserves the uttermost respect. Lloyd-Jones's public prayers from Westminster Chapel impressed many with their majestic perspective. Upon hearing one of them, Rev. Ron Clark describes what it was like to hear the London minister entering God's presence:

Dr. Lloyd-Jones' voice, with its slight Welsh lilt, captivated me. I had heard many pray before, but none like this! This man started with adoring his God. And the words that were uttered portrayed such a great and majestic God that I felt as if I did not know the Lord. Then he moved on to a confession which seemed to tear away every covering from our hearts, until all was laid bare before the eyes of the Holy One. Finally he pleaded for mercy and blessing through the merit of the Son of the holy Father. How vital the person and work of the Son appeared. How marvelous the merit of the uplifted one! When the prayer ended, to my amazement I realized that he had been praying for nearly twenty minutes yet it was not a second too long. This minister had led me into the throne room of heaven!⁵⁰

Clark noticed that the unmatched character of that prayer did not consist of new techniques. Adoring, confession, pleading, and exalting Christ are all part of many prayers that the Christian utter. The fresh perspective was the minister's glorious perspective. He displayed the aroma of a "great and majestic God," of the "Holy One" and "Holy Father." But the last remark sums up the entire attitude: "led me into the throne room of heaven." The vision of God in His splendor produces a reverent

⁴⁹D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2013), 45.

⁵⁰Eric Fife, "D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Twentieth-Century Puritan," *Eternity* (1981): 29.

approach to Him, but also in the manner one speaks on God's behalf.

3.2. A MAJESTIC PREACHING

The perspective of God's glory will invariably affect the way a preacher proclaims the Word of God. In Lloyd-Jones's words, "if you contemplate these glorious truths that are committed to our charge as preachers without being moved by them there is something defective in your spiritual eyesight."⁵¹ In one of the seasons of his life, ML-J experienced sickness and physical weakness. He had to occupy the pew instead of the pulpit. Upon listening to various ministers, he expressed what he longed for the most in that period, namely to convey the glory of God. In his view, the chief end of preaching is "to give men and women a sense of God and His presence":

I can forgive a man for a bad sermon, I can forgive the preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God, if he gives me something for my soul, if he gives me the sense that, though he is inadequate himself, he is handling something which is very great and very glorious, if he gives me some dim glimpse of the majesty and the glory of God, the love of Christ my Saviour, and the magnificence of the Gospel. If he does that I am his debtor, and I am profoundly grateful to him.⁵²

However, one must not think that Lloyd-Jones spoke out of a vulnerable condition of his body specific to sick people. Rather, that period of infirmity revealed his most fundamental convictions. He added that, to him, preaching is the most amazing and thrilling activity for a man "because of all that it

⁵¹Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 93.

⁵²Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 96–97.

holds for us in the present, and because of the glorious endless possibilities in an eternal future."⁵³

The glory of God as his motivation was evident also at the level of specific sermons and sermon series. For example, when he preached a series on *Revival*, he urged believers to pray, look for, and long for a spiritual awakening of the Church. He specifies that the main reason is the glory of God: "the first reason for this miraculous act is that all these people and nations 'might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty.' God is vindicating himself; he is asserting his own glory and his own power."⁵⁴ God's works exalt God and His majesty. The Doctor had the same motivation when he delivered his series on *Spiritual Depression*. God's glory will diminish through the life of a depressed Christian, who is "a contradiction in terms, and [...] a very poor recommendation for the gospel."⁵⁵ He adds: "It behooves us, [...] for the sake of the Kingdom of God and the glory of the Christ in Whom we believe, to represent Him and His cause, His message and His power [so that others], far from being antagonized, will be drawn and attracted as they observe us."⁵⁶ God's glory was more important to ML-J than even the good state of the believers.

A view of the majestic God gave Lloyd-Jones a grandiose philosophy and motivation for preaching. Many confirmed the impact of his proclamation of the gospel upon hearing him. Rev. Ron Clark offers one such testimony:

⁵³Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 96–97.

⁵⁴Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christ-Centered Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Classic Sermons For The Church Today*, ed. Elizabeth & Christopher Catherwood (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014), https://www.scribd.com/read/353181202/The-Christ-Centred-Preaching-of-Martyn-Lloyd-Jones#b_search-menu_68904.

⁵⁵Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*, 6.

⁵⁶Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*, 7.

Through this ministry was coming an awesome awareness of the eternal dimension! Men was seen to be a rebel and vile sinner. And oh how great and majestic was the Son of God! Indeed He was present, and we were 'undone!' Eternity was real [...] Before the sermon concluded the minister paused, and did what I later discerned was a feature of this ministry. He brought in a note which, in our present feelings, we scarcely expected. Warmly, passionately, movingly, he urged every listener to 'Go to the Lamb before He comes to you in glory. Confess to Him your sins [...] Ask Him to have mercy upon you, to save you, and He will!'⁵⁷

Clark mentions the sense of eternity, of majesty, of glory, all of which were peculiar of the Doctor's ministry. Eric Alexander had a similar experience:

There is little doubt that Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones was the greatest preacher the English speaking world has seen in the twentieth century. Those of us who have had the privilege of hearing him will not easily forget the sense of awe which came upon one's soul as he was gripped by the glory of the gospel, and God spoke with such power through him. Yet it was not the man who lingered in the mind, nor was the lasting impression one of human gifts or intellectual ability, or personal magnetism. Rather, it was the power of truth, the greatness of God, the poverty of man, and the glorious relevance and authority of Holy Scripture which left an indelible mark on his hearers.⁵⁸

Another writer, Charles Turner Packer, describes the powerful effect of ML-J proclamation: "There was in the Doctor's

⁵⁷Fife, "D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Twentieth-Century Puritan," 29–30.

⁵⁸Eric J. Alexander, introduction, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Cross: God's Way of Salvation*, ed. Christopher Catherwood (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1986), <https://www.scribd.com/read/266030965/The-Cross-God-s-Way-of-Salvation>.

preaching thunder and lightning that no tape or transcription ever did or could capture." He indicates that "through the thunder and lightning, I felt and saw as never before the glory of Christ and of His gospel as modern man's only lifeline and learned by experience why historic Protestantism looks on preaching as the supreme means of grace and of communion with God."⁵⁹

J. I. Packer, who attended many Sunday evenings at Westminster Chapel, depicts the force of Lloyd-Jones' preaching:

The sermon (as we say nowadays) blew me away... He worked up to a dramatic growling shout about God's sovereign grace a few minutes before the end; then from that he worked down to businesslike persuasions calling on needy souls to come to Christ... I went out full of awe and joy, with a more vivid sense of the greatness of God in my heart than I had known before... The thunder and lightning; the gestures – kneading fits representing perplexed philosophers, the vibrating arm with open hand marking God's descent in grace, the right-angled turns to point to heaven and hell (one side of the church for each, and always the same side): and the electric impact of those trombone-sforzando shouts about God...⁶⁰

All those that heard Lloyd-Jones preaching speak with one voice that the majesty and glory of God transpired through his sermons. All seem to agree that "the thrust of Lloyd-Jones' sermons is always to show man small and God great."⁶¹ When an observer compared the Doctor's evangelistic sermons from

⁵⁹Steve J. Lawson, "Striking Similarities Between Two Extraordinary Expositors," *MSJ*, 22, 1 (Spring 2011): 62–63.

⁶⁰Quoted in Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing: The Preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 55.

⁶¹Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 325.

Sunday nights with other preachers popular in London, he concluded: "Soper preaches love, Weatherhead preaches Jesus, and Lloyd-Jones preaches God."⁶² Focusing on the future display of God's glory impacts the present proclamation of God.

3.3. A HEAVENLY PREPARATION

For Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the last major result of the vision of God's glory is serious preparation for the heavenly place. For him, the Christian is certain and knows beyond a doubt what his destiny will be. As such, he does not strive to conform to a standard, rather a matter of getting ready for his destination. As a child of God, his destiny is heaven and glory, and nothing can prevent that plan from realization. The presence of the Holy Spirit in him casts out the spirit of bondage and fear and is the guarantee of glory.⁶³

The Doctors' biographer remarks that, toward the end of his life, ML-J understood the importance of preparing for death. In that last period of his life, he believed that it was his most important work as a Christian.⁶⁴ When he visited Lloyd-Jones on March 3, 1980, he discovered a man not preoccupied with the past, nor with a transatlantic treatment and the hope of recovery. Rather, the focus was on the future glory in heaven and the adequate preparation for death. What ML-J prayed when they parted their ways: "he asked more of what he already knew, 'that we might rejoice in hope of the glory of God.'⁶⁵

One of the books he read in the last period of his life was John Owen's *The Glory of Christ*.⁶⁶ This Puritan theologian states that

Christians must be ready to accept the time God sets for someone's death. They must yield to the will of God and understand that times are at God's sovereign disposal. In addition, Christians must embrace the manner God decides for someone's death. Whether it will be prolonged illness, unbearable pain, or a form of violence, the wise man will always be ready for any experience God sends to end one's journey on the earth. Then Owen ends by saying: "Is not his will infinitely holy, wise, just and good in all things? Does he not know what is best for us and what will bring most glory to himself? [...] None of these can we do, unless we now believe in and enjoy the excellent glory of Christ."⁶⁷ ML-J understood that gazing upon the glory of God will prepare a Christian for entering the splendor of the Triune God.

John Owen was not a singular voice but only a stellar representative. According to J.I. Packer, an expert in Puritan theology, they taught many "to see and feel the transitoriness of this life, to think of it, with all its richness, as essentially the gymnasium and dressing-room where we are prepared for heaven, and to regard readiness to die as the first step in learning to live."⁶⁸ Packer uses John Bunyan's language from *The Pilgrim's Progress* when he affirms that what kept the Puritans on the right path was keeping their eyes on heaven and remembering that they were pilgrims that traveled toward their home, the Celestial City. He adds that "reckoning with death brought appreciation of each day's continued life, and the knowledge that God would eventually decide, without consulting them, when their work on earth was done brought energy for the work itself while they were still being given time

⁶²Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 324.

⁶³Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*, 151-2.

⁶⁴Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 730.

⁶⁵Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 732.

⁶⁶Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 741.

⁶⁷John Owen, *The Glory of Christ* (London: Grace Publications Trust, 1987), 5-6.

⁶⁸James I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 13.

to get on with it.”⁶⁹ Indeed, for the Puritans and ML-J, dying well is a crown for a godly life. This truth explains why the Doctor considered that the final work of his ministry was making a good end.⁷⁰

In his last few days on the earth, when his speech was gone, Martyn Lloyd-Jones pointed to his daughter a certain passage from the Scripture. He wanted to hear once again 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. There Paul speaks about an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Being increasingly weaker in his body, he wrote on a scrap of paper to his wife, Bethan, and the family, two days before his passing into glory: “Do not pray for healing. Do not hold me back from the glory.”⁷¹ The vision of God’s glory motivated him to the very end.

