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Persuasion in the Art of Preaching for the Church

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PERSUASION IN THE ART OF PREACHING FOR THE CHURCH

A major applied project presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Ministry

by

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PROLOGUE

THE SOWER REVISITED: A PARABLE

As the sun brightened the field and warmed the face of the farmer, he sowed the good seed with rhythmic motion and head held high. "Surely, this is God's work!" the farmer thought, as he dreamed of a great harvest. And when he was finished, satisfied with his sowing, he returned to his farmhouse. The rains came and the sun continued to warm the earth.

Each week the farmer would sow good seed in his field. His other time was spent sorting seed and studying seed catalogs for the best grade of seed possible. But when the harvest finally came, the farmer found no crop in his field. Upset and confused, he called in some advisors to give him help.

The first man said, "The ground has to be plowed and the earth cultivated for the seed to take root."

The second said, "The seed needs to be sown sparingly in order to give it a chance to grow."

The third said, "Rocks need to be removed and weeds contained so that the seed will not be choked out."

The farmer thanked the men for their good advice.

The next season, the farmer sowed his seed quite like he had always done before. A friend stopped him one day and asked, "Why is it that you sow your field with no regard to the advice given you for a good harvest?"

"I'm sure the advisors meant well," he explained, "but not one of them is a farmer."

"That may be true, but you had no harvest last year," the friend said, "and you cannot afford to continue to sow with no harvest."

"Look friend," answered the farmer defensively, "you cannot tell me there will be no harvest. That's God's work and His alone! He gave me the seed to sow."

And the farmer continued to sow his seed and look for a great harvest, while his friends shook their heads in bewilderment.¹

¹ Revised from:

"The Complacent Sower" by Clyde Reid, The Empty Pulpit (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 13-15.

INTRODUCTION

This major applied project -- "Persuasion in the Art of Preaching For the Church" -- gives great honor and respect to the preaching ministry of the church. Many people today, even some pastors, tend to regard preaching as a form of foolishness, while the Scriptures tell us quite clearly that (in God's wisdom) "it pleased Him through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21 RSV). In other words, the preached message is God's way of bringing people to salvation. It is part of God's plan. It is the awesome and privileged task of those who are called to such a ministry. The following paper will study three aspects of that preaching ministry. First of all, it will study the theological basis for preaching the Word for the church (Chapters 1-3). Secondly, it will study the persuasive nature of the preaching task (Chapters 4-6). And finally, it will study a process of sermon evaluation which keeps the preaching task on target (Chapters 7-9).

Throughout the following pages three major themes will be interwoven with the aspects of the preaching ministry mentioned above. The themes are pastoral in nature and have been formulated over many years in the parish ministry. In some ways, they are similar to the themes indicated in an isagogical study of a Scriptural text, as one studies (1) the addressees, (2) the content of the message, and (3) the approach or style of the writer. In a similar way, this paper will study the proclamation of the Word in relation to (1) the hearers, (2) the content of the

message, and (3) the approach or manner of communication. These three areas of study, which are also the three goals of this paper, can be summarized in the following manner:

1. Hearers: The preaching ministry is only as persuasive as the preacher is sensitive and relational to his hearing congregation.

Preaching is for the hearer (Matthew 13:9), and if the proclamation does not relate to the hearer's needs, faith and life, it is of little value for anyone. That is not to imply any disrespect for the authority and power of God's Word, the office of the ministry, the divine call, or the efficacy of the work of the Holy Spirit. As Richard Caemmerer has entitled his classic homiletical text, Preaching (is) For the Church. The pastor is called by, called on behalf of, called for the people he is to serve. His preaching ministry is to reach out to and involve those very people in his task of proclamation.

2. The Content of the Message: The preaching ministry is to deliver the same persuasive Word as God has given His church from her inception.

"Preaching," according to Caemmerer, "is God's Word in Christ to people."¹ The content is the Word of God in Christ, which is God's "power for salvation to all who believe" (Romans 1:16). The term "Word of God" is used frequently throughout this paper. Most often it refers to God's Word as given to us in the Holy Scriptures. It is not, however, limited to that form. The clearest expression of God's Word is Jesus Christ, as "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). God's Word in Christ, as Caemmerer puts it, is nothing less than the Gospel, the good news of salvation personally won for me and all

¹Richard Caemmerer, Preaching For The Church, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. xi.

believers by Christ on Calvary's cross.² God's Incarnate Word in Christ, moreover, is not even limited to that act of salvation. For Jesus, as the Risen Christ and Ascended Lord, is still God's Incarnate Word in the faith and life of all believers. The Holy Spirit guarantees it, and the preaching ministry of that Word brings to bear the very promise and power of Christ Himself in each believer. In a sense Martin Franzman relates it in his Romans commentary, "the Gospel has the force of revelation; it is not only news of an event. In news there is a report of an event that has taken place; in revelation the event is not only reported but presented, made a present reality, effectually active in the life of man."³ The Word of God was persuasive in its original revelation event to the believer in Christ and through His Spirit. It is the position of this paper that that historic revelation event, recorded in the Scriptures, is still the power of God unto salvation today through the proclaimed Word. It is still persuasive, for Christ is alive in it and His Spirit is active through it. Not only that, but those who proclaim His Word enable God's revelation to be a present reality for the faith and life of the hearer. It is a persuasive Word! "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ" (Romans 10:17).

3. The Manner of Communication: The preaching ministry is dynamic in its proclamation of the Word just as God's Spirit is dynamic in enabling us to proclaim that Word persuasively (2 Timothy 1:7).

It is the position of this paper that the proclamation of the Word can never be a part of a static understanding of a Word and Sacrament ministry. Preaching is not to be a replication of the Scriptural Word,

²Ibid., p. 28.

