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# An Inquiry of Dialogical Preaching: Its Purpose, Procedure, and Evaluation

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AN INQUIRY OF DIALOGICAL PREACHING: ITS  
PURPOSE, PROCEDURE, AND EVALUATION.

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by

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Advisor

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to investigate and evaluate dialogical preaching as a possible means for improving the effectiveness of communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to man. The process of dialogical preaching shall be examined not with the intention that it should abolish the present monological form of preaching, but rather that it might be considered as a means of supplementing and improving that preaching which attempts to integrate man's faith in Christ with the happenings of his everyday life.

In the following quotation taken from the October, 1963 issue of Pastoral Psychology, the Church is charged with having failed to make its message meaningful to the average man:

Something is wrong with our current efforts to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ. The average American Protestant has little enthusiasm for his faith. He has difficulties saying what that faith is, even when he attends church week after week. The basic beliefs of his Christian faith rarely seem to permeate his daily life. He fears death and is a ready puppet for the manipulating strings of the mass advertisers and the materialism they promote. Prayer is an empty and meaningless term to him.<sup>1</sup>

Statements such as this one have prompted many a clergyman of the Christian Church in recent years to seriously evaluate the Church's present means of communicating the Gospel and to search for new methods and techniques which might

more fully allow the power of the Gospel to have its effect upon man.

This paper attempts to address this problem as it explores the potential value of dialogue between clergy and laity and between one layman with another in regard to the sermon. It is not the specific intention of this study to enumerate whatever weaknesses the conventional, monological form of preaching may have, although at times certain criticisms will be mentioned only in so far as they may contain a corresponding clue to the particular problem.

This paper is written on the assumption that preaching is a form of communication, and that as a form of communication, it might profit by subjecting itself to the laws which govern effective communication. Inherent in that assumption is also the contention that preaching, as a form of communication, shares essentially the same goals as that of any other form of communication. Just as communication is ultimately aimed at transferring a meaning between two or more people in order to produce or stimulate action of some kind on the basis of this shared meaning, so also preaching strives to bring about a response in the listener's life, either internally, or externally, on the basis of a shared meaning.<sup>2</sup>

Some clarification is necessary at this time as to the meaning of dialogical preaching, especially as it pertains to this study. There is a distinction between that form of preaching which is dialogical in method and that which is dialogical in principle. Whereas the former refers to the

way in which the sermon is delivered verbally, the latter involves the whole concern that governs the communication.<sup>3</sup> For example, a sermon which is delivered by two or more people is called a dialogue sermon. But if that same dialogue sermon had been written by only one person, regardless of how many people may have helped in delivering it, it can be considered dialogical in method only, whereas it remains monological in principle. On the other hand, when the dialogical principle governs the preaching, there is involvement between the preacher and his audience in the preparation of the sermon. An opportunity of some kind is provided either before or after the preaching of the sermon for the preachers and his parishioners to discuss the text of the coming sermon or the content of the past sermon. The dialogical principle allows the parishioner to share his insights and experiences in regard to the sermon with the preacher as well as his fellow parishioners. It also allows the preacher an opportunity to clarify what he has already said in the sermon or to incorporate in the coming sermon whatever contribution the laity has brought to the encounter. The actual writing and preaching of the sermon is still the sole task of the preacher. This is the dialogical principle as understood in the present study.

There is an occasional reference to the conventional or monological form of preaching. This refers to that method of preaching which makes absolutely no attempt at creating dialogue between the preacher and the layman concerning the

the sermon. Once again, it is most important to note that dialogical preaching may, and usually does, employ a monological method of delivery, however, this factor does not affect its dialogical principle.

Chapter two presents various argumentative factors which support the need for dialogical preaching. These factors are seen both through a scriptural understanding of preaching as the responsibility of the entire Church, and through an understanding of preaching as a form of communication. A doctrinal study of the ministry is presented briefly to provide the basic background for the legitimacy of the laity's involvement in preaching. Likewise, a brief examination of the methodology toward effective communication is given to illustrate the advantages offered through the dialogue principle. The chapter concludes with an investigation of two special problematical areas, both psychological and sociological, which confront preaching on the contemporary scene, and which suggest the use of dialogue.

Chapter three consists of a survey of some of the more recent structures of dialogical preaching which have been employed. The rationale, the procedure, and the reported results of these structures will be related as each structure is described.

The fourth chapter is an evaluation of dialogical preaching on the basis of those structures presented in the previous chapter. This evaluation will consist of a few



general remarks on the part of the writer with regard to some of the more outstanding features revealed by his survey of dialogical preaching in practice. The remaining portion of the evaluation consists of a few personal reactions on the part of the clergy and laity who have experienced dialogical preaching first-hand. Their remarks will be self-explanatory as to the value of dialogical preaching.

Because dialogical preaching is relatively new in the Church today, its potential is constantly being explored, and therefore this study cannot possibly presume to present its total picture. For this reason, the concluding chapter will present some "questions for further study" in an effort to suggest further study in those areas of dialogical preaching which have not been examined with any degree of intensity in the present study.

The research for this study was conducted on a bibliographical level. Special credit must be given to writings of Ruel L. Howe and Clyde H. Reid the directors of the Institute for Advanced Pastoral Studies at Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Both of these men have done extensive research in the area of dialogue communication, especially as it pertains to communicating the Gospel.

## CHAPTER II

### ARGUMENTATIVE FACTORS SUPPORTING THE NEED FOR DIALOGICAL PREACHING

#### The Role of Clergy and Laity in the Preaching Task of the Church

##### The Scriptural Understanding of Preaching as the Responsibility of the Entire Church

Dialogical preaching, by its very definition, calls for the participation of clergy and laity in preaching. Although it remains the peculiar task of the ordained preacher to determine and prepare the content of that sermon delivered from the pulpit, the dialogical principle allows the laity to share their sermonic insights and experiences with the preacher and with their fellow laymen. As a result, the contribution of the laity may well influence the preacher in the writing of his sermon. Therefore the question might be raised, "On what authority does the layman undertake such an important task?"

The following passages taken from Scripture make it most clear that all who have come to faith in Christ are also called as spiritual priests for the preaching of the Gospel:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.<sup>1</sup>

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thanksgiving in your hearts to God.<sup>2</sup>

Luther speaks of this responsibility toward preaching

the Gospel as the special privilege which all believers possess. But he is also strong in speaking out against any procedure which might bring about disorder in the Church through the utterance of several voices at the same time. Such action may bring both confusion and division within the Church as Luther points out in his commentary on I Cor. 14:40 as follows:

But because all have the privilege, it becomes necessary that one, or as many as the congregation pleases, be chosen and elected, who in the stead and name of all, who have the same right, administers publicly, in order that no revolting disorder arises among God's people and the Church be turned into babel, seeing that all things should be done decently and in order in it, as the Apostle has taught in I Cor. 14:40.<sup>3</sup>

Luther thereby distinguishes between the priesthood of all believers and the public ministry composed of those whom the laity has chosen.

In addition to the fact that the ordained minister is a chosen member of the lay priesthood, there are also certain qualifications which he must have for this office. In Titus 1:7-9, St. Paul enumerates the virtues and qualifications necessary for anyone about to become an ordained minister (bishop). Not only is he to be virtuous in all things, but he must also possess the aptitude to teach, and specifically, to teach the true doctrine according to God's Word. Thus St. Paul writes in verse 9: "he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instructions in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it."<sup>4</sup>

It is the congregation, made up of the spiritual priest-

hood, which has the authority to decide whether a man is qualified for the public office of the ministry. However, when this congregation calls a man for this office, it agrees to submit itself to the instruction of the called minister unless he should show by means of proclaiming unsound doctrine that he does not teach the true Word of God. In his discourse on the rite of installation, Luther explains this mutual relationship of pastor and people as follows:

The whole matter depends on whether the congregation and the bishop are in accord, that is, whether the congregation wishes to be taught by the bishop and the bishop is willing to teach the congregation.<sup>5</sup>

The role of the ordained minister and the role of the layman complement one another as they together carry out the Church's task of proclaiming the Gospel to the world. The preacher is servant to his parishioners, and yet he stands above them since they are commanded to follow his spiritual directions. They are ultimately servants together under the leadership of Christ, the Head of the Church. Dietrich Ritschl, in his book entitled, Theology of Proclamation, emphasizes the fact that the eternal Word existed before the Church did, and that Christ's ministry existed before the Church was ever called to participate in it. He therefore concludes that this participation of proclaiming the Word cannot possibly be the special privilege of the "ministers," but the corporate ministry of the whole Church. At the same time, however, Ritschl is careful to clarify that the participation of the Church in the ministry of Christ cannot mean

that every church member is a "minister" or pastor. "Everyone has a ministry, but not everyone is a pastor," writes Ritschl.<sup>6</sup>

### The Dialogical Understanding of the Clerical and Laity Roles

All believers, both clergy and laity, have a ministry to the world. And in their ministry together, the laity has certain obligations over against the clergy, whereas the clergy has an obligation to the laity. As can be seen from the previous study, there is a natural demand for cooperation on the part of each. When one understands the ministry of the Church in this manner, that is, as a combined effort of clergy and laity, he is also likely to be interested in a search for ways in which the clergy and the laity can speak to one another in a mutually supportive relationship.