CONCLUSION

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was an influential preacher, who understood the glory of God as the summative attribute of God and as the destiny of God’s people. As a result, God’s glory became the driving force of his theology and preaching. The present paper defended this thesis by using the analogy of a tree. As such, the first section detailed the roots of ML-J’s understanding of God’s glory. Lloyd-Jones discovered the glory of God by discovering Calvinism in his youth through two influences: the Puritan Movement and the Welsh Methodism, the denomination in which he grew. The Puritans emphasized that the chief end of man is to glorify God, and they sought practical ways to display it in their ordinary lives. Lloyd-Jones became a modern (but discerning) Puritan and this meant also emphasizing the doctrine of the glory of God.

The other major influence was of Welsh Methodism, the denomination in which the Doctor grew. Their theologians (Willaim Williams) wrote poems and songs about the glory of God, and their preachers (George Whitefield) proclaimed mightily the centrality of God.

The fruits of ML-J’s understanding of God’s glory represent the last section. One implication for the Doctor was a reverent approach to such a glorious God. He modeled in his public prayers and his attitude toward God the uttermost respect. Another result of his theology of God’s glory was his majestic preaching. The chief end of preaching is to communicate to people a sense of God and his glory. The testimonies of those that heard him preach attest to this characteristic. The last fruit was his preparation for heaven. Lloyd-Jones based his theology on God’s glory and lived for it.

⁶⁹Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, 14.

⁷⁰James I. Packer, “A Kind of Puritan,” in *Chosen by God*, ed. Christopher Catherwood (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1986), 55.

⁷¹Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, 747.

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09

**CURRENT CHALLENGES IN
PREACHING CHALLENGING THE
INTERPRETATION OF CULTURE
AND THE PRESENTATION OF A
CHRISTIAN-FREE CHRISTIANITY**

Dragota Pantea Petru

CULTURE INTERPRETATION

DIAGNOSTIC

The problem of interpreting culture has several valences, being best observed in the extremes with pendulum play from both poles of the problem. A manifestation of the first form of extremism is the preaching of the biblical text without the relevant addressing of cultural issues. Preaching must be the result of interpreting the biblical text so that the biblical message addresses current issues without distorting the literary meaning of the text.

The other extreme is the transformation of preaching into news bulletins, or speeches centered on the man of today's culture. In this case, the biblical message is either distorted to give the impression that it allows for certain interpretations that support different ideologies; either it is neglected and ignored to such an extent that it has no relevance and centrality to practice and worship. The latter becoming completely defined expressions of culture and the trend imposed by it.

DESCRIPTION

In the first instance, preaching became a mere repetition of the biblical text, or a preaching without relevant applications and criticism. This betrays the lack of correct interpretation of the biblical text, and the lack of address to culture. Preaching, in this case may indicate a closure to the outside world, which does not encourage the call of outsiders to repentance, but rather tends to condemn them with divine authority. This type of preaching can be characteristic of ultra-dogmatic conservatives, who, out of excessive zeal in order not to get dirty with worldly opportunities, end up in an extremely dangerous situation. Given

the importance of preaching in the development of the church, these churches tend to fall into a state of self-righteousness. This condition is characterized by spiritual apathy and inactivity, especially with regard to evangelism and the call of people to repentance.

As I have said, a form of sermon specific to this state is the mere repetition of the text, sermons are devoid of any textual or spiritual depth. They argue that the preaching work should be well-founded only in the biblical text, which is why it can be called repeated preaching. Even if the preacher shows a good knowledge of the biblical text, the sermon remains in this stage, never reaching the present times. The small references to the current culture are rather executive judgments, without presenting any relevant teaching or application.

The second extreme is the exact opposite of the first one. If in the first case the preaching remained closed in the biblical text, in this case the sermon can be called a discourse based on current ethics and culture; or a newsletter, in which the preacher presents by reading a biblical text the political, technological, economic, religious, cultural, etc. news of the globalized contemporary world. In the preaching of the first case, the meaning of the text is recreated by the interpreter in order to be relevant and to correspond to secular thinking and ideologies.

Thus, preachers began to actively support and promote various racial, gender, or other cultural, ethical, and political ideologies just to be relevant. Their argument is that Christian preaching must meet the needs of culture. However, if Christianity responds to cultural needs with the specific treatment of culture, but not through the treatment imposed by the Word, what is the point of Christianity, it has lost all its strength and meaning. That is why the treatment of cultural needs must be in line with Bible truth.

In the second situation, the preaching is characterized by an excessive presentation of the news from different public domain news. The tangent with the biblical text is very small or often non-existent. Even if it is, most of the times it is so evasive regarding the real problems of the men and the rigor of the scriptural text. The preacher is rather eager to expose his times and personal interpretation of them; often mocking secular personalities or harshly criticizing certain measures in the secular world.

SOLUTIONS

In this situation, as in many others, a balance must be found. A quote from Karl Barth highlights and correctly exposes this need for balance in preaching: "Take your Bible and take your newspaper and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible."¹ In order not to fall into the first extreme, there must be a culture-relevant address in preaching; but at the same time, in order not to reach the other extreme, the cultural trend needs to be interpreted and presented from the perspective of Scripture.

Preaching must exalt and present Christ as presented in the Holy Scriptures; so much so that the message penetrates the layers and cultural distances of the audience from the Word and the preacher, so that the truth about Jesus Christ may be heard and understood by the audience.

¹ <https://christianchronicle.org/bible-in-one-hand-newspaper-in-the-other/>, 23 June 2021.

THE PREACHING OF AN ABSTRACT OR CHRIST-FREE CHRISTIANITY

DIAGNOSTIC

This problem has to do with preaching a Christianity from which Christ has either been marginalized or excluded. In this case, the preaching is oriented towards contemporary morality and ethics, the emphasis being on the fulfillment of man.

This form of preaching presents Christ as a kind of support for human desire. Someone who helps you with the bad things, because the man is actually good.

DESCRIPTION

Preaching in such situations emphasizes only certain attributes of God and man. It can be considered and likened to the preaching of the gospel movement of prosperity or social.

Preaching is centered on love, kindness, and compassion; but the problem is that all this is centered and sought in the inner strength and will of man, God being excluded. God may be a model, but a model reshaped by the naive aspirations of men who do not have the courage to face the reality that man is evil and sinful; and God being just and holy condemns sin. Those who preach in this way ignore the reality of God's Word, and the reality of man's fallen nature. They look at man with optimism, believing that his nature is good. Since man is good, he needs only love and support to straighten out, and to change his way of life; because man gets bad because of the negative influences in his life, in essence he is not bad, they consider.

The biggest problem with such conceptions is that preaching always arises from the fusion of two conceptual hemispheres: the

subjective conceptions of the preacher and the conceptions of the religious group to which he adheres by partial or total identification. Even if it is a total identification, the personality of the preacher offers a certain degree of partiality or subjectivity. Thus, one of the problems is that the preaching and the vital force of living according to the Christian norms must never be extracted only from the attributes of God, but from the very Person of God, more precisely from the Lord Jesus Himself. This aspect is relevant because of the tendency to overemphasize only some of God's attributes (His love, His goodness, His mercy), but not His own Person as a whole or Jesus Christ. Some Christians emphasize only the love and goodness of God, neglecting and ignoring the rest of God's attributes and the biblical teaching of the Holy Trinity, believing that God's revelation in the Old Testament is not closely related to the revelation of the New Testament. Thus, the first problem of these preachers is that they present a fragmented conception of God, emphasizing only what they like about the Person and character of God. The second problem is that a Christless Christianity of the Bible is a dead and abstract Christianity, no matter how hard they try to preach love and kindness. In fact, these concepts (love and kindness) are abstract to man. If we do not look to Christ and His love, we have no way of learning what true love is. The apostle John says that God is love, not love is God. An aspect that shows another problem of these preachers, the love separated from God leads to death and disappointment. It leads to death because it does not save, and it produces disappointment because in the end the man who does not base his life on Jesus Christ will be struck by the emptiness and degradation of human nature and will suffer. He will suffer because these people do not look at Christ and His love but look at and extract the meaning of life from themselves or from the people around them and from the work they do for them. This does not mean that a Christian who fully trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ does not suffer on this earth, on the contrary he may

suffer; but in his suffering he looks to Christ and to the reward of His full presence from eternity and rejoices even in great sufferings. Therefore, the Christless preaching of the Bible gives no human meaning or power, and there is no salvation.

SOLUTIONS

Christianity must preach Christ as He is, not just His love, or certain characteristics of Him to the detriment of others. The Bible says that God is just and holy, He condemns sin, and He cannot see sin. That is why there is salvation only in the sacrifice of Christ; for no one, no matter how much love he manifests, can rise to the height of His holiness. Jesus Christ must be treated as a person. Nothing gives man more motive and willpower than the love he feels for another person, even from a human point of view this is true. People around us give meaning to our lives. Knowing this and knowing that God first loved us, we too must love Him. God is closest to us, He has given His only begotten Son for us. Therefore, God is the only one who does not disappoint and gives life. Christian preaching must present Jesus Christ as a Person who offers salvation and life; strength and will by the Holy Spirit to live on this earth in His love. He does not disappoint He is perfect, all His ways and words are pure and good for man to find instruction and encouragement in his walk on this earth.

The Word of God presents the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the personalities of the three Persons, and the character of God. Christian preaching must preach these aspects as presented by the Word. Balance is again a solution in this situation to avoid exaggeration or extremes.

10

MINISTERING TO PEOPLE IN CRISES DUE TO INCURABLE ILLNESSES

Adrian Giorgiov

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to present two main categories of incurable illnesses and ways in which the Christian church, its ministers, but also the members of the church can help and serve those affected by these illnesses.

This study groups incurable illnesses into two categories: handicaps and terminal illnesses. Both may have a great impact on people and present a real crisis or a series of crises. The present study is dealing not only with crises experienced by people with incurable illnesses; in many cases these crises are experienced by family members in a way or another, and in some parts the emphasis will be on these people's crises.

A few remarks at the beginning of the study are due. There is a wide variety of incurable illnesses. Not all of them are mentioned in the present study. The focus will be on some specific illnesses that are well-known for creating crises. Many other illnesses that are not mentioned create similar crises and require similar crisis intervention.

The study will not concentrate on related subjects, like visiting the physically ill or hospital emergencies, although some of these will be the platform of a crisis intervention.