³Martin Franzmann, Romans, (St. Louis, Concordia, 1968), p. 35.

or a monological treatise, or an imparting of Scriptural information, even if it be "good news." Preaching is to be understood in its original conversational ("homilia") and dialogical form. It is persuasive, for it proclaims God's Word, and, through the Spirit's power, convicts the hearer of his/her sin and frees him/her in Christ for newness of faith and life (John 16:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17). It is also an art form, for, under the Spirit's guidance, the proclaimer draws upon all his rhetorical skills, his pastoral understanding, and his relationships to his hearers in order to interpret and apply the Law and Gospel to their faith and life.

SECTION ONE

The first section of this paper emphasizes the theological basis for the preaching task. The written Word of God is to come to life in God's people, the hearers, just as the Incarnate Word has become flesh in God's Son, Jesus Christ. (Romans 10:9-17; John 1:14) The process of proclaiming that Gospel begins within the one called to preach.

Chapter one connects the Spirit's inspired Word and the one proclaiming that Word with the faith and life of the hearer. The message is more than content; the proclamation carries the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. The Word proclaimed accomplishes God's will and is used artistically to reach into the personal life of the hearer.

Sensitivity to the hearer's life and circumstance is a key aspect of that proclamation in chapter two. The preacher identifies with the hearer as he also identifies with the Law and Gospel message he proclaims to the hearer.

Finally, in chapter three, the preacher applies the Law and Gospel message of God's Word to the needs and goals of his hearers. He can do that effectively, since he has identified his own needs and goals and has identified with those of his hearer. The proclaimed Word, Law and Gospel, helps the hearer and all believers assembled to grow in faith and life.

CHAPTER 1

PROCLAIMING THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE CHURCH

Dramatic stories and verbal pictures played an important part in the message that Jesus preached to His hearers. The kingdom of God was at hand. God's salvation was being accomplished. The Scriptures were being fulfilled. The Gospel was to be heard. As Jesus said: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Let him hear what God is doing through His personal Gospel! Let him see that Gospel taking on shape and substance in faith and life! Even the titles which were given to Jesus demanded attention and response. John the Baptizer called Him the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. God the Father called Him His beloved Son in Whom He was well pleased. The evil spirits recognized Him as the Holy One of God. Peter called Him the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus called Himself the Light, the Good Shepherd, the Bread of Life, the Living Water, the Vine. John simply called Him the Word!

"He (God) can come in no way other than as the word," Karl Rahner observes, "for He should give Himself to us precisely in that which He simply as the Creator of realities outside Himself cannot reveal . . . that reference which points beyond all created things -- the word."¹ Not only does God reveal Himself in His written Word, but He gives to man His eternal life in Christ through that Word. The Old Testament revelation

¹Willard Jabusch, The Person in the Pulpit, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981) p. 78.

of God to His people and through His people kept pointing to, and moving toward, the fulfillment of time when that Word became flesh and finally dwelt among us full of grace and truth. Jesus was the embodiment of that eternal Word. In His authentic personhood, in His perceptive communication, in His compassionate caring, in His miraculous authority, in His redemptive activity, and in His supernatural conquest, Jesus was God's Word revealed in all its fullness to man.

The Word became flesh! Those few words in John tell the great Gospel story! God took on man's nature, not just to identify with him, but to be able to die for him. Writing to the Philippian Christians, the Apostle Paul speaks about the very heart of God's action in Jesus Christ: "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."² And just as the Word became flesh in the person of Jesus, so also the message of salvation through Him is to become incarnate in the lives of God's people. God's truth is to be revealed in human form! His life eternal is to become available to those who only know temporal existence! The Word is to become envisioned in human words! That is the Gospel intent.

What an awesome task it is to use the most effective human words available to envision for people God's eternal Word! That, however, is the task of the one who is called to proclaim that Gospel message through the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is indeed the One Who breathes His very life-giving, creative power into those human words.

²Philippians 2:6-8. The Revised Standard Version is the primary translation used in this paper.

The Holy Spirit is also the One Who enables those words to carry God's precious Gospel to the faith and life of the hearer. The Holy Spirit is even active within the process of formulating those human words to be proclaimed by the one who preaches. The task of the preacher, moreover, is to experience that Gospel in his personal faith and life, interpret that Gospel accurately according to God's revelation in the Scriptures, and relate that Gospel compassionately to the faith and life needs of his hearers. The preacher then needs to draw on his artistic skills in order to accomplish his preaching objectives.

The Art of Proclamation

The preacher's task has to start within himself before he can interpret and relate the Gospel to others. As he looks within, he needs to see God at work. The Gospel needs to be his personal strength and comfort, his personal power and salvation in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit needs to be his counselor, his interpreter, his communicator with God. Francis Pieper describes this qualification for preaching as a "spiritual aptitude" (habitus spiritualis),³ that is to say, a gift of God, knowing that we are not sufficient of ourselves, "but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). That aptitude presupposes personal faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. It implies reliance on the Holy Scriptures as God's divinely inspired Word through which the Incarnate Word is revealed. Furthermore, it includes understanding the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), and continuance in God's Word (John 8:31,32). Luther described this habitus in his famous dictum:

³Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950) Vol. I, p. 46.