Ruel Howe illustrates the value of such a dialogical relationship between the role of the laity and the role of the clergy. He relates an incident that took place in a church in the city of Philadelphia. This church at one time had a succession of "great" preachers. When, however, they found themselves with an incumbent who, after one year, had not measured up to the quality of preaching that the congregation expected, they decided that something should be done. When a committee of the church consulted with the preacher, and he (the preacher) had learned of their evaluation, he offered to resign. The story continues, however, that the congregation refused to accept his resignation by telling him that it

was up to them to help him become the preacher they believed he could be.<sup>7</sup>

Scripture does not demand that the laity be judgmental of the "quality" of its ministers' preaching, but it does require that the preacher possess an aptitude to teach.<sup>8</sup> From the above incident, an argument might be raised as to the responsibility of the laity to help its minister improve his present teaching and preaching abilities so that he may become a more effective servant of the Word. This is, at least, a practical example of constructive dialogue between laity and clergy.

The dialogical role of the preacher is more obvious than that of the layman, since his very purpose in preaching is to help stimulate dialogue between the listener and his God. The preacher's efforts are not carried out with the intention that men be drawn unto him, but rather that men be drawn closer to the God they worship. As Howe expresses it,

The purpose of preaching is not that the congregation shall hear the preacher, but that the dialogue between God and man be directed and informed....The preacher is important as the educated and skilled agent of that dialogue. His formulations are important when they stimulate people's formulations of the meaning of their contemporary experience with man and God.<sup>9</sup>

Implicit in Howe's description of the preacher's dialogical role is the ability of the preacher to be a person of dialogical dimensions on both the divine and human level. Part of the preacher's problem in attaining this dimension or ability is bound up with the image he has of himself. In

a rather confessional tone of voice, the Rev. Frank McDowell comments on this problem. He writes in response to an article by Ruel Howe entitled, "Communication Between Clergy and Laity," He writes:

In the first place, we clergy would rather have our laity in a dependent position....We see ourselves, too often, dedicated not to the interests of our people so much as to our own interests.... Second, our laity do not see us as someone with whom they can have dialogue.<sup>10</sup>

Several researchers in the field of dialogical preaching are strong to contend that the preacher himself must foster various dialogical qualities before any serious consideration can be given toward the practice of dialogical preaching. One such quality is that of authenticity. The Rev. Dr. John Thompson, in an article entitled, "When Preaching is Dialogical," writes:

The preacher must be authentic. He is open to himself, to others, and to the truth. Laymen sometimes complain that their pastor does not want to be challenged or questioned about anything; therefore, they are reluctant about entering into dialogue with him.<sup>11</sup>

When the preacher becomes authentic and open to others, his personality complements his message. His preaching, for the most part, is accepted as a result of the open and genuine concern he brings to the dialogue. Howe places a great deal of emphasis upon the relational factor involved on the part of the preacher as he performs his task. He maintains that dialogue which arises out of such relationships as love, and care, appreciation and criticism, is merely following the pattern set forth by the incarnation. This is evident from

the following quotation taken from his book entitled,  
Miracle of Dialogue :

As Jesus found it necessary to live in the world in order to reveal the Father, so we, too, must live in the world in order to reveal the Father. His talk was related to, and given force by, His profound acceptance and use of ordinary human events, meanings, and everyday things. His living made the dialogue between God and man acute and decisive; and it took place not in synagogues or church but on the streets and roads, in homes and taverns....<sup>12</sup>

Howe is not speaking here so much of the office of the public ministry but of the lay priesthood in general. Nevertheless, the implications are aimed at both clergy and laity. His portrayal of Christ's ministry would indicate a path for today's pastor, namely, that the Gospel is not communicated only from the pulpit but through living encounters with people. According to Howe, therefore, the messenger of the Gospel, whether he be preacher or layman, is an effective communicator when his message is allowed to blossom forth through a relationship. The outcome of this relationship is dialogue.

Thompson underscores the relational factor as essential to the proclamation to the extent that only dialogue is capable of revealing the nature of truth as compared to the inability of monologue. Thus Thompson writes :

The monological person does not comprehend, nor does monologue reveal, the nature of truth. In other words, monologue does not take the other person seriously - does not understand who he is or even that he is. Monologue pretends to take the truth ever so seriously, but actually only takes itself seriously....Dialogue, on the



other hand, because it takes the other person seriously, causes language to become the means to a genuine meeting between the persons in which truth is discovered.<sup>13</sup>

From the above quotation one can see that Thompson distinguishes between that truth which is "told" as opposed to that truth which is "discovered." He thereby supports an inductive dialogical method involving participation of all concerned over against the deductive, monological method of instruction.

In an article entitled, "What Is the Matter With Preaching," the Rev. Dr. Harry Fosdick stresses the need for the preacher to be clairvoyant. Fosdick, however, seems to feel that the preacher who is perceptive to life about him can build a dialogue effect into the composition of his sermon. Fosdick does not, therefore, propose any particular dialogical approach toward improving preaching, but instead stresses the preacher's need for clairvoyance as follows:

A wise preacher can so build his sermon that it will be not a dogmatic monologue but a co-operative dialogue in which all sorts of things in the minds of the congregation - objections, questions, doubts and confirmations - will be brought to the front and fairly dealt with. This requires clairvoyance on the preacher's part as to what the people are thinking, but any man who lacks that has no business to preach anyway.<sup>14</sup>

Fosdick suggests that one way in which this effect could be incorporated into the sermon would be through the use of such phrases as: "But some of you will say," or "Let us consider a few questions that inevitably arise," etc.<sup>15</sup> He also suggests that a preacher should start at the end of a

problem, that is, with the social concerns and present issues that disturb their minds.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the preacher being a dialogical person to those thoughts expressed by his audience, Howe speaks about the nonverbal response on the part of the listeners. He says, "There are always certain people in the congregation upon whom a preacher depends because, invarious nonverbal ways, they indicate that they are hearing and responding to him."<sup>17</sup> Howe enumerates such nonverbal actions as the shake of the head, the smile, the puckered brow, etc.<sup>18</sup>

The preacher must also involve himself with his people as well as confine himself to his study when he prepares to preach. This is the contention of Ritschl, who states: "He (the preacher) can only preach after having heard the Word, but he cannot hear the Word when he is alone and isolated from his people in his study."<sup>19</sup>

As can be seen from this study thus far, the dialogical character or personality of the preacher leads him to sermonize with a profound sense of perceptiveness and sensitivity with regard to the position and feelings of his parishioners. The following section will attempt to show the effort of dialogical preaching as it attempts to embody the communicational methods of dialogue to the fullest.

#### The Purpose and Nature of Preaching as Communication

## The Purpose and Nature of Preaching

If preaching is to be understood as communication, it is first of all necessary that each of these terms, "preaching" and "communication," be examined as to their meaning and purpose. Dr. Richard R. Caemmerer defines "preaching" according to its very content when he writes, "Preaching tells of God's gift of life, which He gives to men through His Son Jesus Christ, who died on the Cross and rose again that men might live."<sup>20</sup> Thus "preaching" is the proclamation of the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Yet, preaching is more than a mere "telling" or "proclaiming." For Caemmerer continues:

Preaching does more than tell of this gift of life. It gives it. Through preaching God tells of His life to the world....Preaching utters words. Yet, when it is truly preaching, it is the Word of God to man and the power of God at work in man.<sup>21</sup>

According to this definition, the nature and the purpose of preaching are bound up as one. Preaching not only tells of the gift, but it actually gives the gift. This definition also qualifies that which is "truly preaching" as being "the power of God at work in man." Although this does not mean that "truly preaching" is dependent upon man's response to that preaching, a response which makes manifest "the power of God at work in him," it does imply the idea that if there is to be any response on man's part to this preaching, it will require an effective kind of preaching to accomplish

the task. It then becomes what Caemmerer calls "truly preaching."

In view of the objection leveled at the Church in the introduction of this paper, the concern of this study is that of attempting to find a way in which preaching might more fully accomplish its purpose, namely, of becoming a powerful force in the hearer's life, a force which integrates his beliefs with his actions. The sermon, as a formalized expression of preaching, is instrumental in activating the powerful force of God's Word in man's daily life.