The first part will have the emphasis on children with severe handicaps. In some way their situation is more complex than the situation of handicapped adults, because it affects parents in specific ways. Many reactions and crises experienced by handicapped adults are very similar to those of the parents of handicapped children.

The second part will have an emphasis on adults with terminal illnesses (especially cancer) and their crises. There are also children who suffer from terminal diseases. However, most of the discussed cases of cancer are experienced by adults.

Abstract: Handicaps and terminal illnesses are part of the earthly human condition, Christians included. Understanding the people who experience such crises and ministering to them is an important part of the mandate of the church (both of its pastors and members).

The purpose of this study is to present two main categories of incurable illnesses: severe handicap and terminal illnesses and bring to attention ways in which the Christian church, its ministers, but also the members of the church can help and serve those affected by these illnesses.

There are more than 100 types of cancer.¹ They are considered terminal – but, if treated, especially at an early stage, several of them have a very good survival rate.²

The third part gives general guidelines concerning crisis intervention and briefly touches upon dual disorders and AIDS. The study does not discuss the issue of AIDS in detail, although it can be a terminal condition. This would require another extensive paper. Only a very short passage will give some directions regarding this subject. There are many similarities with other terminal cases of illness, and the limitations of this work do not allow to concentrate on the specific characteristics presented by AIDS.

It is important to emphasize that not only pastors are called to minister to people in crises. Each member of the church is called to a life of service. “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1Peter 4:10); “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

In an article on developing church-based counselling teams, Potgieter concludes: “Pastoral care as an expression of love for a neighbor is not reserved only for the ordained, but it is the duty of all who have been transformed by God’s redemptive love. Although there may be other distinctions between clergy and laity, in this respect we are all ‘professionals’ in Christ.”³

¹ <https://www.cancer.gov/types>. 7.04.2022.

² <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/survival/common-cancers-compared>. 7.04.2022.

³ Stella D. Potgieter, “Communities: Development of church-based counselling teams”, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71(2) (2015), Art. #2050, 8 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i2.2050>. 7.04.2022.

SEVERE HANDICAPS

Definition. The term *severely handicapped* describes a wide range of people including those who are severely emotionally disturbed, developmentally disabled, impaired, and severely or profoundly retarded.¹

Disasters are a main cause of severe handicaps. It is important to take into consideration the fact that there is a great number of people, including many children, who remain handicapped or are born ill because of war or a nuclear attack. Radiation is a problem which is faced by many children and adults in various parts of the world. Those who will work in parts of the world where such problems are a real possibility should be prepared to help in times of crisis, when it comes out that a malady is due to radiation.²

Another group of severely handicapped people is the *mentally retarded*. Mental retardation is a condition that is observed already in childhood. The severely retarded children function at a minimal level, below that required of a full participating member of society. They might learn certain things, but they cannot organize their experiences. Some retarded children are below the range of trainable. They are profoundly retarded, requiring complete custody.

Hans Falch discusses that it is a mistake to assume that the retarded child has only deficits, whereas he or she is also a powerful force in the family unit. Falch lists several things to be considered:

- The retarded child gets more attention than anyone else.
- His or her needs tend to be met prior to everyone else's.
- It is the person who is talked about often, and about whose condition people often whisper.

¹Jan Blacher, “A Dynamic Perspective on the Impact of a Severely Handicapped Child on the Family” In *Severely Handicapped Young Children and Their Families*, ed. Jan Blacher. (Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1984) 5.

² The author spent most of his life in Romania where he could learn about many cases of radiation from the Chernobyl atomic explosion of 1986.

- The family members feel deprived concerning that child and they have no ability to say it aloud.
- It is the person whose medical bills are high.
- It is the person whose future is very much in doubt. Siblings may regard him or her as a burden they may need to bear after the parents are gone.

The mother may feel guilty about the child, and sometimes the husband accuses her of giving birth to such a child. It is possible that the father had dreams about a successor son. The mother dreamed of some far distant wedding day in white bridal dress.³

STAGES EXPERIENCED BY PARENTS OF HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

Parents have made plans concerning the future of the child during the nine months before birth. If the child is retarded, change of plans must be made. Charles Kemp gives a summary of the stages parents go through:⁴

Recognition is the first stage. The retardation may become evident at birth or much later. At discovery most parents are deeply concerned about possible causes of mental defect in their child. Some of the families put the blame on something specific, a definite illness in pregnancy, birth trauma, or postnatal accident.⁵ Other parents accept the explanation that, "Something went wrong in the making."

³Hans S. Falch, "Mental Retardation: A Family Crisis- The Role and Function of Social Worker," *McCormick Quarterly Supplement* (March 1966): 30.

⁴Charles F. Kemp, "The Local Church and the Minister Seving the Mentally Retarded and Their Families," *McCormick Quarterly Supplement* (March 1966): 54-55.

⁵John N. Carver and Nellie Enders Carver, *The Family of the Retarded Child*, Segregated Settings and the Problem of Change Series, ed. Blatt, Burton, Seymour B. Sarason and Harriett D. Blank (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1972), 41.

As a second stage, after the definite diagnosis there comes a period of *shock*, disbelief, and confusion. The pastor has a task of supporting the parents, giving them opportunities to express feelings, fears, and questions.

Denial is the third stage, which is simply the refusal to accept the truth. Parents may try to put pressure on a counselor or minister, or even a doctor to say that really the child is quite without problems or is "growing out of them." However, it is a mistake to assume that this is what parents wish to hear all the time.

The fourth stage contains *conflicting emotions and grief*. Some of these emotions are interrelated: disappointment, embarrassment, resentment, hostility, unconscious rejection of the child, shame, guilt, confusion, anxiety, self-pity, and fear of a lifetime of having to give complete care. Some parents may be angry towards the medical profession. A variety of questions are raised:

- *Why* did this happen?
- What have I done wrong?
- Why did it happen to *me*?
- Is it the result of heredity?
- Is there any hope?
- What would I say to people? What would people think? Sometimes friends and relatives who do not know about the problem ask uncomfortable questions, "Why doesn't he sit up? When is he going to sit up?"
- How could I go on living?
- Why does this happen to the innocent child?
- What is God's purpose in allowing the birth of a retarded child?
- I prayed as sincerely as I know how, just that this baby be healthy- didn't I pray hard enough?
- My baby is so terribly damaged-to me it seems that God's will was for it to die, but that man is intervening just to keep him breathing. He would have died months ago, had God's will been

done as I feel He intended. Now he exists, but that is all. What does the church say?⁶

The parents may also feel frustrated because the child's handicap is felt as a blow to their success as parents and because their aspirations for the child will not be fulfilled. It is a grief experience for the child that was expected but that never was.⁷

Adjustment is the fifth stage. The crisis of the birth has the potential for either bringing the parents closer together and establishing mutual support or estranging the parents from one another. Parents who were able to communicate their feelings and provide support for each other during the crisis were able to adapt more successfully to the birth of a handicapped child.⁸

Communication of feelings is also important in the case of later discovery of a handicap. The minister can help parents in expressing their feelings, emotions freely.

This period is accompanied by attempts to discover all the details about the condition of the child. The pastor should assist them in finding accurate information. Many times, they search for a cure. Sometimes this can lead to further disappointments. There are cases when parents go from clinic to clinic trying to find someone who will give them a gleam of hope. They seek to postpone the inevitable—the acceptance of the fact that their child is retarded. In so doing, they lose much valuable time. The chief tragedy is this: the child is growing without the steady consistent treatment that he should have to make full use of his limited capacity. These defense reactions from the part of the parents are understandable but they are unfortunate. They stand in the way of arrival at an adequate

⁶ Paul W. Pruiser, “The Challenge of Mental Retardation for the Church,” *McCormick Quarterly Supplement* (March 1966): 23.

⁷Ibid., 55.

⁸Judith Sewell Wright, Roberta D. Granger, and Arnold J. Sameroff, “Parental Acceptance and Developmental Handicap,” in *Severely Handicapped Young Children and Their Families*, ed. Jan Blacher (Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1984) 55.

solution to the problem of what is best for the child and for his family. The minister should help the family in realizing the truth about the child and to concentrate on possibilities of early treatment.

After having all the information about the child's situation, the parents must adjust to it. This includes making plans for the future of the child, concerning possibilities of education, care-giving and other details.

In this period of adjustment, the pastor can help the parents in finding the best ways in planning. However, he must be careful not to make decisions for them. His task is to present them the possibilities and emphasize that they have to decide what they think is good for their child.

THE TASK OF THE MINISTER

There are several things that are important for the minister to be aware of. Wright, Granger, and Sameroff give a good overview of them.⁹

First, the minister needs to *understand the situation*. He must know what mental retardation is. It is a condition, not a disease. It is not mental illness. The mentally retarded person is operating at a lower level of intelligence. It is important for him to give accurate information to the parents in order to avoid false hopes and at the same time to recognize that much can be done.

(It is estimated that twenty to fifty percent of the shelter population suffer from major mental illness. In helping these people, the counselor is aware that the mentally ill seek to live dignified and productive lives. Many recover sufficiently that they can work with those who understand their deficits.)¹⁰

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Stephen G. Post, “III and on the Street,” *Christianity and Crisis* 52 (July 1992): 248.

Second, the minister needs to *have a biblical attitude to the situation*. He must accept the child as worthy of his attention, a person of unconditioned worth in the sight of God.

Third, *knowledge of counseling procedures* is also needed. The pastor needs to have active listening skills and empathy. He should know the steps that are conducive to a better situation of the persons who are around the mentally retarded child.

Some parents tend to develop a guilty attachment to the child, thus neglecting other family members. This can create a crisis in the neglected family members. The minister should extend his counseling of the family to these members. Preventive ways should be sought, discussion with the parents about the mode they might divide their attention among their children is one of the avenues.

Fourth, the pastor needs to have a *knowledge of community resources*. Some of these resources are helpful for purposes of diagnosis, others for purposes of education, vocational guidance, training, and placement.

Fifth, the minister is expected to *provide spiritual guidance*. This is important especially for the parents. They must be reassured that God loves everybody, not only the brilliant or the average. By assisting the parents, the pastor assists the child too. Anything that helps a family helps the child.

Overall, both the pastor and the members of the church, in their service towards those in need, have to keep in mind the importance of the spiritual aspect of each situation. Andrew Miles rightly states: "Spirituality, which arises from the spiritual dimension of the human person, is a singularly important experience of meaning in life which, by its nature, transcends an individual's personal circumstances, his/her social situation and the material world itself."¹¹

¹¹ Andrew Miles, „George Fitchett & Steve Nolan, (eds.). (2015). *Spiritual Care in Practice. Case Studies in Healthcare Chaplaincy. An Analysis, Commentary and the Implications for Person-Centered Healthcare.*” *European Journal for Person Centered Healthcare* Vol 5 Issue 4 (2017):

Another aspect of the minister's task is to educate his congregation how to relate to the issue of mental retardation. By this he indirectly helps parents of such children or even adults who are mentally retarded and happen to join the church.