"Oratio, meditatio, tentatio faciunt theologum."⁴ Prayer (oratio), in the power of the Spirit through the Word, gives one humility and enlightenment. Meditation (meditatio) is one's diligent attention to the Word through the Spirit. And temptation (tentatio) is the true touchstone for Luther by which the Holy Spirit teaches one not only to know, but "to experience how true, sincere, sweet, lovely, powerful, and comforting the Word of God is . . ."⁵

One's experience might seem very subjective for the task of preaching God's Gospel message, but one's experience is never really subjective when it is connected with the Holy Scriptures. Pieper says that without the Scripture there is no Christian "experience," but "without the personal Christian experience there can be no Christianity."⁶ For the preacher of the Gospel, the experience of God's Spirit confirming the Gospel in his faith and life is of prime importance. He cannot effectively preach the Gospel if he has not experienced the Gospel.

The preacher's experience of the Gospel is never subjective in its content, as it is connected to the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit. In other words, his experience is not outside the influence of the means of grace, and, in that sense, it is not subjective. It is subjective, however, in its form. No two people respond to the Gospel in exactly the same way; for, even though the same Spirit uses the same Scripture, the Spirit works within the uniqueness of each individual personality and within the uniqueness of each of the gifts, talents and abilities of that individual. That is what makes God's revelation so interesting and creative. The Scriptures tell us that "holy men of God spoke," each

⁴Ibid., p. 186.

⁵Ibid., p. 188.

⁶Pieper, Op. cit., I, 66.

in his own unique and relational way, "as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

This uniqueness and creativity God gives to us as a part of His gift for our service in His kingdom. He places all of us together, separately unique, in His created world, and asks us to relate to that world, as He relates to us with His Word. He even gives us His Word through many unique individuals, with unique styles and form, and He asks us to be sensitive to the style and form as we receive and proclaim His powerful Word.

As preachers, sensitive to our task of proclamation, as well as our God-gifted style and form, we are more than theologians and exegetes, communicators and persuaders. We are artists in the best sense of the term. We not only "possess the capacity to experience many things intensely," and "can enter into the experience of others," marks of a true artist according to Schökel,⁷ but all of the creative gifts our God has given us comprise the total person God uses in our proclamation of His Word. Moreover, the preacher's habitus, of complete dependence on, and motivation from God's Word, furthers his artistic quality.

Andre Malraux writes of the artist in The Voices of Silence:

One of the reasons why the artist's way of seeing differs so greatly from that of the ordinary man is that it has been conditioned, from the start, by the paintings and statues he has seen; by the world of art. It is a revealing fact that, when explaining how his vocation came to him, every great artist traces it back to the emotion he experienced at his contact with some specific work of art: a writer to the reading of a poem or novel (or perhaps a visit to the theater); a musician to a concert he attended; a painter to

⁷Jabusch, Op. cit.

a painting he once saw. Never do we hear of a man who, out of the blue so to speak, feels a compulsion to "express" some scene or startling incident.

The experiential impact of the Word of God on the faith and life of the preacher, over a long period of time, with regular periods of oratio, meditatio, and tentatio, generates the Spirit-directed enthusiasm so vital for the preaching task. And as necessary as it is to demonstrate the artistic quality inherent in preaching, that artistry is of no effect without the proper insight into the heart of the people who hear.

As Caemmerer talks about the history of preaching in his textbook, Preaching For The Church, he calls homiletics an art, but reminds his readers "that preaching represents an act in which all the worshipers join. Very easily the sermon can deteriorate simply to a message from the preacher to the people."⁹ In Romans 10:15, the Apostle Paul raises the question, "How can they hear without a preacher?" Paul seems to assume in that question the opposite thought: how can they preach without hearers? Hearing is imperative to the preaching task. The people of God are always God's prime concern when He makes possible the proclamation of His powerful Word. The people are always the addressees of His Gospels and Epistles. And so the proclaimer of that Word has to adjust his message to the very different kinds of audiences he might face. Indeed, Paul spoke quite differently to officers of the Roman government than he did to the common folk of his day, or to the sailors and soldiers, or to his Jewish compatriots.

⁸Ibid., p. 79.

⁹Caemmerer, Op. cit., p. 56.

The first question the preacher needs to ask is "Why do I want to share this specific Word of God with this specific group of people on this particular occasion?" "'Why' is, at one and the same time, one of the most stubborn and most helpful words," writes Paul Harms. "The roots of effective preaching are hidden in that 'why' and its answer."¹⁰ The proclaimed Word obviously needs to be very sensitive to the unique situations of the hearers, and, in that sense, the preacher uses many of his artistic qualities to connect the Word with the people. The proclaimed Word also needs to be a challenging Word to the hearers. "Preaching is an encounter," Reuel Howe says, "involving not only content but relationship, not only ideas but action, not only logic but emotion, not only understanding but commitment."¹¹ That encounter also draws heavily upon the preacher's artistic resources, for God's Word "will not be bound, but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people" (The Collect for the Church).

The art of proclamation, then, requires the motivated preacher to adapt his message and challenge his hearers. Although God's Word is the content of the proclamation, the method of communication is often more influential than its content. That is an unfortunate fact of the rhetorical arts, according to Patrick Marsh.¹² The subtleties of language frequently overpower the most dynamic content of the Word of God. The art form, therefore, can be either beneficial or detrimental

¹⁰Paul Harms, Power From the Pulpit, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977) p. 6.

¹¹Reuel L. Howe, The Miracle of Dialogue, (New York: Seabury Press, 1963) p. 42.

¹²Patrick O. Marsh, Persuasive Speaking, (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) p. 318.

to the proclaimed Word. Furthermore, the physical presence of the speaker can be even more influential in regard to the hearer's reception.¹³ Everyone notices a person's posture and dress, his gestures and facial expression; those qualities are involuntarily received. One's content and style, language and form, are not as easily recognized; they require a considerable amount of voluntary effort.