Preaching, however, does not necessarily end with the sermon. According to David Ernsberger, the sermon does not end until the listener makes his decision whether or not to take up the call to discipleship which the sermon offers him. Ernsberger compares the sermon to a lawyer's brief by emphasizing the function of a sermon to summon a verdict.<sup>22</sup> "The sermon," writes Ernsberger, "is therefore not finished when the preacher leaves the pulpit....The rest of preaching is about to begin in its application in the life of the people in their dispersion in the world."<sup>23</sup> Caemmerer expresses the purpose of preaching in much the same vein when he states that "preaching is a call for repentance." And he defines "repentance" as that process whereby a "change" is brought about in the hearer's mind.<sup>24</sup>

The Purpose and Nature of Communication

In answer to the question, "What is communication?", Clyde Reid suggests the following understanding:

It is helpful to remember that the word communication is based on the Latin communis, common. A leading researcher in the field of mass communications, Wilbur Schramm, has said that "when we communicate, we are trying to establish a 'commonness' with someone. That is, we are trying to share information, an idea, or an attitude ...." When we speak of communicating the Gospel, then, we are speaking of the effort to establish a commonness with someone in regard to some aspect of Christian faith.<sup>25</sup>

If the primary goal of preaching is to bring man unto repentance, as was said above, how then does this effort of establishing a commonness contribute to this goal? Caemmerer speaks directly to this question when he stresses the importance of preaching presenting an accurate diagnosis of the hearer's problem. He writes:

As the preacher diagnoses the obstacles for the calling,<sup>26</sup> he wants his hearers to come to the point that they say: "You are so right, you read my mind, and I should do what God wants me to do - help me!" He looks as if he wants to help, and he has promised to do so. He does. He preaches the Gospel.<sup>27</sup>

The implications of this observation for the need of dialogue are tremendous, as shall be seen later.

The purpose and nature of effective communication are bound up as one just as is the case with effective preaching. Communication is not a mere one-way transfer of information; this is only the half of it. Communication demands a response on the hearer's part before it is complete. Reid points this out in his comment on the last step toward effective communi-

cation, namely, action, when he writes:

Researchers now tend to regard communication as incomplete unless it has reached the point at which the communicator and listener have a common, shared understanding and are acting on the basis of this understanding. "A transfer of meaning has taken place which influences conduct."<sup>28</sup>

There are those who would argue that this "transfer of meaning" may be vital for effective communication, but that such a function or process belongs in the area of teaching rather than preaching. In an attempt to distinguish communication which is preaching apart from that which is more properly called teaching, the following discussion is presented.

#### The Role of Teaching on the Preaching Level

According to the above examination of the nature of preaching, it has been said that preaching is a "call to repentance," or a "call to commitment." However, it has also been pointed out that preaching embodies certain communicational functions as sharing, proclaiming, and telling in order to enforce its call. These functions are nothing more than the very ingredients vital to teaching. Caemmerer explains the role of teaching in preaching in the following:

The purpose of Christian preaching is not, strictly speaking, to inform but to empower toward goals and ends. Preaching imparts information and teaching, certainly. But its fact and teaching is a means toward further ends.<sup>29</sup>

Although teaching is a separate field in itself, it is a necessary step of preaching inasmuch as preaching is a means

whereby the informative facts of salvation are conveyed. Ernsberger, in speaking of the supportive role which teaching plays in preaching, even goes so far as to say that a "mutually supportive relationship can exist between preaching as a teaching method and other methods of teaching, of guiding changes in behavior and attitudes among the people of God."<sup>30</sup> He feels that such a "mutually supportive relationship" of teaching and preaching can find expression in dialogue discussions involving laity and clergy with regard to the content of the sermon. In support of his suggestion for such interaction, Ernsberger refers to the pedagogical method that our Lord and His apostles used during their ministries. He writes:

I think it is noteworthy that whenever our Lord spoke to the disciples or to the multitudes for any length of time, he would follow it up with discussions that would allow for dialogue between him and his hearers. We find this same pattern of preaching followed by dialogue in the record of the apostolic preaching found in the Book of Acts. Both Christ and his apostles evidently were aware of the inadequacies of preaching alone as a teaching method, as a means of facilitating redemptive change, and realized the importance of discussing what had been preached.<sup>31</sup>

On the basis of Ernsberger's concluding sentence, it is clear to see that he believes that dialogue aids preaching not only in its goal of teaching, but also in its goal toward bringing about a redemptive change (repentance) in the hearer's life.

On the basis of the investigation thus far into the purpose and nature of preaching as communication, one can see that preaching and communication in general travel the same roads toward reaching their destination. This is only logical

in view of the fact that preaching is a form of communication. The following discussion shall attempt to present various implications for dialogical preaching through an overview of the basic steps toward reaching effective communication and their reliance upon dialogue.

### The Relationship of Dialogue to Effective Communication

In order to gain an understanding of how effective communication is established, one must also consider those problems which hinder and sometimes prevent proper communication. Howe refers to these problems as "barriers" in the sense that they tend to prevent a meeting of meaning.<sup>32</sup> He lists five such barriers common to the preaching situation. An enumeration and brief elaboration of them according to Howe is as follows:

- 1) Language. Language can be both a barrier and a carrier. When people, for example, bring different meanings to the use of the same word, their communication gets hung up on that word.<sup>33</sup>
- 2) Images. ...images that the clergy may have of the laity, and the laity may have of the clergy; images both may have of the church, the gospel, religion, or of the relation of the church to the world.<sup>34</sup>
- 3) Differences. ...differences between people with respect to age, sex, education, cultural level, etc.<sup>35</sup>
- 4) Anxieties. These anxieties may be personal, situational, or topical.<sup>36</sup>
- 5) Anxieties which cause defensiveness. If we feel under attack, for example, a very natural defense is to reject the criticism by justifying ourselves as we are, with the result that criticism never becomes for us a source of learning.<sup>37</sup>



Howe does not in any way claim this list to be all-inclusive but warns that there are also other such barriers.

Howe is a firm believer that the only way to overcome these barriers of communication, whether they be related to the sermon or to any other area of communication, is through dialogue. He feels that monologue is not only victimized by these barriers, but that it actually helps create them.<sup>38</sup>

According to the results of a study conducted by Melvin DeFleur and Otto Larsen, entitled, The Flow of Information: An Experiment in Mass Communication, Reid distinguishes seven basic levels or phases involved in the process of communication and relates them to preaching.<sup>39</sup> He introduces these steps by emphasizing the importance of maintaining a distinction between that which is real communication and that which is only contact. He holds that this distinction is most important in the area of preaching, because preaching has as its ultimate goal the changing of a person's life and actions. This distinction becomes more evident in his explanation to the various steps of communication as follows:

1) Transmission occurs when the communicator presents his message (or delivers his sermon).<sup>40</sup>

Reid warns against the speaker's assumption that communication is reached by the mere broadcasting of a message.

2) Contact occurs when a listener has heard the message. Even though a person may appear to be listening to our sermon, we do not really know if we have established contact unless he reflects back to us in some way that he has heard.<sup>41</sup>

3) Feedback is the return process by which the listener reflects information to the original communicator....This also assumes that the original communicator is listening attentively for feedback. A minister may be as superficial with his acceptance of genuine feedback as parishoners are with their "I enjoyed your sermon" type of comments.<sup>42</sup>

4) Comprehension occurs when the listener genuinely understands what it is the communicator means by the message he has transmitted....It is theoretically possible for comprehension to occur without the introduction of feedback.... However, the chances for communication to reach the level of comprehension are greatly heightened when some feedback process is used.<sup>43</sup>

5) Acceptance. One of the difficulties with any form of one-way communication is that the communicator does not know when his listener has rejected his message. Nor does he know the basis of that rejection, for which he may have an answer....We now know from recent research that the way in which an individual hears and responds to a message is influenced by his primary group relationships.... but these primary relationships are rarely rooted in his church.<sup>44</sup>

6) Internalization. Even if the listener has accepted the message, it may be at a superficial level. It may not influence his way of behaving.<sup>45</sup>

7) Action. Researchers now tend to regard communication as incomplete unless it has reached the point at which the communicator and listener have a common, shared understanding and are acting on the basis of this understanding.<sup>46</sup>

Reid admits that there is nothing sacred about the above division of communicational steps. He likewise admits that it is entirely possible that effective communication may skip one or more of these steps. However, on the basis of research, he is strong to affirm the importance of success at each of these steps toward accomplishing communication.<sup>47</sup>

In accord with Howe,<sup>48</sup> Reid concludes: "To establish complete communication, monologue is rarely enough, and a two-way flow of communication is almost essential."<sup>49</sup>

Reid does not deny the importance of a well-written sermon for communicating the Gospel message, nor does he deny that such sermons are prevalent today. But in the following words, he points out some of the uncontrollable factors of the monologue approach, regardless of the number of well-written sermons, when he says:

We do not know that these sermons were well delivered, nor that anyone heard them, much less understood them, accepted them, internalized them, or acted upon their message. We do not know if they were shouted in a holy tome or mumbled under the preacher's breath.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to the already-mentioned complexities involved in effective communication, there are other problems peculiar to the contemporary scene which challenge the preacher's task of communicating the Gospel. These problems border upon the psychological and sociological areas of life, and they strongly suggest the use of dialogical preaching.