TERMINAL ILLNESSES

Problems faced by people with cancer are fear, anxieties about work, sexuality, the meaning of life and death. "Cancer, an emotionally charged illness, can be expected to precipitate a state of crisis for most patients and their families."¹² Lee Hancock mentions in an article The Judson Cancer Help Project, which offered a kind of care. The Project deals with problems related to surgery.¹³ In crisis counseling it is good to help people to learn to ask questions, articulate pains, and desires.

From the point of view of the cultural environment, the crisis of a person who has cancer may be aggravated by the society's tendency to "extol... health and beauty and to banish the aged, the sick, the ugly and the dying to the back corridors of life".¹⁴ In the case of mastectomy, for instance, a woman loses her breast, one of the cultural symbols of femininity, and in addition to that she loses her hair as a side effect of chemotherapy.

The families of terminally ill children are going through a significant crisis. "It appears that family units with terminally ill children have a tendency to withdraw and this isolation leads to

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20180721200925/http://www.ubplj.org/index.php/ejpch/article/download/1498/pdf>. 6.04.2022.

¹²Jeanette R. Oppenheimer, "Use of Crisis Intervention in Casework with the Cancer patient and His Family," *Social Work* 12 (April 1967): 44.

¹³Lee Hancock, "A Journey for Healing," *Christianity and Crisis* 47 (August 1987): 263.

¹⁴ Colin B. Johnstone, "On Asking the Right Question," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 35 (September 1981): 171.

problems in mental health. Anger, frustration, restlessness, and depression amongst others, characterize their mental health.”¹⁵

The person who has cancer may experience almost all the stages of crisis mentioned in the previous section related to severe handicaps.

Analyzing the usual mode patients relate to their situation, it occurs that one of the most frequent question that arises is “Why?”. The question may have many forms:

- What caused it?
- Why did it happen just now?
- Why would this happen to me?
- I don't smoke, why should I get cancer?
- I've been good, why would God let me get cancer?¹⁶

All these questions are pointing to the main philosophical and religious question related to the issue: *Why do some people suffer?* At a personal level, the question becomes: *Why did this happen to me?* The minister must understand that there is no easy answer to these questions. In fact all philosophies and religions have tried to find adequate answers, and there is no agreed upon answer. No wonder, then, that the issue presents such a struggle to the ill person and his environment.¹⁷

It is worth mentioning that during the first three months after diagnosis there is a preponderance of thoughts about life and death. The existential plight manifested by these existential concerns are independent of site of tumor or age.¹⁸

¹⁵ S. Hechter, M. Poggenpoel and C. Myburgh, “Life stories of families with a terminally ill child,” *Curationis* 24 (May 2001): 55.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20190427143338/https://curationis.org.za/index.php/curationis/article/download/830/767>. 6.04.2022.

¹⁶ Colin B. Johnstone, “On Asking the Right Question,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 35 (September 1981): 171.

¹⁷Ibid. 171.

¹⁸Ibid. 169.

CRISIS INTERVENTION IN AN INCURABLE ILLNESS

Most crisis theorists suggest that there is a specific precipitant of the crisis; it may be the loss of a job, the breakup of a relationship, and one of the first steps in crisis intervention is the identification of the event. For medical problems, the external precipitant, the illness is quite apparent.¹⁹

Johnstone suggests a three-step crisis intervention model to health care professionals, and ministers can take advantage of it.²⁰

The first step is *ventilation*. By listening to the distressed person, the minister enables that person to express and ventilate his or her emotions. By asking “Why?” the person also makes a statement about his or her feelings. The tone of the voice and the body language could express fear or anger. Even if no answers have been given, much has already been done. The emotional component of the question “Why?” has been ventilated.

The second step is *differentiation*. In this step the person clarifies the issues involved and the decisions to be made. He or she will be able to differentiate the existential component of the question “Why?” by examining the meaning of life.

The third step is *integration*. The person is able to integrate or reintegrate fragmented parts of his or her life or personality. He or she may discover that there is no need to know the answer to the question “Why?”. Rather, they will realize the importance of relationships with family members and that material possessions have become less important. The value-system may change totally.

The minister assists the person with cancer to enhance self-image, and in the case of mastectomy, issues relating to restoration of marital harmony may be addressed. It is important for ministers to

¹⁹Rita Yopp Cohen, “Crisis Intervention for Medical Problems,” In *Crisis Intervention*, 2d ed., ed. Lawrence Cohen, William Claiborn and Gerald A. Specter (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1983) 131.

²⁰Colin B. Johnstone, “On Asking the Right Question,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 35 (September 1981): 172-75.

avoid clichés in trying to give hope and encouragement to family members or the ill person. “In their efforts to provide consolation to the grief-stricken families these helpers often overlook their real needs and forge their own views upon them. For example, a well-meaning clergyman, saying that there is a purpose to everything that happens, or, that our loved one is going to heaven.”²¹ These statements can be true, but the encouraging person must evaluate the situation and determine the degree of truth as related to the specific situation of the family and the ill person. For example, according to Scripture, not everybody goes to heaven by default (Matthew 7:21). Regarding the purpose of everything that happens, this statement, instead of giving an acceptable and comforting answer, can raise even more questions in the realm of “Why?”

The steps in crisis intervention suggested by Samuel Dixon are also valid in the cases of incurable illnesses. The following is a short summary of these steps:²²

1. Establish a constructive relationship with the sick person and his or her family.
2. Encourage expression of painful feelings. Not only emotional pain, but also physical pain may be present in cases of illness.
3. Discuss the precipitating event with the sick person or with family members.
4. Assess and evaluate their condition (physical and emotional).
5. Formulate a dynamic explanation concerning the situation.
6. Restore cognitive function. In certain cases of denial, it can be very difficult.
7. Plan and implement treatment. This does not necessarily mean healing from the disease, but the possibility to function 'normally' in the given situation.
8. Terminate.

²¹ S. Hechter, M. Poggenpoel and C. Myburgh, “Life stories of families with a terminally ill child,” *Curationis* 24 (May 2001): 55.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20190427143338/https://curationis.org.za/index.php/curationis/article/download/830/767>. 6.04.2022.

²² Samuel L. Dixon, *Working with People in Crisis: Theory and Practice* (Columbus, OH: Merrill, 1987), 98-126.

9. Follow-up. Maintain an on-going relationship by giving real support.

David Switzer writes about two factors involved in such a crisis:²³

One is the relationship between the concept of body image and the whole self. Any change in or attack upon the body is perceived to be an attack upon one's whole being. The perception of this threat is experienced as anxiety, and in the case of the medical patient, it is not always proportionate to the medically diagnosed seriousness of the disorder.

A second factor is that in the face of this anxiety there is often the beginning of a breakdown of one's personal world. If hospitalized, the person is taken out of the familiar and somewhat secure context of living and thrust into a new and strange situation and is relatively isolated.

The minister is aware that by visiting such person in hospital he represents the community that was so familiar to the ill person. This can be a first step in crisis intervention in a hospitalized setting.

Those illnesses which do not predict a return to a high level of wellness are likely to produce a great deal of subjective distress. Physical disability, such as that produced by amputation, or lifestyle disruption, such as that produced by kidney dialysis are only a few examples of such cases.

A few words about dual disorders and AIDS. “At the onset of the 1980s thirty percent of persons diagnosed with schizophrenia, manic depression or depressive disorder were also using alcohol or drugs in a destructive way. By 1990 the estimates were dramatically higher.”²⁴ These are *dual disorders*.

²³David K. Switzer, *The Minister as Crisis Counselor*, (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1974) 35.

²⁴Bert Pepper, “Mentally Ill Alcohol and Substance Abusers,” *Church and Society* 82 (May-June 1992): 109.

A first step in helping these people is to tell the patient that because he or she has a problem with confusion-thought disorder, it is important to stop all use of alcohol, and other intoxicating drugs completely.²⁵

The church should offer hope to those suffering with AIDS considering Christ's preaching the good news and helping the diseased at the same time. No matter what the outcome of their condition will be, they need the redemptive grace of Christ who came to give His life for every lost human.

CONCLUSION

This study is only a very brief presentation of some of the most common incurable illnesses. Ministers and church members must realize that there is so much to be done in this area. The members of the churches are exposed to most of the incurable illnesses that non-Christians experience. On the other hand, the minister must be available to anybody, regardless of church-affiliation. It is true that there are many kinds of techniques used in crisis intervention. However, the most important for the minister and the serving church member is to be a good servant of God who is able to really help people distressed by incurable illnesses, and to point toward Christ, whose presence in the life of the sufferer is invaluable.

²⁵Ibid. 111.

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11

THE SERMON ANALYSIS OF THE SERMON ON THE LORD'S SUPPER BY JOHN BRADFORD IN THE LIGHT OF HADDON ROBINSON'S METHOD OF DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY OF EXPOSITORY MESSAGES

Ilie Sorițău

GREAT INTRODUCTION: ORIENT TO SUBJECT, RAISE THE NEED

Haddon Robinson says that the introduction introduces a preacher's audience to the subject of his sermon idea, to his central idea, or his first major point.¹ In other words, the characteristics of effective introductions grow out of that purpose. John Bradford introduces the subject of his sermon to orient to the Lord's Supper in his introduction: *Of the Lord's Supper*, "I am purposed presently to speak through the help of God because we are assembled in Christ, I hope, to celebrate the same" (83).

An effective introduction uncovers needs. A preacher must motivate his audiences to listen. Robinson says that directing our preaching at people's needs is not merely a persuasive technique but the task of the ministry.² Bradford demonstrates that there are two sacraments in Christ's church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. And then, he uncovers to focus on only the Lord's Supper, not baptism. Furthermore, he indicates that the congregation of Christ's church should take part in the Lord's Supper so that they can feel one body as the same family in Christ. Also, they can reconcile to God through the body and blood of Jesus Christ. In this sense, his audiences realize why they should pay attention to his preaching. They can be interested in what he is going to say through an indication of their needs.

¹ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: the Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 166.

² *Ibid.*, 170.

Bradford outlines three questions in the sermon: who instituted this sacrament, what is the sacrament, and where did the Lord did institute this sacrament (83). After he

finishes preaching, his audiences will have the answers to questions related to the Lord's Supper. These questions are automatically relevant to their lives. As they gain the answers to the institutor, the meaning, and the object of the Lord's Supper, they can apply his message to their lives. In brief, Bradford uncovers needs toward his audiences in his introduction, so that no one needs to guess what the preacher plans to preach and discuss.