One of Marshall McLuhan's basic concepts of communication is that the medium is the message.¹⁴ The medium is the sum total of one's words and physical presence; that constitutes the message. When there is a contradiction between what is perceived to be spoken, with what is perceived to be presented, however, the presentation will tend to be the more influential on the hearer, as Reid observes.¹⁵ That is part of the artistic aspect of proclamation. It can add great beauty and receptiveness to the Word, or it can keep the Word from being perceived as beautiful and meaningful. Therefore, the Word itself needs to be analyzed in the light of God's revelation to man. It needs to be understood both as the content of that revelation and as the medium of that revelation to sinful mankind. Since the medium becomes the message for the hearer, the proclamation needs to be that message, with the preacher's physical presence conveying the Word he proclaims. That should not be a unique task. It is, after all, exactly what God has done with His Word of proclamation; He has presented it to man in the flesh in Jesus Christ. The medium is the message!

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Reid, Op. cit., p. 75.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 74.

The Proclamation of the Word

The proclaiming of the Word is the task of the preacher. It takes such faith: speaking the whole content of the Word to the people of God, and the Holy Spirit will move within them toward the goals of greater faith and life. Preaching is, after all, kerygmatic; it focuses on the content of the apostolic word. It means that the preacher is a herald proclaiming an important truth. The herald, from his most ancient origin, delivered important truths as they had been given to him; he never expressed his personal viewpoint in the matter. But the word "herald," κήρυξ, is not used in that sense by the New Testament. In fact, the word itself is avoided because of the likely association with ancient Greek mythology. It is the corresponding Greek verb κηρύσσω that is used some sixty-one times in the New Testament. It not only refers to the herald's activity proclaiming an important truth, but it also relates to his activity of calling his hearers to action, the Holy Spirit being the power behind both activities.

According to C. H. Dodd in his noted and articulate work, The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments, "the Pauline kerygma is a proclamation of the facts of the death and resurrection of Christ in an eschatological setting which gives significance to the facts."¹⁶

Christ's death and resurrection are indeed most significant in the kerygma, but they are not the entirety of the kerygma of God's revelation

¹⁶C. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962) p. 13.

in its proclamation. Dodd does see Scripture's close connection of thought between the two verbs κηρυσσειν and εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, which he states as being "virtually equivalent." But because both terms relate to preaching as proclaiming "good tidings," that fact does not necessitate the exclusion of any other usage by God. The early church, according to Dodd, held that preaching the Gospel "was by no means the same thing as delivering moral instruction or exhortation."¹⁷ In other words, the kerygma was the proclamation of the facts of the Gospel, and the didache, for Dodd, was the ethical "teaching" or "exhortation." The New Testament, however, does not see such a distinction.

The verbs κηρυσσειν, to herald, and διδάσκειν, to teach, are often used interchangeably in the New Testament (e.g. Mt. 4:23 with Mark 1:39, or Mark 1:21, 22, and 37 with 1:38). They also correspond in the chief confession of the Lutheran Church, in the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession, where the German and Latin texts relate to the "preaching" and "teaching" as the doctrina evangelii. "Not the silent possession of doctrine is meant here but the act of oral teaching and, again, not a teaching that ignores assurance and comfort, but a teaching that is preaching," observes Edmund Schlink.¹⁸

The kerygma of the New Testament is certainly a proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but it always implies Christ's fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets for man to receive by faith. The kerygma of the New Testament is certainly a proclamation of God's

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁸ Edmund Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961) p. 199.

"good news" in Jesus Christ, but it always implies an acceptance of Him as personal Lord and Savior. The kerygma of the New Testament is certainly a proclamation of man's salvation through the cross of Christ, but it always implies a summons to repent and receive the forgiveness of one's sins, as well as the Spirit's power to live the sanctified life in Christ. The kerygmatic excerpts of Peter in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles demonstrate the proclamation of the Gospel in these three dimensions: (1) as a revelation of God's salvation as an accomplished task, (2) as a theological evaluation and a call to acceptance, and (3) as a summons to newness of faith and life, as Robert Mounce states.¹⁹

Emil Brunner writes in his book, Revelation and Reason, wherever there is true preaching and the Word of God is genuinely proclaimed, "in spite of all appearances to the contrary, the most important thing that ever happens upon this earth takes place."²⁰ Jesus Christ and His vicarious atonement for mankind is personally related to and received by those whom He wants to call His own through the Word of God, as it is preached, heard and responded to with faith and life. That, surely, has to be the most important thing that God's Spirit can accomplish on this earth. The kerygma as Gospel content is not complete, according to God's plan, until it is proclaimed to, and received by, sinful man.

The Augsburg Confession calls the church "the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel."²¹ The church is

¹⁹Robert Mounce, The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960) pp. 61-110.

²⁰Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946) p. 142.

²¹Theodore G. Tappert, translator and editor, The Book of Concord, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959. Augsburg Confession, VII, 1.

the assembly of all believers, but the assembly is determined by what is done in its midst.²² The Gospel, not just the Word of God in general, is preached; it is an oral proclamation of God's forgiveness of sins. But that is not all! "According to the Gospel" includes also the proclamation of forgiveness of sins related to the holy sacraments. As Schlink puts it in his Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, "the church is characterized in her essence not by the silent possession of a doctrine of the sacraments in agreement with the Gospel, but by the 'administration' of the sacraments, that is, through the actual giving and receiving."²³ The church is defined by what is done in its midst -- the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. The Holy Spirit works forgiveness and life through those "means of grace."