### Contemporary Problems Confronting Preaching

#### Psychological Areas of Controversy

In recent years especially, the Church has become involved in various issues of controversy. The Church has had to take a stand, either pro or con in such issues as integration, open-housing, the war in Vietnam, birth-control,

and many others. The Church has not only found difficulty at times in making her decision, but she has also found difficulty in leading her people to agree to that decision once it has been reached. One of the Church's most popular persuasive instruments for such a situation continues to be that of the Sunday morning sermon, especially that sermon which is solely monological in principle.

Bernard Berelson, a recognized scholar in the field of mass communications, makes the following observation with regard to the persuasive power of mass communications:

Mass communication can be effective in producing a shift on unfamiliar, lightly felt, peripheral issues - those that do not matter much to the audience or are not tied to audience pre-dispositions. On the others, it is effective in reinforcing opinions but only infrequently changes them.<sup>51</sup>

In view of this observation, there is a strong indication that any form of mass communication, and this would include the conventional form of preaching, is of little value in changing a person's thinking in such controversial issues as were mentioned above.

In an article that appeared in the October, 1963 issue of Time, a similar observation was made to the above. The article centered around the racial crisis of the south and specifically reported some of the steps which the clergy had taken to stem this crisis. Despite the Church's stance in support of integration, Time reported that the practice of segregation was still prevalent in many of the churches. In

its evaluation of the Church's efforts to promote racial equality, Time placed little value upon preaching. The article concluded:

But many signs show that preaching alone is disappointingly ineffective. Chief among them is the segregation that still thrives within the church despite a striking increase in sermons on integration since the Jan. conference in Chicago.<sup>52</sup>

In an effort to supplement the force of preaching on controversial subjects, the dialogical approach has been employed through sermon seminars. At least this was the approach taken by Ernsberger while preaching a series of sermons on the social ethical teachings of his denomination during an election year. He felt that the only fair and effective way to handle such matters would be through discussion. He explains the rationale and importance undergirding this approach in the following words:

Because Christian social ethics are a matter of profound controversy in the church today, I felt that I could neither be fair nor effective as a communicator of the gospel without providing an opportunity for lay people to react to this presentation of their denomination's social teachings.<sup>53</sup>

#### Sociological Understanding of the New Authority Structure

A second major problem confronting the effectiveness of preaching today, especially monological preaching, is that of the new authority structure in society. The problem hinges around the authoritative position of the pastor in the Church.

The pastor is no longer the most knowledgeable figure of the Church that he once was in the past. With today's growing

emphasis upon education and the penetrating forces of mass media, many believe that the laity today is generally as well informed of the current events and the various educational disciplines as the pastor. Reid describes how this new authority structure came about and emphasizes its significance when he writes:

The narrowed gap in both formal education and experience may be the most crucial factor in this changed authority structure. Many parishioners not only have bachelor's degrees and Ph.D.'s, but they have instant access to information from all over the world.<sup>54</sup>

The significance of the educated and well-informed laity, according to Reid, is that their opportunities for real participation in secular affairs have increased. As a result, they have learned the value of making contributions by exercising their voice and airing their opinions on different matters. This new perspective carries over into the church as well. There they wish to have the same feeling that their contribution will benefit themselves as well as those around them. Reid sums up this new kind of outlook of the laymen in the following words:

He is learning by experience that his authority is worth something, and that he need not sit in abject dependence upon his superiors in many areas of his life. He can now contribute, speak and be listened to, and make a difference to others who share his life. He is learning to participate meaningfully in this world.<sup>55</sup>

At the same time, Reid is careful to point out that this new perspective on the part of the laity is not to the minister's disadvantage, but is rather an advantage to the minister

in the sense that the people are willing and capable of helping him with his many minor duties. And finally, the minister can harness this energetic spirit of his people in helping to communicate the Gospel through dialogical preaching.

The arguments in favor of a dialogical approach to preaching are many. When one seriously examines the purpose and nature of preaching as communication, he sees both the theoretical advantages as well as the theological importance of dialogical preaching as compared to the conventional, monological approach. In the coming chapter, this paper will present a number of structures which have with some success followed the dialogical principle. Each structure will have somewhat of a different procedure; each one may grow out of a special need; each one has its strengths as well as its possibilities for improvement. They will represent a wide spectrum of Christianity in the sense that they have been tried in a wide variety of denominations. With the exception of one, these structures are limited to the United States.

## CHAPTER III

### POSSIBLE STRUCTURES FOR ATTAINING DIALOGICAL PREACHING

#### Orientation Period

According to results compiled by the Institute of Advanced Pastoral Studies in regard to sermon-seminars, there is a definite correlation between the amount of time a person has spent in such seminars and the amount of satisfaction he has derived from these meetings. For this reason, Reid suggests that the planners of the sermon-seminar are aware of this fact before embarking on such an adventure lest they soon become disappointed, expecting results too soon. He explains that a certain period of time must elapse during the seminar process before a significant level of trust and relationship has developed.<sup>1</sup>

It is the suggestion of Howe that a congregation about to undertake a particular dialogue structure be properly oriented as to the purpose of preaching itself and the role that the laity plays in the church's preaching. He says, "A first step would be to take sermon time to talk with the congregation about the ministry of preaching, describing both the minister's and the layman's role, and the relationship of the two."<sup>2</sup> Howe is also concerned about instructing new members of the congregation as to the purpose of preaching. He considers such training of the laity to be "every bit as important as the education of the clergy, for without a



a trained laity, skillfully obedient to their ministry in the world, the ministry of the clergy is vain indeed."<sup>3</sup>

#### Cooperation of Laity and Clergy in Choosing the Text

One of the first steps in the direction toward involvement between laity and clergy in preaching is the possibility of the two cooperating in selecting the sermon text for the coming Sunday(s). Although this process does not allow for as thorough a discussion of the text as does one of the more immediate dialogical structures, it is in keeping with the dialogical principle and is therefore worthy of consideration at this time.

In the majority of denominations, the minister is the one who ultimately chooses the text. He may make his choice systematically through a long range perspective, or he may choose the text at random with no particular scheme in mind. Ritschl, who is a firm believer in lay-participation in choosing the text, begins his discussion of this matter with a few comments regarding the value of some of the more popular methods toward choosing the text. In his evaluation of the pericope centered method employed chiefly by the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Episcopal churches, Ritschl points out what he believes to be a basic weakness. His feeling is that tradition must give way to the immediate needs of the particular congregation on this matter. He writes: "Indeed, must not one church hear today the end of Romans 8, while another must urgently be invited to hear Matt. 24, or a

word of judgment from Jeremiah?"<sup>4</sup> Ritschl also contends that such a method as this is guilty of picking out important parts of the Bible and thereby often slights the Old Testament. He raises the question: "Who could judge what the "important" passages of the Bible are?"<sup>5</sup> Ritschl comments on another popular method of choosing the text which he feels to be even more detrimental than that of the pericope method, namely, that one in which the minister chooses the text purely out of his own understanding of the people's needs at that particular time.<sup>6</sup> Ritschl finally concludes his discussion of the matter by stressing the necessity of lay-participation in the choosing of the text when he writes:

The sermon text, therefore, grows out of the relationship between the minister and the congregation. The choice must come from contacts in Bible stories, house visits, and session meetings. The preacher has to live with his text throughout the whole week; that is, not in privacy, but in brotherhood with his people in the Church. No preacher should avoid sharing the sermon text with as many people as possible.<sup>7</sup>

Although there may be some validity to Ritschl's criticisms of the more popular methods today of choosing the text, Ritschl is not at all clear as to his definition of lay-participation in this area. From the above quotation, Ritschl's description of the layman's role in choosing the text is solely a passive one. He makes no suggestions as to how the laity can actively aid the minister in selecting the text other than simply being themselves. One might suspect that Ritschl has a personal axe to grind with ministers in general. He is

quick to criticize the minister who chooses the sermon text on his own understanding of the people's needs, yet he gives no further direction to the minister in determining the needs of his people other than the normal points of contact which any minister experiences with his people. One might ask, "How else does any minister arrive at an understanding of his people's needs other than the rather obvious ways which Ritschl describes?" Ritschl's argument is weak in the sense that he does not offer any constructive advice for either minister or layman as to how they might cooperate in choosing the text; he is reluctant to commit himself.