ACCURATE AND CRYSTAL CLEAR: AN EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT

A preacher should discover the exegetical idea through the study of a biblical passage.

When preachers study a passage, they relate the parts to each other to determine the exegetical idea and its development. Robinson says that a preacher should be able to do two things: the subject and the complement.³ A preacher can have the subject with a series of distinctive questions: what, when, where, who, why, and how. Bradford has explained the idea of three things consisting of the subject and the complement in his preaching: who instituted this sacrament and Supper; what the sacrament is; and where the Lord instituted this sacrament.

³ Ibid.,66.

WHO INSTITUTED THIS SACRAMENT AND SUPPER?

In light of Robinson's stage, after discovering the exegetical idea, a preacher should submit his exegetical idea to three developmental questions.⁴ A preacher must be aware of how thoughts develop. To develop the exegetical idea, a preacher can do only three things with it: explain, prove, and apply it. Namely, when a preacher develops the exegetical idea, he may deal with all three questions, "What does this mean? Is it true? What difference does it make?"⁵

Bradford uses a distinctive question to emphasize Jesus Christ as the institutor of the sacrament. He said, "How can the thing which we be about ward to celebrate but be esteemed of every one highly... but hath all dignity, authority, wisdom, power, magnificence, holiness, tender love, mercy, glory, and all that can be wished absolutely?" (83) After that, he proves it through who Jesus Christ is. He says that Jesus Christ is "the image of the substance of God," "the Wisdom of the Father, "the brightness of his glory," by whom all things were made, are ruled and governed (84). He says Christ's supremacy if Jesus Christ is like us, he cannot institute this sacrament. In brief, because Christ is not like us, he is the Lord of this sacrament. Bradford emphasizes the truth that Jesus Christ instituted this sacrament by his love and authority so that his audiences accept. To effectively prove the fact, he quotes various characteristics of Jesus Christ came out of the Bible. Jesus Christ is the Messiah of the world, Savior, Mediator, Advocate, Intercessor (84). This is related to the theology of preaching called Christology. Bradford knows who Jesus Christ is and what the center of preaching is. Preaching should begin with Jesus Christ. All Scripture ultimately not only focuses on Jesus Christ but also is

⁴ Ibid., 75.

⁵ Ibid., 77-96.

about His redemptive history. Jesus made it clear that all Scripture is about Christ (Luke 24:27, John 4:39, 46). Furthermore, prophets prophesied the first coming of Christ, and apostles preached the second coming of Christ. Also, the Scripture includes the redemptive work to all of its incarnation, atoning, rising, interceding, and reigning dimensions.⁶ Therefore, the entire Bible is Christ-centered, so that Christian preaching must be Christ-centered preaching. Bradford's sermon is Christ-centered preaching to reveal Jesus Christ.

WHAT IS THE SACRAMENT?

While he introduces the second point, he motivates his audience to immerse themselves in preaching. He says, "I shall not be either tedious or unprofitable unto you." As Robinson speaks of the importance of opening, if a preacher does not capture attention in the first thirty seconds, he may never gain it at all. Most audiences decide if they are interested in listening to the preaching, based on his opening. To support the fact, Bradford compares the sacrament of Christianity with that of popery. In the view of Christianity, the substance of bread and wine remains in the sacrament after the words of consecration. However, Popery contends that the substance of bread and wine are transubstantiated to the body and blood of Jesus Christ. He quotes the word of the priesthood, such as Aaron and Melchizedek, to prove their false doctrine (84). In other words, he proves whether it is true or not through the Bible. This is the distinctive method to determine the truth or falsehood. His grasp of Scripture is accurate and firm.

The Bible is the written Word of God. The Word of God is powerful and authoritative. He judges their false thought

⁶ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 276.

according to the living and active the Word of God. At this point, he powerfully preaches that the sacrament of the popish mass is not the sacrament of Christ's body (85). They consider the Lord's Supper as the sacrament of the altar, omitting specific substantial points of the Lord's institution. Even though they think of the Lord's Supper like this way, Bradford speaks of the substance of bread and wine in the supper of the Lord or the sacrament of Christ's body. He attacks the Catholic doctrines through his sermon. Here he teaches many things related to the Lord's Supper against it.

First, the Holy Spirit does tell us, by calling it often "bread" after the words of consecration. Bradford explains what the bread means through 1 Corinthians 10 -11. Paul writes what we break is the bread, not Christ's body. Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples (2 Cor. 11:24). In terms of the history of early Christian, they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts (Acts 2:46). The substance of bread and wine remain still in the supper after the words of consecration. There is no transubstantiation of the bread.

Secondly, Bradford speaks of the authority of the fathers to support that the substance of bread remains still: Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Epiphanius, Hieronymus, Austin, Theodoret, Cyril, and Bede (86). Thirdly, Bradford proves that there is no transubstantiation of the bread for this reason. He believes more in the word of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of truth than the tradition of the church. His preaching abounds with scriptural quotations. This shows that he has not only a clear conviction regarding the Bible's authority but also accepts the authority of the Bible by faith.⁷ His preaching lies solely in the

⁷ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 54.

authority of the Bible and ultimately in the authority of God who sent him.

Fourthly, Bradford proves that there is no transubstantiation by Luke and

Paul's words. To prove the incorrect transubstantiation, he studies the meaning of the the word "this." He speaks of the word "this" demonstrating bread, "This is my body." He was interested in biblical languages and devoted himself to study languages.⁸ Jerry Vines says that a preacher should seek its meaning to answer the question, "What does the word mean?"⁹ It is word studies for a preacher to look up the meaning of the words in the original language. Bradford knew the grammatical use of the words as well as how the word was used by the person who wrote it.

Fifthly, Bradford has the definition of a sacrament to prove a false doctrine to transubstantiation. He defines that a sacrament consists of earthly things and a heavenly thing, of the word and of the element, of sensible things and of things which be perceived by the mind (87). However, Transubstantiation only includes a heavenly thing, the word, and a reasonable thing. In this sense, Bradford formulates a clear proposition in his preaching. When he delivers the proposition of a sacrament, his audiences can understand the same as what God is proposing to them in His Word. This is the essence of preaching. When a preacher formulates a proposition, he can deliver his sermon more easily.

⁸ Edwin C. Dargan, *A History of Preaching, ed. , From the Apostolic Fathers to the great Reformers A. D. 70-1572* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 499.

⁹ Vines, *Power in the Pulpit*, 105.

Sixthly, Bradford affirms the nature and proportion of a sacrament. He says that Christ's broken body feeds the soul as bread nourishes the body. In terms of the proportion of a sacrament, many grains of corn made "one bread" and many grapes made one wine. As a result, those who take part in a sacrament feel "one body" with Christ and his church (88).

Seventhly, Bradford preaches to his audiences the meaning of the Lord's Supper through an analysis of baptism's meaning. He quotes the Bible, 1 Corinthians 10 and 12, to demonstrate the meaning of two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism means that the old man is put off, and the new man put on without transubstantiation of the water. Like this, the Lord's Supper is given to us the communion of Christ's body and blood, grace and forgiveness of sins, and immortality without transubstantiation of the bread (89).

As one of the Reformers, Bradford is one of the expositors who present the meaning of the passage, so that he insists that the Word always be expounded in the administration of the sacraments.¹⁰ In this sense, one of his characteristics is doctrinal preaching based on Christianity because his sermon is against popery's doctrines. All popery thinks of the mystical body of Christ rather than the natural body of Christ. So, he says that they should know Christ is not separate from the body. Also, their doctrine is based on Gnosticism, which separates the body and the soul in the early Christian Church. Two distinctive doctrines to a sacrament flow through chapter by chapter in his preaching.

Eighthly, Bradford preaches that all popery is antichrist to deny the substance of bread and wine to be in the Lord's Supper after consecration. In particular, they do not admit that Christ is the

¹⁰ David L. Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), 142.

human nature, but only believe that Christ is the Divine nature. So, he proves that two natures are confounded in Christ according to the Bible. Bradford, whenever he has a very serious problem with the doctrines, he solves it through a quotation of the Bible. This is one of the strong points of a reformer preacher.

Ninthly, Bradford preaches if there be no substance of bread in the sacrament, then Christ's body is received of the ungodly and eaten with their teeth. He believes that bread is eaten, not Christ's body so that we dwell in Christ (91). This is our faith through the Holy Spirit, an unchangeable meaning of the sacrament.

Bradford says that there are two evils about the sacrament, which to avoid the Holy Ghost has taught us. One thing, lest we should with the papist think Christ's body presents in or with the bread really, naturally, and corporally, to be received with our bodily mouth. The other thing, lest we should make too light of it, making it a bare sign and no better than common bread, the Holy Spirit calls it "Christ's body" (96).

He answers how Christ is present in the sacrament. According to both the Scripture and Christian faith, he says that it will not give Christians to make any carnal, real, natural, corporal, and such gross presence of Christ's natural body in the sacrament (96). He says that Christians should look with the eyes and hear with eyes of the Spirit and faith (97).

He quotes that the fathers support an idea of the Lord's Supper. Chrysostom says that we feel a presence of the Lord "by grace" or "in grace" and receive the "influence of grace and the grace of the Holy Spirit" (98). Also, St Austin says that we receive grace and verity, "the invisible grace," and holiness of the members of Christ's body (98). All sayings of the fathers confirm our faith and doctrine to the sacrament. In this sense, Bradford's preaching is based on Scripture and the fathers' accounts, not his claim. Sometimes Bradford uses short

quotations for his audiences to memorize. Robinson says, "If you use a quotation, it should be short, and you should have it memorized." Long quotations are difficult to read well and to memorize.

Bradford talks about the profit of the sacrament. Firstly, Christians abide in Christ and Christ in them. Secondly, Christians attain by it a celestial life or a life with God. Thirdly, Christians receive not only Christ's body and blood by faith and in spirit, but also, wholly Christ, God, and man. Fourthly, Christians receive remission of our sins and confirmation of the New Testament by the worthy receiving of this sacrament. Lastly, Christians get by faith an increase of incorporation with Christ (99). In brief, the coupling of Christ's body and blood to the sacrament is a spiritual thing.

What is the body and blood of Christ that a Christian receives? He says that it is not simply bread and wine, but rather Christ's body. The papists still babble, "This is my body; this is my blood." They do not see what body it is and what blood it is. He says that Christ calls it "his body broken" and "his blood shed" (102). Mark says that Christ calls it "his body which is broken," "his blood which is shed" presently.