Is preaching the Gospel, then, equated with the Gospel as a "means of grace"? The decisive issue seems to focus on why preaching the Gospel has been so closely connected with the Gospel in the first place. From its very origin, the church has taught that proclaiming the story of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a part of the Gospel itself. It cannot be seen "simply as sacred rhetoric or as a public speech on a religious theme," relates Ron Sleeth; "preaching is part and parcel of what it proclaims."²⁴ For Luther "preaching was the veritable Word of God Himself, and, as such, occupied the central position in the church."²⁵ He, and most of the Reformers, held that the preaching of the Word was the Word of God,

²²Schlink, Op. Cit., p. 198.

²³Ibid., p. 199

²⁴Ronald E. Sleeth, God's Word and Our Words: Basic Homilectics, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986) p. 1.

²⁵Ibid., p. 2

insofar as the message of the Scripture was proclaimed. According to Sleeth, Luther seemed to move the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation from its altar to the Lutheran pulpit.²⁶ In his commentary on Genesis, Luther stated that "it is in the Word alone that the bread is the body of Christ, that the wine is the blood of Christ."²⁷

Luther loved to talk about the "living voice of the Gospel" (viva vox Evangelii). He wrote: "You do well to call the Word of the pastor and preacher, when he preaches, the Word of God. For the office is not that of the pastor and preacher but of God; and the Word that he preaches is not the Word of the pastor and preacher, but of God."²⁸ "Gospel means nothing but a preaching and proclamation of the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ . . . not that which is contained in books and is put together in letters, but rather in oral proclamation, a living Word."²⁹

The similarity and connection between the preaching of the Gospel and the Gospel content is not one of identity, as if one were a replication of the other. The preaching of the Gospel speaks the Gospel to the life and world of today's hearer, yet remains umbilically attached to the original Gospel act of Christ's death and resurrection for mankind. Theodore Wedel states that "the sermon contemporizes the gospel--a gospel which, as merely read gospel, might have remained safely entombed in the church's historical archives. From a then, or 'once upon a time,' it confronts the hearer with a now."³⁰

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Henry J. Eggold, Preaching Is Dialogue, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980) p. 19.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Sleeth, Op. cit., p. 2.

The preached Word is a Word filled with the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). It is a Word that gives life (Psalm 119:25), makes people holy (Ephesians 5:26), leads them into truth (John 8:31-32), works faith through the hearing (Romans 10:17), brings peace (Isaiah 2:3-5), overcomes the wicked one (1 John 2:14), makes people one with the Spirit (Hebrews 6:4-5) and causes them to grow in grace (1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:32). What an awesome power we have in the preached Word, enough to cause every faithful preacher to want his proclamation to be of his very best. As Paul writes: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Not only are the preachers of God's Word servants of that Word (Jesus Christ), but, as Paul says, those preachers are servants of the hearers also "for Jesus' sake." For what is preaching without the hearing? If the hearers do not hear the Word, the preaching is of no effect. As William Roen says in his book, The Inward Ear, "both the hearing and the speaking of God's Word are necessary, and both are accompanied by the promise of the Holy Spirit who, according to Luther's Small Catechism, 'calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth.'"³¹ For Luther the "hearing" was virtually synonymous with the "preaching" when he translated Romans 10:17 as "So kommt der Glaube aus der Predigt" (Thus faith comes by preaching.)³² For the "preaching" (Predigt) included the listener, and the purpose of the Word was the challenge or appeal (Anrede) to the hearer.

³¹William Roen, The Inward Ear, (Alban Institute, 1989) p. x.

³²Vilmos Vajta, Luther on Worship, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958) p. 133.

In the heralding metaphor, so much a part of the proclamation idiom of the New Testament, something is certainly expected on the part of the hearers. The proclamation issues an appeal, a summons to faith and newness of life. The herald expects a response. According to Luther, to be a man is to live by the daily challenge of God's Word.³³ The Confessions say that hearing the preached Word is of paramount importance: "All who would be saved must hear this preaching (repentance and remission of sins), for the preaching and the hearing of God's Word are the Holy Spirit's instrument in, with, and through which he wills to act efficaciously, to convert men to God, and to work in them both to will and to achieve."³⁴

The very act of preaching, then, is so much more than carrying the content of the Gospel to the hearer. The proclaiming of the Gospel in preaching makes God's Word personal and persuasive to the hearer through the direction of the Holy Spirit. As the anthem is the "coming alive" of the music of the composer through the voices of the choir, so the sermon is the "coming alive" of the Word of the cross and empty tomb through the proclamation of the preacher. It connects God's Word with the faith and life of the hearer. It answers the questions: "How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without someone preaching?" The Gospel is more than the good news of salvation we have in Jesus Christ; it is also the act of proclaiming that good news of salvation to sinful mankind.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II, 52.

The Proclamation Is For The Church

The hearers of the Word are not just individuals brought together occasionally for a proclamation event; they are the church of Christ. Private Christianity is a contradiction of terms. The Gospel of Jesus Christ happens through the history of God's chosen people, within the context of a unified, holy, apostolic and catholic tradition, and for those who struggle together against Satan, the world and their sinful flesh (the church militant), in order to claim their inheritance as the communion of saints (the church triumphant). "This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel."³⁵

From the very beginning of the history of the Christian Church, the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments were incorporated into a Jewish form of Sabbath worship. In their Sabbath worship, the Jews would join in prayers and psalms and readings from the Torah and the prophets. A worship leader, in turn, would often exhort or instruct the people on the basis of the readings, as Jesus did in his hometown synagogue (Luke 4:16-20).³⁶ The early Christians added a spoken Gospel message from the life and sayings of Jesus, and in later years they had readings from the writings of the Apostles and from the Gospels. Exhortations and encouragement for Christian living became a part of the worship service, with the members of the assembly "breaking out . . . into

³⁵Augsburg Confession, VII, 1.