Joint effort on the part of the clergy and laity in choosing the text presents certain problems.<sup>8</sup> Such was the case with an experiment conducted by former psychology professor George Morlan in Springfield, Massachusetts. Morlan did not actually allow the congregation to choose the text, but he did send out a questionnaire to each member which was to indicate the sermonic substance preferred by the members. Morlan, operating on the assumption that preaching might profit by using the business techniques of market analysis together with a measurement of the people's response to different phrasing and pictorial illustrations, devised and employed what he called an "open-end interview questionnaire." The questionnaire requested the parishioner to describe those sermons which he remembered best. Its ultimate objective was to help the minister determine the preference of his parish-

ioners with regard to the content of sermons while it would also indicate those forms of communication such as pictorial illustrations and phrasing which were best retained by the parishioner. Morlan equated the method of market analysis with that of being sensitive to the specific needs of the laity. In this way, thought Morlan, "the pastor would direct his sermons where they need to be directed and where they can do the most good."<sup>9</sup>

The results of his questionnaire proved to be of interest in view of their inconsistencies. Out of 371 opinions expressed, 259 people wanted sermons to be restricted to faith and religious topics. In commenting on these results, however, Morlan explains that a problem of ambiguity rose to the surface. He explains as follows:

...a great many who say they want sermons to be related to practical problems do not understand what they mean. For example, the application of religious principles to practical problems, in their opinion, often did not include discussion of problems of government, economics, or international affairs....Majority opinion does not tell what is right, but the survey does reveal that there is need for clarification of the general nature of meaning itself.<sup>10</sup>

The very fact that people vary in the associations they attach to such a common concept as "practical" indicates a real problem for any church attempting to pool the thinking of its laity with that of the clergy in choosing the text. There is a good possibility, however, that in the dialogical process, people will have the opportunity to explain exactly what they mean with their terminology and thereby overcome such ambiguity.

In regard to those forms of communication best retained by the people, Morlan reports:

An analysis of the sermons recalled revealed that word pictures were best retained; next, those that concerned the problems and interests of the people; third, those that shocked, and, least of all, sermons that "stuck to religion."<sup>11</sup>

Having found no other reported incidents of cooperation between clergy and laity in choosing the text, the writer continues with a presentation of dialogical structure.

#### The Self-Test

One of the less known and less direct means for a pastor to stimulate and promote dialogue with his people is through the so-called "self-test" method. In an attempt to explore the pedagogic possibilities of the sermon, Rev. Lionel D. Skamser began the practice of administering a series of tests to his people by means of the Sunday bulletin. The test was based on the content of the sermon and service for that particular Sunday. Skamser gave it the name "self-test," since it was an opportunity for each of his parishioners to test himself upon attending the Sunday morning worship service. Most of the questions would deal with the sermon text, focusing attention upon the historical facts related in the text, the doctrine proclaimed by the text, and the understanding and application of the text to life. The remaining questions concerned the propers and the liturgical emphasis for that Sunday. Each test would have from 15 to 20 questions,

usually in the form of multiple choice. The correct answers would be listed on the last page together with a scale on how the person might score himself. Since the audience consisted of people of all types and ages in various stages of mental and spiritual health, Skamser resorted to using questions based on the most apparent truths of the sermon as well as those questions which would probe more deeply.

According to a questionnaire which Skamser administered to a cross-section of the congregation concerning the effectiveness of the self-test, the general reaction was that the people found the self-test to be helpful to them in the following ways:

- 1) It helps them review and retain the message of the service.
- 2) It helps them clear up misunderstandings arising when the pastor may not preach lucidly enough or the members may not listen carefully enough.
- 3) It helps them underscore what is really important.
- 4) It alerts them to listen carefully and guides them as to what to listen for. And this skill improves as members take the test week after week.
- 5) It gives Sunday school and Bible class teachers opportunity to follow through on the sermon.<sup>12</sup>

One of the hazards of the self-test, according to Skamser, had to do with the scoring. He writes:

Over half of those who found the test least helpful were people who did not score very well on the test. A self-test may be discouraging to the member who is a good Christian but does not find it easy to "pass" in a testing program.<sup>13</sup>

As for the positive values of such an approach, Skamser lists the following advantages:

1) The members of our church had opportunity to live with the sermon day by day, not just once a week; 2) They retained last week's sermon for a greater length of time; 3) They were better prepared for the coming Sunday service; and 4) The pastor was led to examine in greater depth Biblical and doctrinal materials for each sermon.<sup>14</sup>

#### Worship Service Discussion Groups

Research in the area of dialogical preaching reveals a wide variety of sermon-discussion groups each having its own peculiar steps of procedure. However, if one examines each group in relation to its connection with the worship service itself, he will arrive at two basic groupings: those which are conducted as part of the worship service, either before or after the sermon delivery, and those which are conducted at a time separate from the service, either during the previous week or the following week. In order to maintain some clarity in the present study, the fore-mentioned distinction shall be employed.

The more popular form of group discussion revolving around the sermon is that of the sermon-seminar conducted within the worship service, and in particular, that which is held immediately following the sermon. This type of seminar or dialogue is usually referred to as "sermon plus discussion." Within this type of discussion there are also a number of variable factors as shall be seen from the following cases.

One such promoter of the "sermon plus discussion" technique is the Rev. Paul Malte of Concord, California.<sup>15</sup> Malte

has explored the possibilities of dialogue preaching at a suburban church, a college chapel, and a veteran's hospital. His procedure is a simple one; at the time of the text-reading the congregation is alerted for conversation after the sermon. He limits his "pointed homily" to 15 minutes, steps out of his pulpit, and begins a 10 minute dialogue with the members.

Since he does not follow this practice every Sunday, he places a special announcement in the bulletin on the appropriate Sunday reading as follows:

In the service today we shall try dialogue preaching. After the sermon, worshipers are invited to converse about its theme. Please feel free to participate personally and to the point. The preparation, delivery, and follow-through of a sermon are a mutual responsibility. Pastor and people together, as one body, speak the Word back and forth. In the dialogue sermon today please participate by listening well and by speaking out with personal concern for all of us.<sup>16</sup>

Malte also offers advice to the pastor who attempts this method of dialogue. He emphasizes the importance of making the entire service compact and to the point by singing fewer (but more meaningful) hymns and by making the homily pointed, provocative, and sketchlike in such a way that excessive verbiage gives way to apt insights conducive for further discussion. Malte does not rely upon a set format of questions to begin the discussion but simply opens the dialogue by saying, "Your comments, questions, even criticisms, are welcome. Please feel free to share personal experiences in line with the sermon."<sup>17</sup>

Malte also gives some comforting encouragement to the



pastor who may be reluctant to try this technique. He says:

The preacher has to feel relatively secure inside himself, and he must trust the real presence of Christ in the "human" church. The church is not a body of superpeople but a group of human beings very much like the very human pastor.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, Malte cautions the pastor not to wear out this method, but to use it occasionally in a series of two or three. He also suggests trying variants such as families discussing the sermon right there, two persons nearby (other than family) conversing. And with regard to the pastor's personal benefit, he recommends that the preacher might well evaluate the sermon later the same day, noting strengths and weaknesses, and marking comments by parishioners.<sup>19</sup>

Another promoter of the "sermon plus discussion" technique is the Rev. Eugene F. Bleidorn,<sup>20</sup> who has employed this dialogue approach for almost a year and a half primarily during the weekday masses while occasionally also during the regular Sunday mass. The attendance ranged from 250-100 (including children) at the weekday morning masses with anywhere from 12-150 at the evening masses.