THE USE OF ORIGINAL LANGUAGES

Bradford studied the Greek text to show that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the very passion of Christ should be as present. In this sense, he had a profound knowledge of the Greek language, so that he found the original meaning of a text. This is one of the strong points in his preaching. In the process of preaching, the first step is an exegesis. Bradford represents what

the Scripture itself says by "leading out of" the right meaning of the text.¹¹

In the light of an exegesis, Robinson's definition of expository preaching emphasizes the importance of exegesis. Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.¹² In addition to Robinson's definition, Vines also defines, "Expository sermon is a discourse that expounds a passage of Scripture, organizes it around a central theme and main divisions which issue forth from the given text, and then decisively applies its message to the listeners."¹³ Bryan Chapell emphasizes the importance of a text in his definition. An expository sermon may be defined as a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text.¹⁴ The above three definitions have a common point that preaching is entirely derived from the given text. This is the power of the Word that preaching present. Preachers are committed to saying what God says. Furthermore, preachers are not to communicate the value of their opinions, other's philosophies, or speculative meditations. In brief, Bradford proclaimed truths of God how God's Word discloses his will.

¹¹ Vines, *Power in the Pulpit*, 28.

¹² Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

¹³ Vines, *Power in the Pulpit*, 29.

¹⁴ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 31.

Also, Bradford's preaching has the authority of the word that preaching presents.

Chapell depicts, "Modern trend in preaching that deny the authority of the Word in the name of intellectual sophistication lead to a despairing subjectivism in which people do what is right in their eyes."¹⁵ However, Bradford approaches that God has spoken in his Word. To preach it in such a way, he endeavors to discover and conveys the precise meaning of the Word so that the meaning of the passage became the message of the sermon. In other words, the text governs John Bradford. Bradford knows that the authority behind preaching resides not in the preacher but the biblical text. Therefore, he derived the idea from a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context. Also, he searched for the objective meaning of a passage through his understanding of the language, backgrounds, and setting of the text.

The Lord's Supper teaches not simply Christ's body and blood but repentance. Jesus says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Bradford says that whenever a Christian takes part in the sacrament, they should feel the gravity and grievousness of sin. He perceives God's mercy and Christ's love through God's wrath for sin in the Lord's Supper, so he preaches, "God open our eyes in time and give us repentance" (103).

There are the characteristics of God in his preaching, such as mercy, kindness, and compassion. A mercy is that God gave his only son, "the image of his substance, the brightness of his glory, being in his own bosom" for us (103). A kindness is that the

Almighty Lord should make us rich by him. Compassion is that the omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth would deliver his

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

own only beloved Son for us and make one with him by the Holy Spirit (103). Furthermore, Bradford derives Christ's love from the Lord's Supper. God would become man, poor, and a slave for man. His love is heavier than many words speaking. Bradford commands that Christians should rejoice, be glad, and thanks for the Lord's Supper. In particular, the supper used to be called of the fathers' thanksgiving.'

WHEREFORE THE LORD INSTITUTED THIS SACRAMENT

Firstly, Bradford says that our nature is very oblivious of God and of all his benefits. So Christians might have in memory the principal benefit of all benefits. Jesus Christ said, "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24).

Secondly, Christians might be on all parts assured of communion with Christ through a sacrament (106). The apostle said, "The bread which we break, is it not the partaking (or communion) of the body of Christ? Is not the cup of blessing which we bless the partaking (or communion) of the blood of Christ?" The sacrament teaches us that no man can communicate with Christ, and they need to communicate with God's grace.

Thirdly, this sacrament was instituted to realize the forgiveness of sins. Christians should be certain of the remission and pardon of their sins. Christians may also perceive by the cup called "the cup of the New Testament," to which the New Testament is properly attributed to remission of their sins. In summary, the supper is instituted because of the condition of people's oblivion, communion with Christ, and the remission of people's sins.

Bradford mentions the relationship between a sacrament and the Holy Spirit.

He says that no man can communicate with Christ's body and blood, and people must communicate with his Spirit. Those who

communicate with Christ's Spirit can communicate with holiness, righteousness, innocence, and immortality (106). We regenerate into a lively hope, and we are in the fellowship of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit through the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, we know that Christ is ours, and we are Christ's: he dwells in us, and we in him (107).

He says, "I am a very grievous sinner, and I feel in myself very little repentance and faith: therefore I am afraid that I am unworthy" (108). To the answering of this objection, he thinks it necessary to speak something of the worthy receiving of this sacrament. The true probation and trial of a Christian conscience consist altogether in faith and repentance. Faith has respect to the doctrine and articles of our belief: repentance has respect to manners and conversation (108). Concerning the former, he says that the apostle teaches us I Corinthians 11. Also, concerning the latter, he says that Paul wrote, „Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (Rom. 6:12). When we give over to sin and let him have the bridle at this liberty when we strive not against it, but allow it and consent to it. However, if we strive against it, if it displeases us, our sin is not of those sins which do separate us from God (108).

Bradford preaches his sermon in terms of the view of the Holy Spirit. He says, "I answer, that indeed great idolatry is committed to and about this sacrament, and therefore men ought, as much as they can, to avoid from occasioning or confirming it: but, in as much as the Holy Spirit is wiser than man" (95). Also, he says, "There are two evils about the sacraments, which to avoid the Holy Spirit have taught us" (95). Bradford depends on the dynamics of the Holy Spirit. Dargan indicates that he was a man of deep piety and was often engaged in penitential meditations and prayer.¹⁶ He walked daily with God, fully

¹⁶ Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, 499.

surrendered his life to the Lord, and spent quality time each day with God in prayer, so that the Spirit of God should be connected to the Word of God.

Contemporary's preaching seems to be separated from the relationship between the

Word and the Spirit. Preachers have many resources to prepare a sermon; yet, they frequently do not have the power of the Holy Spirit to transform the lives of their listeners. Nowadays, most preachers neglect the power of the Holy Spirit so that their preaching is boring, discursive, and uninspiring.

Greg Heisler suggests Spirit-led preaching to overcome the problem. He defines: "Expository preaching is the Spirit-empowered proclamation of biblical truth derived from the illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit by means of a verse-by-verse exposition of the Spirit-inspired text." The prime reason for defining expository preaching is that the doctrine of inspiration for the Holy Spirit is linked with the expository understanding of preaching for the text. Bradford's preaching can be a good representative of the combination of the Word and Spirit.

CLEAR AND MEMORABLE MAIN IDEA: THAT COMES OUT OF TEXT

Bradford has a clear main idea for his audiences to memorize. His main idea derived from the text, Matthew 26, and I Corinthians 12. The main idea is that Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper for sin's repentance and communion with Christ through the grace and mercy of God. The sermon on the Lord's Supper attacks the Catholic doctrines as well as breathes the spirit of the gospel. He says, "I would that the objectors would well consider what a presence of Christ is in his word" (100). Also, he quotes that it is truer to take Christ's body and his blood for the word of the Scriptures and the doctrine of God (Psalm 47).¹⁷ He did not need the word of man to receive the sacrament. Only the Word of God is based to affirm the sacrament.

STRUCTURE THAT HELPS THE PURPOSE

There are deductive arrangement, semi-inductive arrangement, and inductive arrangement.¹⁸ In the deductive method, the idea appears as part of the introduction to the sermon, and the body explains, proves, or applies it. In this way, a structure of Bradford's sermon is a deductive arrangement because the idea is presented in the introduction. He says, I will tell you how and in what sort I will speak of it. Three things would I have marked, as the principles and scope whereto I will refer all that I shall at this time speak thereof. They are these: Who, what and wherefore. That is, to make it more plain, who did institute this thing which we are about to celebrate: this is the First. The Second is, what the thing is which is instituted. And the Last is,

¹⁷ p. 80

¹⁸ Robinson, *Biblical preaching*, 116.

wherefore, and to what end it was instituted, whereby we shall be taught how to use it (83).

In brief, He states the complete idea in the introduction and analyzes it in the body and repeats the idea. Also, he had clear thinking, unadorned style, the fundamental doctrines, and principles of the Reformation.

SUPER ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapell says that illustrations exegete Scripture in terms of the human condition, creation a whole person understanding of God's Word.¹⁹ In other words, illustrations unite biblical truth with experience, make the Word more accessible, understandable, and real in ways that propositional statements alone cannot. When his audiences listen to the illustration, they can effectively accept the false doctrine of the papists.

Bradford has already said that nine things were related to the substance of bread and wine in the supper of the Lord, or in the sacrament of Christ's body. Also, after he asks a few questions to the definition of a sacrament, he uses super illustrations to answer the question. He says, "How can a man be guilty of the body and blood of Christ by unworthy receiving it, if it be but bare bread? (92-93)" His illustration is as the following:

When a loving friend gives to you a thing, or sends to you a token, I think you do not do as you should do, if that with the thing you do not consider the mind of your friend that send or give to you the thing, and according thereto to esteem and receive it. And so of this bread think I that, if you do not rather consider the mind of your lover Christ than the thing which you see, if you do not altogether consider Christ's mind, you deal dishonestly and strumpetly with him: for it is the property of

¹⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 178.

strumpets to consider the things given and sent them, rather than the love and mind of the giver and sender: whereas the true lovers do not consider in any point the things given or sent, but the mind of the party (93).

Bradford concludes that Christians should see and consider the mind of Christ because of the mind of Jesus Christ is more important than the things he sends to Christians. Whenever Christians take part in the sacrament, they should meditate on Christ rather than the sacrament itself.

Also, Bradford says, "how shall Christians best know the mind of Christ?" As a man's mind is best known by his word, Christians can know his mind through Christ's words. Jesus Christ says, "This is my body, and this is my blood." It is manifest and most plain. All Christian should esteem Jesus' words because he cannot lie, and he is omnipotent and can do all things. Bradford says that a sacrament is a sign or a figure of his words. He uses a clear illustration of the fact.

As for example, an ivy-bush is a sign of wine to be sold: the budding of Aaron's rod did signify Aaron's priesthood allowed of the Lord: the reservation of Moses' rod signify the rebellion of the children of Israel: the stones taken out of Jordan, Gideon's fleece of wool, and such as these, be signs significative, and show no gift, in a certain manner a giving also: as baptism signifies not only the cleansing of the conscience from sin by the merits of Christ's blood, but is also a very cleansing from sin; and therefore it was said to Paul, that he should "arise and wash away his sins," and not that they should arise and take only a sign of washing away his sins (94).

He concludes that the bread is called "a partaking of the Lord's body," and not only a bare sign of the body of the Lord (94). His illustrations not only make truth believable but also apply his ideas to people's experiences. Furthermore, his illustrations

serve his congregation to memorize, hold attention, and establish rapport between him and hearer.²⁰ In brief, his illustrations draw the audience's attention to the idea and overlap between the Word of God and the listener's lived experience.