³⁶Caemmerer, Op. Cit., p. 56.

conversation which included comments or explanations, thanksgiving and exhortation (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:26). Such a conversation was termed a homilia."³⁷

Caemmerer continues his brief history:

Soon the leader of the worship began to incorporate what he expected to take place in such a conversation into a message by himself, a one-man homilia -- and thus was born the science and art of 'homiletics.' It's useful to remember that preaching represents an act in which all the worshipers join. Very easily the sermon can deteriorate simply to a message from the preacher to the people.³⁸

It is the preacher who conveys God's forgiveness to and among the assembled people (2 Corinthians 2:10), and who proclaims the new life of Christ, as the people stir one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:19-25; the term "homologia" is used in verse 23). The preacher also initiates the mutual teaching and admonishing of the gathered community (Ephesians 4:11-16, Colossians 3:12-17). In other words, in a very real sense, the preacher is God's spokesman "preaching for the Christians who in that very act are communicating the power of God to one another," as Caemmerer points out.³⁹

The communication of God's Word "to one another" is a vital aspect of the assembly of believers, the church in worship. Howe entitles that quality of communication "dialogical."⁴⁰ The Scriptures themselves relate the dialogical character of the revealed Word through the countless

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰William D. Thompson, A Listener's Guide To Preaching, (New York: Abingdon, 1966) p. 68.

interactions between God and man, and then between man and his fellowman. God interacts with Abraham, Jacob, Moses, the prophets, and others; there are questions and answers, objections and explanations, rebuttals and confirmations. In the process, God reveals Himself and His will; man in turn, receives God's revelation, declares God as Lord, and then relates the message to others. Jesus' ministry demonstrates the same dialogical character as is found of God in the Old Testament. Not only are there the questions and answers, and the mysteries revealed with truth in a relational way, but God manifests the ultimate dialogue: the Word becomes flesh, so that carnal man can respond to and interact with God eternally. Then, he can also interact with others in the process of proclaiming the depth of the riches and glory of God in Jesus Christ. The dialogical function of the Gospel is never-ending in the Spirit. It is also never-ending in the church.

In contrast to a one-way form of communication, says Howe, dialogue is a "reciprocal relationship in which each party 'expresses the other side.'"⁴¹ When Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman at the well in John, Chapter 4, by the end of the chapter, the Samaritan woman had experienced a little of the life of worship Jesus was talking about, and Jesus had experienced some of the woman's quest for meaning, which ended in a marvelous witnessing. Jesus moved from the illustration of physical thirst to His spiritual gift of living water, and from the subject of religion to a consideration of the kind of life the woman was living. Reciprocal relationship, furthermore, describes the reality of the pastor and people in a worship

⁴¹Howe, Op. cit., p. 50.

setting. It describes the true "assembly of all believers," labeled by the Augsburg Confession as the people "among whom the Gospel is preached in its truth and purity."⁴² Howe's dialogical function applies here to the interaction between pastor and people, for preaching is "an address and response between persons in which there is a flow of meaning."⁴³ The preacher of God's Word brings to the hearer his own personal encounter with God's Word, as he relates that Word to the understandings and needs of his hearers. When there is no sensitivity to, and understanding of, the needs of the hearer, there cannot be any "reciprocal relationship," any dialogical function, or any "assembly of believers among whom the Gospel is preached."

Bringing the people of God into the task of preaching for the church enables the proclaimed Word to be dialogical and persuasive. The people of God are hungry for that Word; they are eager to digest it and have it nourish their faith and life. They do not want an abstract proclamation, no matter how doctrinally pure or Scripturally sound. They want a Word that touches their personal lives, with a preacher who has been there, involved in their lives in a loving, caring and understanding way. "Love provides the only right motive for the act of preaching itself," Dean Lueking says. "It is the power which moves the one who preaches out among people with care for the uniqueness of every human. It quickly shows in the manner as well as the content of preaching."⁴⁴

⁴²Augsburg Confession, VII, 1.

⁴³Howe, Op. cit., p. 37.

⁴⁴F. Dean Lueking, Preaching: The Art of Connecting God and People, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985) p. 24.

That pastoral love in preaching is quickly reflected in the eyes and responsiveness of the hearing congregation. Since it is the gift of the Holy Spirit by which those people are so motivated, their faith is strengthened and their life is empowered in witness to Him. Howe says it well: "The church's sermon is the one born in the hearer, and this is the only one taken and delivered in the world."⁴⁵

The church's proclamation is indeed for the church! Caemmerer uses his entire homiletical textbook to say it as clearly as he can: Preaching (is) For The Church. "The preacher preaches most of his sermons to the church . . . but he is also preaching for the Christians who in that very act are communicating the power of God to one another."⁴⁶ Such is the "art of homiletics"⁴⁷ -- proclaiming the Word of God for the church.

⁴⁵Howe, Op. cit., p. 145.

⁴⁶Caemmerer Op. cit., p. 57

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 56.

CHAPTER 2

CONNECTING THE PROCLAMATION WITH THE LIFE OF THE HEARER

The Life of the Hearer

Aristotle once noted that all messages should be constructed with the "character" of the hearers in mind -- their common understandings and patterns of thinking.¹ That is good advice. God does that very thing with His proclamations to the people. We read in the Old Testament how God adapted His message: forthrightness to Adam and Eve, blessing to Abraham, reprieve to Jacob, strong encouragement to Moses, judgment to Pharoah, and all manner of varying proclamations to other people according to the "character" of the situation of the people addressed. Jesus demonstrated such adaptability throughout His ministry. His messages, to His disciples alone, ranged from compassion and loving understanding to rebuke and punishment, from teaching and exhortation to rejoinder and judgment. In one short period of time, He could move from an emotional weeping over Jerusalem, through an exhilarating entrance scene, and then onto an angry lashing out at the temple money-changers. Knowing the hearer, his character and circumstance, is crucially important to anyone who wants to present a message that is clear and articulate.