Bleidorn outlines his procedure through a question and answer approach as follows:

- 1) How much time should be allotted for the dialogue homily? About 15 minutes.
- 2) Who speaks next? Those who raise their hands.
- 3) How about their being unwilling to speak? If the group keeps silent for a while after the priest has invited their comments - don't panic. Let the silence settle down for a while. People need time to reflect, to gather their thoughts, to put them

into words. After quite a long pause, it may be helpful for the priest to suggest an area or two for discussion. This latter situation will not be the case very often.<sup>21</sup>

The advantages of such dialogue are many, as Bleidorn indicates in the following list:

- 1) Having real life applications being made by the laity.
- 2) Every member who takes part in this Bible discussion is forced more than otherwise to think things out, and he also becomes more articulate in an area of previous small competence. Because of the varied life experiences of the people present, we in the group can live vicariously a little and learn to broaden our views.
- 3) Building of the community. From time to time we encourage people to say their name as they make their contribution to the homily, and it is delightful to see how, after they have learned a little about each other through a mutual exchange in church, they follow the natural impulse to meet and to talk after Mass.
- 4) Growing sensitivity to others. Examples of personal witness have much more impact than the examples cited by the monologuing homilist.
- 5) The needs of a specific group will much more probably be met, and in-depth treatment can be given to those areas of need expressed by the members of the group.
- 6) There is the fact that personal involvement in a homily will more likely trigger a personal response. It is so easy to sit back and daydream, and it is so comfortable, when one other person does all the talking. But if one is in the middle of a group and different voices are heard and witness is being given all around one, the urge is there to speak also, and having spoken, to be committed to an idea or an action.<sup>22</sup>

Concerning the role of the leader, Bleidorn describes his function as being threefold: to introduce, to preside, and to conclude. He expands upon this in the following:

The leader's role is to acknowledge the speakers in order, to respond personally from time to time as he feels it helpful, to summarize nearly every statement without himself commenting on it, and to keep the conversation flowing and at times perhaps to steer it. He must be careful not to discourage the flow of the conversation by making a personal comment and evaluation of each statement given.<sup>23</sup>

Bleidorn encourages the leader to use the non-directive approach throughout the dialogue and especially in dealing with the difficult person. Speaking from his own dialogical experiences, he boasts of the fact that he has never encountered an undesirable situation that he could not control by simply applying the non-directive counselling technique of accepting the emotional content of a person's remark without getting his own emotions riled up. In this respect, he also places great confidence in the group's ability to control a violent outburst should it ever arise. He writes:

Usually, every group has a number of people who are perhaps by nature peacemakers and who will readily enter the conversation to attempt to soothe ruffled feathers. Furthermore, no matter how foolish or ignorant a statement may be, there is usually some fragment of truth that can be taken out and found to be acceptable to all.<sup>24</sup>

A second type of sermon discussion activity is that which is held prior to the sermon within the worship service. An example of this pre-sermon discussion is that which the Rev. Vernon T. Trahms of Pamona, California. He adds a new twist to those groups thus studied by dividing the audience into separate groups according to age: children, young people, and adults. This division takes place prior to the singing of the sermon hymn in the Morning Service. He describes the

procedure thus:

I take off my clergy robe and begin the general discussion with one large group. Members of each group discuss how the text for the day is meaningful in their lives, and we reassemble to share our conclusions and answer questions that come up. The formal service resumes with the singing of the third hymn. I robe and go into the pulpit for a short, inspirational summary and challenging thrust.<sup>25</sup>

His theology behind such dialogue is based upon the belief that "the purpose of worship is to get something and to give something to God." He has found that "most people have never been taught to give; hence we give people practice for personal involvement. Every given sermon text can be beneficial to everyone - if everyone is personally connected with the text and ready to listen."<sup>26</sup>

Trahms also believes that such group activity helps to overcome the barriers that prevent people from getting to know their neighbors as well as themselves. He says, "The world today is one of strangers. We are strangers not only to our neighbors, our fellow workers, our wives and husbands and children, but also to ourselves. We are afraid of each other. Such fear can be overcome when the security of the Christian faith asserts itself by means of group activity."<sup>27</sup>

Trahms does not indicate how often he employs this group activity, although I would assume that this is the normal procedure at his church. He also gives suggestions as to how dialogue may be carried out successfully in other facets of the church life.<sup>28</sup>

## Sermon Seminars Outside of the Worship Service

In an effort to foster vital communication between laity and clergy several churches in the recent years have employed special sermon-seminars in addition to the regular worship service. In his book, Parish Back Talk, the Rev. Browne Barr describes a pattern which is being used in a number of churches.<sup>29</sup> As a result of the congregation's study of Dietrich Ritschl's book, entitled A Theology of Proclamation, both pastor and people became convinced that if the entire church were to engage in the ministry of the church, then it must somehow share responsibility with the minister for the preparation of the sermon. Some of the unique features of these sermon seminars include the practice of ex-corde prayer on the part of the people immediately following the seminar, and the use of the radio during the Lenten season whereby the pastor gives an exegetical introduction of the text to his people as they meet in neighbor or family groupings.

Barr describes the sermon seminar procedure thus:

Each Sunday's calendar carries the announcement of the text for the following Sunday or the lesson which the sermon will seek to open up - "expose." Then on Wednesday nights the entire congregation is invited to come to the church for a sermon seminar at 8:15 p.m. A small but significant remnant of the parish usually appears. The hour is late, to enable parents of young children to come more easily and also to discourage casual attendants. The first announcement of this meeting carried the admonition that this was not another "activity" of the church to be supported. We begin promptly at 8:15 p.m., and the minister who is to preach on the following Sunday does a brief non-technical exegesis of the passage....The effort is to try to make as clear as possible the meaning and intent of the biblical writer.

Following the exegesis the seminar divides into four or five groups of eight to ten each for forty minutes of discussion of the passage. Each group elects a leader, and it is widely announced that the ultimate in leadership in these groups is to get through the entire forty minutes without a word from the leader. The groups are urged to follow the lead of the scripture, but to remember their own problems and questions of faith and life. The preacher sits in on one group, and later gets spontaneous reports from the other groups. He tries to listen and speak only rarely and then in his role as the exegete. It is here that the congregation begins to prepare the sermon; but in the process witnessing and confession and doubting and support have taken place. Sometimes Christian discipline and rebuke have been experienced profitably; and in the sermon seminar care is always taken to see that each person is established as a person with a name, a critically important feature if we are to retain the genius of Protestant parish life in our large un-Protestant sized churches. At 9:10 p.m. the groups reassemble in the larger seminar for a sentence or two of report and for fifteen minutes of prayer.<sup>30</sup>

During Lent, the pattern is modified to include a larger segment of the congregation gathered in neighborhood groups, with the minister's introduction via radio. Other variations of the sermon seminar in Barr's congregation have included breakfast meetings, downtown luncheon meetings, and meetings in members' homes. Barr considers such seminars to be of most value to himself in so far as they make him more aware of the realistic pressures and problems of his people as he preaches, while at the same time it helps them in the process.

The sermon seminar idea found an early expression in the postwar work of Horst Symanowski in Germany. Symanowski, as a pastor and shop-worker, found himself living in a situation where the church was forced to go to the people where they were, to share in their suffering and their labors as fully

as possible. Symanowski became convinced that a basic change in ministers' understanding of their task and of their relation to the laity was necessary if the church was to come to grips with this challenge.

Symanowski, in an effort to meet the people where they were, began to meet weekly with his fellow workers to discuss the text for the coming Sunday sermon. This group became known as the "Friday-evening circle," and a description of its progress and development is as follows:

Usually the group discusses the sermon text upon which Symanowski or one of his associates will be preaching the following Sunday, in order to help the minister with his sermon preparation. After a very brief introduction of the text, often lasting for two or three hours. Yet, not one member of this group is an active church member. A few are nominal Roman Catholics, a few are outspoken atheists, most are nominal Protestants, but not one of them has the slightest interest in going to church - not even to hear "their" sermon! The language of the liturgy is strange and unintelligible to them; the whole atmosphere of the traditional parish church is foreign to them. They do not feel at home there - nor do they feel that what happens there has any meaning for their daily life and work.<sup>31</sup>

This type of sermon seminar contains several strange ingredients, the most outstanding one of which is that the members of these groups are not members of the church, nor do they express any desire to become members at the church where "their" sermon is preached. Symanowski does not say to what extent he allows their opinions and insights to become embodied in his sermon. Although one might question the theological soundness of such an approach, Symanowski's attempt to speak to the real needs of the average man is to

be commended. The crux of the matter has to do with his ability to judge the spiritual complexion of his real audience on Sunday, whether they be of the caliber which constitutes the seminars, or whether they are genuine Christians desiring to hear a message addressed to genuine Christians. In addition to this technicality, one might be tempted to ask Symanowski why he does not attempt to instruct his fellow workers in regard to the liturgy of the church or any other customs of the traditional church which may be strange to them.