CONVICTING APPLICATIONS

A preacher must explain the truth of a passage. However, a preacher's task is not finished until you relate that passage to the experience of his hearers. So, the congregation hopes that a preacher will answer the questions, "So what" What difference does it make?" Bradford relates the biblical truth about the Lord's Supper to his hearers by means of application.

For example, Bradford applies the attitude to sins to his audience. He focuses on a clear decision related to their lives. He says, My dearly beloved, if that your sins do now displease you; if you believe according to the Holy Scriptures and articles of the Christian faith set forth in your creed; if you now trust in God's mercy through Christ's merits; if you repent and earnestly purpose before God to amend your life, and to give over yourselves to serve the Lord in holiness and righteousness all the days of your life (109).

In this same way, he checks up his audience's spiritual condition, giving several questions to them. These questions mean Christian's attitude before the Lord's Supper. He demonstrates it through concrete, concise, powerful words. Also, he has the appropriate answers to the questions. He says:

"I publish to you that you are worthy guests for this table, you shall be welcome to Christ, your sins shall be pardoned, you shall be endued with his Spirit, and so with communion with

²⁰ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 154.

him and the Father, and with the whole church of God: Christ will dwell in you, and you shall dwell in him for evermore (109).

If Christians repent their sins and trust in God's mercy, their sin would be pardoned. His application is in a specific, not a general way. As Chapell says, Bradford's preaching is based on "The Fallen Condition Focus (FCF)."²¹ Chapell says, "The FCF will enable us to interpret the passage properly, communicate its contents, and give the congregation the Holy Spirit's own reason for listening."²² In brief, Bradford interprets the passage that man is a sinner so that man needs the mercy and grace of God through Christ's blood.

EFFECTIVE CONCLUSION

Robinson says that the purpose of the conclusion is to conclude, and the conclusion should produce a feeling of finality.²³ Some elements in the conclusion are: a summary, an illustration, a quotation, a question, a prayer, specific directions, and visualization. Bradford invites his audience toward Jesus Christ through specific directions in his conclusion. He challenges as following;

Do you now appear before the Lord, make clean your houses, and open the doors of your hearts by repentance and faith, that "the Lord of hosts, the King of glory," may "enter in"; and forever hereafter beware of all such things as might displease the

²¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 48. The Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) reveals a text's and a sermon's purpose. Also, FCF is the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God's people to glorify and enjoy Him.

²² *Ibid.*, 51.

²³ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 176.

eyes of his majesty. Fly from sin as from a toad: come away from popery and all antichristian religion (109).

Also, he encourages them to live for the glory of God through Scripture. He says, "Let your light in your life so shine, that men may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16)." In this sense, his audience should follow light in the Lord, not the works of darkness. In addition to his specific directions, Bradford concludes his preaching utilizing a prayer;

God our Father, for the tender mercy and merits of his Son, be merciful unto us, forgive us all our sins, and give us his holy Spirit, to purge, cleanse, and sanctify us, that we may be holy in his sight through Christ; and that we now may be made ready and worthy to receive this holy sacrament with the fruits of the same, to the full rejoicing and strengthening of our hearts in the Lords (110).

PROPER VOCAL PRODUCTION

Even though listening to his preaching, one could feel a vocal production through his script of the sermon. His preaching was fervent, warmth, and passionate. Whenever he finished every point, he prayed for his audience to God: "God open our eyes to see these things accordingly! So shall we come with more reverence to this table of the Lord" (84), "God open their eyes to see it "(99), "God open our eyes in time and give us repentance" (103), "My dearly beloved, let us pray to the Lord to open our eyes to see these wonderful things, to give us faith to feel them" (107).

Pattison describes his preaching: "A master of speech, his eloquence native, masculine, modest, in a word, heavenly, for if you mark him he favors and breathes nothing but heaven; yea, he sparkles, thunders, lightens; pieces the soft, breaks only the

stony heart." He preached with a tremendous passion and convictions the Word of God.

We might guess his vocal production by means of his life and death. Webber said of Bradford, "Filled with the Spirit of God and with a passionate love for Christ and the souls of men, wherever it was announced that he would preach, the people crowded around him, their beating hearts responding to his burning words." Fuller, describing his death, says, "He endured the flame as a fresh gale of wind in a hot summer's day, without any reluctance; confirming by his death the truth of that doctrine which he had so diligently and powerfully preached during his life.

In conclusion, Bradford had clear thinking of fundamental doctrines and principles of the Reformation. His preaching consisted of scriptural exposition, and he subscribed to a view of scriptural authority, which made biblical preaching a necessity. Ultimately, he never made a compromise with the Catholic doctrines to a sacrament. He believed in the power of God's Word so that he did not depend on the skills of the wisdom of a preacher. Before the Word of God, he always was clear and fervent.

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12

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN PREACHING RELEVANCE OF THE MESSAGE, PREPARATION OF THE MESSAGE, LOW ATTENTION OF THE AUDDIENCE

Daniel Pușcaș

INTRODUCTION

This essay aims to present some of the current preaching challenges that ministers face. This essay aims to present both the challenges and the solutions to each challenge.

To achieve this goal, the first chapter has been allocated to present the challenge of the relevance of the message. The second chapter is about the importance of preparing your messages. Finally, the third chapter deals with the issue of minimal audience attention during the ministry. All these chapters will come with solutions to these challenges.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE MESSAGE

The preacher Robert Rayburg said about the preaching: „Christ is the only King in our studies, but the homiletics is the queen!”

¹ The above quote provides a relevant truth: that preaching is always not just for the sake of delivering a message, but for the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And the way anyone can have a relevant preaching is through the power of the Holy Spirit and the application of principles of homiletics. In the book „Comunicarea Cuvântului lui Dumnezeu (manualul studentului” it is wrote:

Communicating God's Word is a mission that requires dedication, knowledge, and skill on the part of the communicator. (...) We believe that every believer should be engaged in communicating God's Word. Both pastors and

¹ Robert Rayburg, *Predicarea cristicentrică: răscumpărarea prediciei expositive*, 26.

believers have a responsibility to teach Bible truth to those in the cloud families, to other believers, and to unbelievers. ”²

On the other hand, Spurgeon said:

☑ Sermons must contain true teaching, and their teaching must be solid, full-bodied, and abundant. We do not go up to the pulpit to speak for the sake of speech; we have to share with others the teachings of the greatest significance and we are not allowed to say anything pleasant. ³

Thus, today, a common problem among preachers is not the lack of talent to say something from the Word, but how relevant the message is. Many preach, but few manage to have a relevant message that captivates, attracts attention and makes people stay with something practical after listening. Many sermons contain descriptive details about people in the past, about events in the past, about statements of some people or of God without giving an application for today's times. Thus, the faithful do not remain built and do not leave the church understanding how they can apply the teachings heard for their context and situation. In this idea John Stott said:

If we want to build bridges to the world and make the connection between God's Word and the major issues of contemporary life, then we need to take both the biblical text and the modern scene seriously. We cannot remain on a single bank of the cultural chasm. In both cases, whether we withdraw from the world and immerse ourselves in the world of the Bible (evasionist attitude) or whether, on the contrary, we go out of the Bible world and

embrace the world (conformist attitude), we will jeopardize our preaching work.⁴

Robert Rayburg adds: "The basic rule for the structure is that it is very simple for any expository message to take the FORM: Fidelity to the text, direct and obvious observation of the text, relationship to the message preached to the first recipients, movement to a climax and application to real life. ”⁵

The same Robert Raiburg (an author we will often quote in this chapter) noted that “Expository preachers are required to explain no more than is necessary to clarify their ideas, but at least as much as is necessary to demonstrate them. ”⁶ Thus, this preacher offers 6 critical questions that can be asked in the text to help the minister prepare a relevant sermon: 1) What is the meaning of the text? 2) How can I know what the text means? 3) What were the causes that determined the writing of the text? (the first 3 questions refer to studying the meaning of a text). 4) What do we have in common with those for whom (or about whom) the text was written and / or with the author of this text? 5) How should today's people react to the truths in this text? 6) What is the most effective way I can communicate the meaning of the text? (questions determine how the preacher conveys the meaning of the text)⁷ Such questions are a great help to those who want to study the Scriptures in depth.

Obviously, it was understood that the strict study of Scripture was encouraged so that our preaching would not be based on personal opinions or other sources. Grech Schark said:

⁴ John Stott, *Puterea predicării*, 163.

⁵ Robert Rayburg, *Predicarea cristocentrică: răscumpărarea predicii expozitive*, 177.

⁶ Robert Rayburg, *Predicarea cristocentrică: răscumpărarea predicii expozitive*, 128-129.

⁷ *Ibid*, 112-113.

² Haddon Robinson, *Comunicarea Cuvântului lui Dumnezeu (manualul studentului)*, 7

³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Sfaturi pentru predicatori*, 70.

We will fail as preachers when our message is based on a source other than the Bible, when our sermon does not follow the intent of the text, or when our purposes are contrary to the purpose for which it was written. Our task is to allow the voice of God to be heard in the congregation and among the nations.⁸

In the same idea, Robert Raiburg said, "By sending listeners to the biblical text, you will give authority to your words, assuring listeners that your statements directly reflect what God is saying and not just your personal opinions."⁹ Also, "To the extent that our words hide the Word, our work is a failure. To the extent that our words illuminate the pages of Scripture, God answers our prayers and those of our listeners."¹⁰

These statements are reinforced by Haddon Robinson who said:

When a preacher fails to preach the Scriptures, he loses his authority. He no longer confronts his listeners with a word from God, but only with another word from men. This is why many modern sermons arouse only a prolonged yawn. God is not in their message.¹¹

Yes, indeed, there are some who learn strictly from the Scriptures, but what they have to learn is to structure and construct their message in such a way that they must clearly explain the Word and be as applicable as possible to people. That's why Robert Rayburg said about the introduction (a crucial point in preaching that needs to get the public's attention):

He did not mention the context, the background of the historical text right at the beginning. Many people sit on benches assuming

⁸ Grech Scharf, *Pregătiți pentru a predica*, 16.

⁹ Robert Rayburg, *Predicarea cristică: răscumpărarea predicii expozitive*, 130.

¹⁰ Ibid, 137.