The proclamation of God's Word, according to God's plan, can never be carried out in a vacuum, with no empathy or caring for the

¹Gary C. Woodward and Robert E. Denton, Persuasion and Influence in American Life, (Prospect Hgts, IL: Waveland Press, 1988) p. 15.

situation of the hearer. When God spoke His Word, sent His prophets, and then finally came to His people in the flesh, He demonstrated His long-suffering love for His people and their plight. What God had done in the flesh, He wanted to accomplish with His proclaimed Word. That proclamation can be no less than His original intent of coming to His people with His love. A sermon should be an embodiment of that love of God. "It may be thoroughly researched, beautifully constructed, well illustrated, and biblically grounded," says David Read, "but if it has no roots in a loving relationship to those to whom it is addressed, it is, to borrow a phrase, 'as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.'"²

Without true sensitivity to God's Word, a sermon does not have a legitimate and meaningful message to proclaim; without true sensitivity to the hearer, a sermon does not have a legitimate and meaningful basis for proclamation. As much as the message needs to be proclaimed according to God's directives and Spirit's empowerment, so also the basis for proclamation needs to be established according to God's loving relationship through Jesus Christ. What a travesty of preaching responsibility -- to be given God's own Word of reconciliation through the cross of Christ, and the Spirit's power to implant that Word into the hearts and lives of His people, and then to short-circuit and impede the entire process because of inadequate understanding of, or sensitivity toward, the very ones to whom God wants to bring that Word. (1 Corinthians 14:19)

It is a "homiletic sin,"³ as Read puts it, to be insensitive to what the hearers really are, and where they live in the physical and

²David H. C. Read, Preaching About the Needs of Real People, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988) p. 15.

³Ibid.

spiritual dimension of life. A congregation assembled to worship God and receive His Word on a Sunday morning cannot be categorized as a "solid block of hardened sinners," or a "phalanx of diehard conservatives," or any other label for that matter, but a "group of living, loving, struggling, aspiring, and sometimes despairing human beings, each with quite individual aches and aspirations, fears, and worries."⁴

The examples of recognized insensitivities haunt the preaching ministry of most parish pastors. I remember Life Sunday a few years ago, and my strong Scriptural message from 1 Corinthians 6, which said that "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit," that "you are not your own; you were bought with a price." As I preached the Gospel, the good news, that Jesus Christ has made a difference in our lives through His death and resurrection (verses 11, 14 and 15), and that through His Spirit He actually lives in our bodies and makes us His own, that Gospel proclamation was not heard that morning by two young ladies in the congregation who each had recently had an abortion. I did not know about it then, but they were quite understandably upset by the Law from the same text, which, without the Gospel, was as terrifying as it sounds: "Do you not know that the unrighteous (all those who have had abortions) will not inherit (for they are no longer God's children) the Kingdom of God?" I had a few hours of counseling that week because I had not been sensitive enough in my message to adequately deal with contrition, repentance and forgiveness.

⁴Ibid.

Insensitivity to the hearer, moreover, might very well be perceived by the hearer in much greater measure than the actual incident would warrant. I would like to think that it is always that way, but I am not so sure. During a Mother's Day sermon, recognizing the wonderful qualities and godly sacrifice mothers do make for their families, specifically targeting pregnancy and child-birth experiences, I failed to remember the one lady in the congregation who had tried every means available to become pregnant and could not, as well as another lady who had just recently had her second miscarriage of two conceptions. Recognizing all the wonderful qualities of motherhood is still very fitting for a Mother's Day sermon, if it is related to a meaningful proclamation of God's Word, but sensitivity to childless and infertile couples is also extremely important for the preaching task of the day.

"Preaching is for people," Lueking reminds those who read his book, Preaching: The Art of Connecting God and People. "The preacher must be with people to reach and relate to them effectively. The goal is to incorporate people into the preached Word, to give a voice to the hopes and fears, the victories and defeats, that are part of the journey of faith we all know."⁵ In a word, the message needs to be one of sensitivity. That sensitivity can only happen as the preacher is also a pastor who is with his people, a pastor who is approachable, relational and understanding. It is in that spirit, through the implementation of the Holy Spirit, that people do become incorporated into the preached Word. They hear their own personal lives being discussed,

⁵Lueking, Op. cit., p. 23.

without disclosure, of course. Their very struggles and conquests, their pain and joy, become the arena in which God's Word is proclaimed. They are the assembled people of God, simul justus et peccatur, the church for which the proclaimed Word is given. "The church's sermon is," as Howe summarizes, "the one born in the hearer, and it is the only one taken and delivered in the world."⁶

The sermon's sensitivity also needs to be focused on the receptivity of the hearer, not just on his present life's circumstance. "Each week God gives me bread for his people," a friend told a fellow pastor. The pastor looked back at him, straight into his eye, and replied, "That's true, but you spend a lot of time in the kitchen!"⁷ The friend had to agree. The kitchen hours of preparation, preparing the "bread" in the most appetizing and nutritious way, can be among the most important hours of the pastor's week. Bread has no real purpose unless it is eaten; and if it can be consumed with great eagerness and even enjoyment, then there has been some real sensitivity to the ones who are doing the eating. The one who prepares God's bread for consumption each week needs to ask himself some very important questions concerning those who are the bread's consumers. Tim Timmons gives a good five-point summary in his article, "Why Should They Listen To Me?" His questions are as follows: (1) "Who is my audience?" (2) "What are their questions?" (3) "Which of those questions shall I address?" (4) "What is God's answer to this question?" (5) "How much time do I have?"⁸ Timmons helps

⁶Howe, Op. cit., p. 145.