Another unusual sociological setting for the structures of the traditional church is that of the inner city. In trying to overcome these barriers, George W. Webber, pastor of an East Harlem Protestant Parish, has relied upon the effectiveness of the small group method of dialogue. Before he feels his people are qualified to participate in active dialogue of preaching they should engage in a thorough Bible study program. He describes his task as preacher to the inner city and their need for Bible study as follows:

In the inner city, where the Bible is being taken seriously, preaching is biblical through and through. The preacher defines his task as "breaking open" the word of God to the congregation. For preaching to have integrity, however, the congregation is required to be as fully involved as the preacher. The proclamation of the word depends not only upon the faithfulness of the minister, but also upon the corporate involvement of the whole people of God. When the members of a congregation are engaged in a continuing study of the Bible they also are able to enter into the preaching of the word as active participants in a dialogue. Preaching is a corporate act and demands participation.<sup>32</sup>



Webber thus underscores the emphasis of other advocates of dialogical preaching by laying heavy stress upon preaching as demanding participation, but he also emphasizes the connection between Bible study and the ability to participate in a preaching dialogue.

Webber's procedure for sermon seminars differs from any of the others thus covered in this study. The major difference is seen in the following description which shows that the preacher begins dialogue on the professional level.

In the East Harlem Parish the minister responsible for the Sunday sermon goes through this process. On Monday he studies the passage with his colleagues at a staff Bible study, seeking to acquire, with the help of all critical tools, the necessary professional preparation concerning the passage. On Wednesday at a noon staff lunch he outlines his sermon as he then sees it, accepting suggestions and picking up ideas and usually criticism. This provides for his colleagues who will be in lay Bible study groups scattered through the parish that evening, some basis for focusing the group discussions. Often one or another of the groups will discuss what they think should be included in the sermon or what topics dealt with. On Thursday morning after eight-thirty worship, the preacher receives the reports of these groups and on the basis of them writes the final draft of his sermon. This process is not as complicated as it sounds and does bring a vitality to preaching that often engenders true dialogue between God and His people.<sup>33</sup>

From this description one's attention is drawn to the way dialogue is employed in practically every stage of the sermon's development by both the professional people and the laity, while at the same time, one notices the way Bible study is coordinated with sermon preparation.

David J. Ernsberger, in his lecture entitled, Preaching For Renewal, refers to another type of sermon seminar unlike

any thus covered in this study. He writes:

Other churches provide for such re-actor groups only in special seasons and occasions. For a number of years Gerald Jud, while pastor of the First Congregational Church of West Haven, Connecticut, conducted a creative Lenten program along these lines. His congregation is organized geographically into neighborhood groups called colonies. The Lenten sermons he preached were mimeographed, and each was distributed following the service on the Sunday it was delivered. The content of the sermon provided the basis for discussion when the colony groups gathered in the homes during the following week. Thus, the message of the sermon was not only heard, but also read, reflected upon, and discussed.<sup>34</sup>

This is one of the few cases recorded of what might be called a post-sermon seminar. While it does not offer an opportunity for dialogue between the pastor and his people in the preparation of the sermon, it does provide a means whereby the spoken word might be more thoroughly digested on a dialogue level among the laity.

Ernsberger continues his treatment of re-actor groups by relating how he followed a similar pattern during two Lenten seasons with one significant addition. He supplemented the resources for discussion by adding a basic text related to the sermon series on which he was preaching. "This served to amplify the basis of common experience and exposure upon which dialogue in the group is based," says Ernsberger.<sup>35</sup>

#### Pastoral Sermon Seminars

In addition to the previously mentioned group in East Harlem in which Webber speaks of dialogue on a professional level in as much as the minister consults with his "colleagues"

on the various stages of his sermon preparation, there is little written of such clerical dialogue. The Rev. Dr. John Thompson, in an article entitled, "When Preaching is Dialogue," suggests and strongly advises the practice of Pastoral Sermon Seminars, although he does not speak from experience. He writes (exhorts):

Begin with fellow pastors in your community meeting early in the week to discuss the sermon for the following Sunday. Different pastors will be given definite areas of responsibility for study. Such an exercise makes for more thorough preparation with no more time than you would ordinarily put into preparation by yourself.<sup>36</sup>

#### Summary

On the basis of the above survey, one can see that there are basically three steps involved in the total process of dialogical preaching. These steps are: purpose, procedure, and end result. As one examines the above structures, he recognizes the significant role that variety plays in each of these steps. Although the basic purpose, principle, and goal of dialogical preaching remains the same, each situation has its own secondary features. One of the reasons for this wide variety is the fact that there is no one set-pattern established for "successful" dialogical preaching. Each church which promotes and practices dialogical preaching does so in view of its own unique needs and resources. Each situation, therefore, demands its own method of procedure, and will consequently harvest its own variety of benefits.

## CHAPTER IV

### EVALUATION OF DIALOGICAL PREACHING

#### General Reactions

Variety is not only characteristic of dialogical preaching in general, but it is also an essential ingredient of each individual dialogical structure in the sense that no congregation should become bound to one particular way of implementing dialogical preaching. In fact, Malte<sup>1</sup> even goes so far as to advise not using dialogue preaching at every worship service.

As dialogical preaching progresses, toward its ultimate goal of helping the believer to integrate his faith with his everyday life, it is interesting to note the many fringe benefits that follow in the process. Some of the more common or obvious ones seem to be fellowship and sensitivity experienced by the participants. Sermon seminars and other structures of dialogical preaching also provide an atmosphere conducive for even the more reserved church member to try his spiritual wings. Yet, Bleidorn is the only one who mentions this benefit specifically.<sup>2</sup>

In conclusion, two other points of interest have come to the attention of the writer. First of all, among those structures presented, not one suggested the possibility of a committee or group of people from the laity getting together with the minister to decide on the sermon text. There are

no reported incidents of clergy and laity cooperating on this level.

And secondly, this survey would seem to indicate that those Lutheran churches practicing dialogical preaching prefer to use that discussion method which is conducted within the worship service. Sermon seminars held outside held outside of the Sunday morning service are nowhere reported in Lutheran circles.

#### Reactions from the Clergy

Although the following reaction to the value of dialogical preaching through the use of small groups is of a general rather than personal nature, it provides a reliable understanding of the clergy perspective. Reid reports the following reactions of a number of ministers who experienced dialogical preaching through the small group method. He reports:

Nine of the ten (ministers) interviewed testified that their sermon preparation had been influenced by the feedback gained through the groups. They found stimulation and guidance for their sermons and came to know their people and their needs better. Most also reported that parishioners involved in small groups increased in attentiveness and sensitivity toward their preaching. The ministers' reports verified the information from the group members themselves, indicating an increase in understanding of the sermon as well as an increase in attendance and leadership activity.<sup>3</sup>

A similar feeling is expressed by the Rev. Otis E. Young. Having been asked the question, "What relationship do you see, if any, between the small group program in your church and preaching?", Otis replies:

There is certainly a direct relationship between these small groups, particularly ours which meet weekly, and preaching. I find that it helps my preaching. Through these regular and intensive contacts, I am constantly made more aware of what's really bothering people. Many of my sermons have grown out of these groups. Often in our meetings we talk about the sermon and I get comments on what was understood and what was not understood. All of the persons in these groups have said that their experience in them has made the sermon much more relevant and meaningful. In fact they testify that the whole worship service has taken on more meaning. I am convinced that groups such as these are almost an imperative for relevant preaching in our time.<sup>4</sup>

#### Reactions from the Laity

The following reactions come from two people who were participants in sermon seminars at the First Congregation Church of Berkely, California.<sup>5</sup> Although they testify to the value of the sermon seminar particularly in helping to make the coming sermon more meaningful to them, their primary appreciation of the sermon seminar concerns the immediate benefits which they received at the meetings themselves.

The following three quotations from the same person reveal the process of growth which the sermon seminars help to promote for the participant. This person indicates that he grew in three dimensions: growth in scriptural understanding, growth in fellowship, and growth in prayer life. This can be seen from his following reactions:

At first I think I came with the idea of bettering my pityfully inadequate knowledge of the Bible. And perhaps at first I stayed just for the sake of a good argument, which I always enjoy. But it ultimately dawned on me that the Bible was far more

closely related to life - and to my life - than I had ever realized before.<sup>6</sup>

In time something else happened. The word "fellowship" is bandied about a church to a considerable extent, but it never had any special meaning to me. It was a group of people. Ours is a large parish, and while I am not a shy person I always had the feeling of sitting around on the edges in a rather useless manner. The sermon seminars changed that. And I came to feel that I had been really knitted into the fabric of a fellowship - a close group of people who were all searching for clues to a closer relationship to God. It was a most supportive feeling, particularly at a time when my normal life pattern had been shattered rather badly.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, and this took a long time to develop, prayer took on a new dimension. Whether it was a sense of the closeness of the group or because our minds had been stretched by the personal effort of discussion, I don't know. But I know it was true for me. There were some nights when it had an intensity that was almost electric.<sup>8</sup>

Mary Eakin, another participant of this same series of sermon seminars, underscores what was said above in regard to the value of the sermon seminar program. And in particular, she tells how these seminars can break down the barriers that prevent a genuine fellowship. She relates one incident in particular in which this was the case. She writes:

One sermon which students received with particular gratitude was made lively and relevant for them through subtle use of an incident recounted quite casually by a well-to-do, retired, conservative member of the group with whom the college crowd would normally have thought they had little in common.<sup>9</sup>

Thus the sermon seminars can be conducive for a pooling of resources or sharing of the Spirit's various gifts for the good of all.