¹¹ Haddon Robinson, *Arta comunicării adevărului biblic*, 18-19.

that the ancient writings of Scripture have no relevance to contemporary life. Don't start describing the customs of the Moabites in the introduction! It is irrelevant to the listeners.¹²

He also added that the best introductions start with specific aspects, not general ones.¹³

Also, regarding the conclusion, again a stage of the sermon whose importance is vital in the presentation of the message, the same preacher said: "Every conclusion must conclude, include and prevent"¹⁴ In conclusion, there should not be a new exposure or application, but rather a conscious effort to mobilize the listeners' will to comply with the exhortations specified above. In conclusion, practically, the ideas must be summarized, the hearts softened and the will stimulated.¹⁵

Thus, in all that has been presented so far, the conclusion is that only the truth of Scripture must be preached so that the congregation understands it and knows how to apply it in the context in which they live and in the situations they experience. Something that is preached outside of Christ and the truth of Scripture means deviation from the true teaching. "The true value of a sermon must lie not in the way it is, but in the truth it contains. No matter how beautiful the sower's basket is, it has no value if there is no seed in it. (...) Whatever is found in your sermons, if the truth that builds up is missing from them, then this lack is like the lack of bread flour and it will be fatal."¹⁶

¹² Ibid, 269.

¹³ Ibid, 273.

¹⁴ Ibid, 276.

¹⁵ Ibid, 276-277.

¹⁶ Spurgeon, *Sfaturi pentru predicatori*, 70-71.

PREPARING THE MESSAGE

There are many challenges in preaching. The preacher must have the wisdom to understand the difficulties, challenges and responsibilities he faces and to know how to approach each challenge.

Another common challenge is the early preparation of the sermon. The habit of preaching "as the Spirit gives" is common at times. One of the supporting texts for such a custom is the one in which Jesus said that "in this hour you will not speak, but the Holy Spirit." However, those texts in which this verse is found speak in its context of the time when believers will be persecuted for their faith, and the Holy Spirit will give them perfect wisdom in speech when they are before unbelievers who persecute them. The text does not excuse the lack of preparation of the one who serves with the Word.

The basic idea of this chapter is that the preparation of the message requires proper Bible study.¹⁷ „The one who is preparing to communicate will have to work hard to master the basic information and actually communicate (practically) many hours in order to improve their communication skills. The experience comes after a long time of assimilating the information and practicing the method.”¹⁸

Before conveying the message, the preacher must prepare it, at the same time trying to master it personally, intellectually, emotionally, and be willing to put it into practice in his own life. Message preparation is a key condition for effective communication. The message is the connecting element between the communicator and the receiver, it is the reason for

¹⁷ Mihai Handaric, *Curs de predicare (Exegeza și homiletica textelor biblice)*, 15.

¹⁸ Ibid, 32.

the existence of communication. That is why it is necessary for him to be well prepared by the preacher or teacher. In order to prepare an effective message, it is necessary for the preacher to be disciplined, because the preparation of a message requires special effort. Discipline is necessary for planning the time for drafting the message, for searching for the necessary sources of information, for knowing and applying the principles of writing messages.¹⁹ So, in summary, a preacher must meet 2 conditions in the ministry: proper theoretical preparation and openness to the intervention of the Holy Spirit in the work of communicating the biblical message.²⁰

Great preachers recognize the need for time to prepare a relevant message that reaches the hearts of the listeners. Donald Gray Barnhouse said, "If I had three years to serve the Lord, I would spend two of them studying and preparing."²¹ Spurgeon adds, "Coming to the pulpit without prior preparation is an unforgivable pride."²²

What matters is what we do with the text. Whether it is long or short, our responsibility, as expository preachers, is to present it in such a way that its message is clear, clarified, accurate, correct, relevant, without additions, cuts or falsifications. In the expository sermon, the biblical text should not be an introduction to a sermon on another topic, nor the stake on which we hang our bag of mixed thoughts, but the main thread that dictates and controls what we say.²³ In order to achieve such a message, it takes time to prepare it.

¹⁹ Ibid, 40-41.

²⁰ Ibid, 84.

²¹ John Stott, *Puterea predicării*, 164.

²² Ibid, 192.

²³ Ibid, 113.

Certainly, because of comfort, laziness, or irresponsibility, preachers do not give interest in thorough preparation for a good message in Scripture. In this regard, a man named James Blanck from Edingburg told his students:

„Your service is great and it is worthwhile to dedicate any gift we have to it ... I urge you, therefore, to decide early on to make preaching the great mission of your life. (...) Our activity is vast enough to use all the training and all the talents we can provide ... You will be entrusted with the task of caring for and shepherding souls. Put in it all the enthusiasm and all the passion of your rich life.”²⁴

Listeners need to realize that you are not talking at random. Everything is focused on one axis of thought. Let them see if you're after something. Let them realize your effort, your work, your prestige at stake, etc. Let them see that you know what to do. You don't waste time just talking, but you know why you are talking and you are looking for a precise thing, you are aware of the work, the action and the intended effect.²⁵

2 Timothy 2:15 commands us to be diligent in studying God's Word so that we can use it correctly. Expository preaching is worthy of the time it takes to prepare for it. When people are changed by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, it will be seen that it is a rich reward.²⁶

Peter says in 1 Peter 4: 10-11 that when you must speak or serve, speak the words of God, counting on His power, and the result will be the glory of God. In preaching, He who sets the agenda and gives power obtains glory. Therefore, if we want to reach

²⁴ Ibid, 37.

²⁵ Ionel Truța, *Homiletica (sfaturi pentru predicatori-preoți)*, 29.

²⁶ Haddon Robinson, *Comunicarea Cuvântului lui Dumnezeu*, 18.

the goal of preaching, then we need only preach the Word inspired by the Spirit of God, through the power given by Him.²⁷

Finally, I would mention the words of Ionel Truța: “The element of inspiration in the sermon has a great role. It is not enough for us to be scholastically prepared, but we must be assisted by the Spirit of God in our preaching work.”²⁸ So there is a balance. On the one hand, without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all hours of preparation will be in vain as preaching will not have divine power and support. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit will urge us to take the time to study the Scriptures and prepare the messages of Scripture. Therefore, there must be a balance between dependence on the Holy Spirit and setting aside time for preparation. All of this is in balance as God works with man and blesses man's efforts to be faithful in the service of the Word, and at the same time the servant, however prepared, is entirely dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit.

LOW AUDIENCE ATTENTION

The preacher does not face challenges only in the sphere of his work around the Word. The challenges appear even in the sphere of the audience it serves. The preacher needs to be aware of what the audience is facing when the message of Scripture is preached. One of the biggest challenges in these times is the low attention of the congregation. Unfortunately, people's ability to concentrate is declining due to the technological age in which we live. Bryan Chappel said in the book "Christocentric Preaching":

Contemporary communication experts say that listeners usually decide in the first 30 seconds of a presentation if they are interested in what the speaker will say. This modern reality

²⁷ John Piper, *Supremația lui Dumnezeu în predicare*, 37.

²⁸ Ionel Truța, *Homiletica*, 55.

emphasizes the importance of drawing attention in the first seconds of a sermon.²⁹

The question that arises is "What can be done in this situation?" Bryan Chappel also replied:

Instead of accusing listeners of the tendency to passivity, skillful preachers anticipate increases and decreases in the concentration of their listeners. These pastors use their creative skills to produce an exposition, a structure, a formulation, and images that present the ideas of a sermon in such a way that they periodically capture and recapture the attention of those in the banks.³⁰

To be more specific, there are a number of factors that need to be considered. Charles Spurgeon devotes an entire chapter to the book "Tips for Preachers" to the attention of the congregation. Some of his ideas are worth considering:

„To draw attention, the first golden rule is: always say something that is worth hearing. Many people have an instinct that leads them to want to hear a good thing. (...) Make that useful content that you give to people very clearly arranged. It is possible to pile up a lot of good things in a mess. Put the truth in front of people in a logical, orderly way so that they can remember it easily and they will receive it more promptly. (...) Make sure you speak clearly; for, however excellent your subject may be, if a man does not understand it, it is of no use to him. Go down to his level if he is a poor man; rise to his understanding if he is an educated person. (...) Your people need speeches for which prayers have been made and which have been laboriously prepared. People do not want raw food, but it must be cooked and prepared for them. (...) It does not allow you

²⁹ Bryan Chappel, *Predicarea cristicentrică*, 259.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 375.

monotony. Change your voice continuously. The speed also varies. Change your accent, move it and avoid procrastination (moaning). Vary your tone; uses the bass sometimes and lets the thunder resound; at other times, he speaks in the usual way from his lips and lets the speech be like a familiar conversation. Do everything to achieve continuous change. Human nature wants hot variety. (...) If you want to get the attention of your listeners, you have it fully and always, this is done only if they are led by the Holy Spirit in an elevated and pious state of mind. If your people are obedient, godly, active, serious, sincere, then they will come to God's House intentionally to receive a blessing. They will devote themselves to their place of prayer, asking God to speak to them through you. They will be attentive to every word and will not tire. (...) A break is a real help in keeping your attention. Stop a little from time to time and the passengers in your carriage will wake up. The miller falls asleep while the mill wheels spin, but if for one reason or another, the grinding stops, the man begins to shout, "Well, what happened?" (...) We need to make people feel that it is to their advantage to listen to what we tell them. This is, in fact, an essential point, because no one sleeps while waiting to hear something that is to their advantage. (...) Be clothed with the Spirit of God yourself, and then there will be no question of attention or inattention. Come fresh from the solitude of the room and from the holy communion with the Lord to speak to people about God with all your heart and soul. You have gold chains in your mouth that will chain them quickly. ”³¹

Haddon Robinson comes with additions. He says the introduction needs to capture attention. If the preacher does not catch the attention in the first thirty seconds, he may never catch it again. The possibilities to choose an introductory statement that attracts attention are vast. The preacher can use a paradox

³¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Sfaturi pentru predicatori*, 127-135.

("Many of God's children live as if they were orphans"), can use a rhetorical question, shocking statistics, humor, the passage itself can attract attention (Ex. Hebrews 6) and so the preacher can enter directly in the passage, you can tell an illustration or story, you can enter directly into the subject. An attention-grabbing introduction promises that what follows may be worth the next 30 minutes of someone's time. An effective introduction highlights the needs. A preacher must turn involuntary attention into voluntary attention so that people listen not only because they have to listen, but because they want to listen.³²

Mihail Handaric supports what has been written previously, adding that the learner has the following responsibilities towards the audience: He must attract the audience's attention, maintain his interest during the communication of the message and use the most appropriate methods to determine participants to assimilate the message received. Attraction must be done in the first moments of the communication process. The communicator's concern to attract the audience's attention will take place when the introduction of the message is presented.³³

CONCLUSION

The preacher has various challenges in his ministry. Despite these challenges, there are solutions like the ones presented in this essay that can help any servant in his ministry as long as he takes them into account and applies them.

The ministry of the believer will be blessed by God. Therefore, in any challenge, the minister has the security of God's guidance and blessing throughout the minister's life in ministry.

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³² Haddon Robinson, *Arta comunicării adevărului biblic*, 182-183.

³³ Mihail Handaric, *Curs de predicare*, 44.

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