Eakin also relates how the sermon seminar can result in creating a certain eagerness and curiosity for the member as he anticipates the coming sermon. She says:

We who participate in the discussions are invariably eager to hear the sermon when Sunday comes around, for we know well that the minister's continuing labor with the text may reveal a message quite different from anything we have discussed. Nor has the Word ceased to work in us. In what manner will it be spoken later?<sup>10</sup>

Preaching by its very nature does not allow for any objective evaluation of its success; such is the case with dialogical preaching as well. However, the average minister can usually rely upon the visible statistical results, such as the number of those who attend the service, as a rather fair indication whether or not the Word has been effective through preaching. According to this rather objective measurement, the ministers above agree that dialogical preaching is effective. For any further evaluation of dialogical preaching, one must rely upon the personal reactions of those individuals who can speak from their own experience with it. The above reactions of the clergy indicate that dialogical preaching aids them in their sermon preparation and also in their understanding of their people's needs. The above reactions of the laity likewise present a favorable picture of dialogical preaching. The Word becomes more meaningful to their lives both from the pulpit through the sermon and from their fellow members through discussion and mutual consolation.



## CHAPTER V

### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- 1) To what extent might the conventional form of preaching incorporate the dialogical principle:
  - a) through the sermon's more frequent use of questions which typify the attitudes and objections raised by the average layman?
  - b) by following the sermon with a litany read only by the congregation and written for two separate levels of the congregation, such as parents and children, so that each group might more accurately express those needs peculiar to itself?
- 2) In what way might dialogical preaching enhance the parishioner's understanding of:
  - a) worship?
  - b) prayer?
- 3) How might pastoral-sermon-seminars contribute to dialogical preaching?
- 4) What significance for dialogical preaching is the choice of the sermon text and the way in which it is chosen?

## FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Clyde Reid, "Preaching and the Nature of Communication," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (October 1963), 40.

<sup>2</sup>Clyde Reid, The Empty Pulpit (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>For a more detailed understanding of the distinction between method and principle in dialogical preaching, see Ruel Howe, Partners in Preaching (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967), p. 47.

## FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>I Peter 2:9

<sup>2</sup>Col. 3:16

<sup>3</sup>As quoted by Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), vol. III, 442 (St. L. X:1589.)

<sup>4</sup>Titus 1:7-9; see also I Timothy 3:1-7 for a similar list of qualifications for the bishop with the additional feature that he be an "apt teacher" (vs. 2), and one who is able to manage his own household properly (vs. 4-5).

<sup>5</sup>As quoted by Pieper p. 455 (St. L. XVII:114.)

<sup>6</sup>Dietrich Ritschl, Theology of Proclamation (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 121.

<sup>7</sup>Ruel Howe, Partners in Preaching (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967), p. 87.

<sup>8</sup>I Timothy 3:2

<sup>9</sup>Howe, Partners, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup>Frank McDowell, "Readers' Forum," Pastoral Psychology, XVI (March 1965), 49-50.

<sup>11</sup>John Thompson, "When Preaching is Dialogue," Preaching, II (October 1967), 5.

<sup>12</sup>Ruel Howe, Miracle of Dialogue (New York: The Seabury Press, 1963), pp. 143-144.

<sup>13</sup>Thompson, pp. 6-7.

<sup>14</sup>Harry E. Fosdick, "What is the Matter With Preaching," Preaching, II (March 1967), 5.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>17</sup>Howe, Partners, p. 86.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>19</sup>Ritschl, pp. 124-125.

<sup>20</sup>Richard R. Caemmerer, Preaching for the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p.1.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>David J. Ernsberger, "Preaching for Renewal," Unpublished lecture, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, August 21, 1967, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>24</sup>Caemmerer, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup>Clyde Reid, "Preaching and the Nature of Communication," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (October 1963), 41.

<sup>26</sup>Caemmerer is here speaking about the call which is extended via the sermon to a person, the call to live the new life of love through Christ; this call demands repentance.

<sup>27</sup>Caemmerer, p. 188.

<sup>28</sup>Clyde Reid, The Empty Pulpit (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 71.

<sup>29</sup>Caemmerer, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup>Ernsberger, pp. 1-2.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 2; others who argue for dialogical preaching on the basis of Christ's example are Thompson p. 9, and P. R. Clifford, "Communicating the Gospel," Study Encounter, II (August 1966), 52.

<sup>32</sup>Howe, Partners, p. 61.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 61-62.

- 34 Ibid., pp. 62-63.
- 35 Ibid., pp. 63-64.
- 36 Ibid., p. 64.
- 37 Ibid., pp. 64-65.
- 38 Howe, Miracle, pp. 36-37.
- 39 Reid, Pulpit, pp. 68-71.
- 40 Ibid., p. 68.
- 41 Ibid., p. 69.
- 42 Ibid.; see pp. 79-81 for an experiment illustrating the importance of feedback on the secular level of communication.
- 43 Ibid., pp. 69-70.
- 44 Ibid., pp. 70-71.
- 45 Ibid., p. 71.
- 46 Ibid.; supra p. 18.
- 47 Ibid., pp. 72-73.
- 48 Supra, p. 21.
- 49 Reid, Pulpit, p. 73.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Bernard Berelson and G. A. Steiner, Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964), p. 542.
- 52 "Working up to Race," Time, LXXXII (October 1963), p. 80.
- 53 Ernsberger, p. 3.
- 54 Reid, Pulpit, p. 54.
- 55 Ibid., p. 55.

## FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>Clyde Reid, The Empty Pulpit (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 89.

<sup>2</sup>Ruel Howe, Partners in Preaching (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967), p. 93.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>4</sup>Dietrich Ritschl, Theology of Proclamation (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 150.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>8</sup>Infra, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup>George K. Morlan, "Preaching and Psychological Research," Pulpit Digest, XXXII (January 1952), p. 16.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Lionel D. Skamser, "After the Sermon," Lutheran Witness, LXXXV (November 1966), p. 294.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>The Rev. Paul Malte, a former parish pastor, presently hospital chaplain (VA) in Concord, California, has experimented with dialogical preaching at a suburban church, a college chapel, and a veteran's hospital.

<sup>16</sup>Paul Malte, "Dialogue Preaching," Advance, XIII (March 1966), p. 27.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>The Rev. Eugene F Bleidorn is pastor of St Boniface Congregation, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>21</sup>Eugene Bleidorn, "The Dialogue Homily: Practice," Preaching, II (March 1967), p. 11.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>25</sup>Vernon T. Trahms, "They Help Each Other Grow," Lutheran Witness, LXXXV (June 1966), p. 142.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.; see p. 143 for procedural suggestions for the use of dialogue in other areas of church life.

<sup>29</sup>The Rev. Browne Barr, pastor of First Congregational Church in Berkely, California represents one of the more publicized promoters of sermon seminars. After several pastorates in Connecticut, he became professor of preaching at the Yale Divinity School. His present congregation at Berkely serves many of the students and faculty members from the nearby University of California.

<sup>30</sup>Browne Barr, Parish Back Talk (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), pp. 77-78.

<sup>31</sup>Horst Symanowski, The Christian Witness in an Industrial Society, translated by George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 19-20; for a more detailed description of the procedure he followed and the results he received, see pp. 90-91.

<sup>32</sup>George W. Webber, The Congregation and Mission (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 82.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>34</sup>David J. Ernsberger, "Preaching for Renewal," Unpublished lecture, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, August 21, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.; see also appendix of Howe, Partners, for a case study of re-acter groups.

<sup>36</sup>John Thompson, "When Preaching is Dialogue," Preaching, II (October 1967), p. 12.

## FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>Supra, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>Supra, p. 38; Bleidorn considers this to be the sixth advantage of the "dialogue homily."

<sup>3</sup>Clyde Reid, The Empty Pulpit (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 89.

<sup>4</sup>Otis E. Young, "A Reorientation to All of Life," Pastoral Psychology, (March 1967), p. 45.

<sup>5</sup>Supra, p. 41; this is the church at which Browne Barr is pastor.

<sup>6</sup>As quoted anonymously by Mary M. Eakin, "Sermon Seminar in a Parish," The Christian Century, LXXXIII (January 19, 1966), p. 77.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., spoken by Mary Eakin herself.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

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