⁷Stuart Briscoe, "What Makes Interesting Preaching" Leadership, (Winter, 1990), XI, 1.

⁸Tim Timmons, "Why Should They Listen To Me?" Leadership, VI (Fall, 1985), pp. 14-15.

the preacher ask questions that are sensitive to the hearers' present circumstance: "Who is my audience?" and "What are their questions?" He also helps the preacher focus on the receptivity of the hearer: "Which of those questions shall I address?" and "How much time do I have?" The receptivity questions are just as important as the circumstance questions. If the preacher tries to answer all of the hearers' questions, and if he tries to do it extensively, without regard to the time factor, he will have accomplished very little for the hearer. It will not have mattered how sensitive he had been to the hearers' circumstance. If he tries to relate God's Word ("What is God's answer to this question?") to every perceived need of the hearer, in other words, "covering the waterfront," he will have lost his hearers in the process. A person can eat only so much bread at one time, even if it is God's bread!

Our receptivity is quite limited as human beings. We can only absorb and digest so much at one time. Our minds can only process and apply only a limited amount of verbal and non-verbal communication, even if it is God's communication to us through His means of grace, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The focus of the preacher's sermon, therefore, and the time allotted to His proclamation of the Word for the church, needs to be appropriate for those who are the designated hearers.

We live in a world of constant change. The forms of communication are also going through drastic change. In my childhood, a pastor-preacher possessed great authority simply on the basis of his vocation. People listened to his proclamation with great respect for his position as God's spokesman, and also with great respect for the oral and written form of communication he brought to them from God's Word. In fact, the oral

form of communication was heavily based on the written form,⁹ just as Reid informs us in his book, The Empty Pulpit. But today's world comes to us in living color and stereophonic sound; it is a world of audio-visual bombardment. "It comes through all the senses at once rather than through abstractions."¹⁰ We now live "in an era in which our children grow up with the omnipresent eye of the television set intruding itself upon their lives. From their earliest days, they are being bombarded with electronic communication, and this cannot help but influence their mode of responding to the world."¹¹

As communicators of God's Word, sensitive to our preaching task, we need to be aware of the hearers' world of communication. It is frightening to think that the average person in the United States is exposed to over 5,000 persuasive messages each day.¹² They come on t-shirts, bumper stickers, napkins, billboards, magazines, newspapers, and through radio advertisements. But the most troubling of all for the preacher of God's Word, the one that has affected communication itself in a revolutionary way, is, of course, television. "Consider, for example, the familiar television spot and its increasing artistry with complex (and expensive) computer graphics and its increasing sophistication and decreasing length (that is, ten-second 'reinforcement spots' are very familiar, and word has it that we may soon be seeing seven-and-one-half second spots).¹³ Even on Sunday morning, before the worship service,

⁹Reid, Op. cit., pp. 56-9.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 59.

¹¹Ibid., p. 58.

¹²Charles V. Larson, Persuasion: Reception and Responsibility, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publ., 1989) p. 5.

¹³Ibid.

and before the preacher even has a shot at the communication process, television has probably influenced the lives of a great many of his hearers.

The preacher, moreover, is not just up against a different communication form, he is up against a powerful communications' system of influence. The people sitting in the pews right below the pulpit, as well as those clear back to the doors leading to the narthex, have been in training throughout their week. They have been influenced by a system that has been carefully laid out each time they sit in front of their TV engrossed in the programs and advertisements; they have been shown how to mold their lives in a certain way. They have been taught most effectively through the commercials, supported by the television programs themselves, three beliefs which are the basis of this system of influence:

- (1) All problems are solvable. (2) All problems are solvable fast.
- (3) All problems are solvable fast through some form of technology.¹⁴

This is the world influencing the faith and life of the hearer. It is an entire system of influence. It says that when you have pain, drugs will relieve it. It says that when you have dirt, detergents will get rid of it. It says that when you have feelings of inferiority, sports cars will make you superior. Every problem has an answer, right now, if you buy the product being sold. This system of influence is much more troubling for the preacher of God's Word than the obvious problem of the hearers' "total immersion" in the world of audio-visual bombardment.¹⁵ The latter is just a form of communication; the prior is a way

¹⁴Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁵Wayne C. Minnick, The Art of Persuasion, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957) p. 33.

of life. That way of life, completely contrary to God's Word of reconciliation, is so deceptive, because most hearers are completely unaware of its system of influence in their lives.

Identifying With The Life Of The Hearer

The person who assembles with his fellow believers for worship each week needs a Word from God that meets him where he thinks and lives. That Word, accordingly, needs to be a relevant, relational Word. It needs to take into consideration the life circumstance and receptivity of the hearer, as well as the form and system of influence affecting communication with him. The church's proclamation of the Word is for the church and for those who are a part of the gathered community at worship. Roen talks about the hearers of the Word, and the sure way in which they become "better audiences for preaching."¹⁶ It is a rule, he says, that "the more understanding and responsive the audience, the better the preaching . . . Preaching is the mutual work of the preacher and the congregation."¹⁷

There is a built-in tension placed on the preacher by the nature of his proclamation task. The tension is caused, on the one hand, by his sensitivity to God's Word, and, on the other hand, by his sensitivity to his people. In other words, the preacher hears God say, "Thus says the Lord!" while at the same time he hears his people say, "Tell us what we want to hear!"¹⁸ That tension can be devastating to any meaningful

¹⁶Roen, Op. cit., p. xi.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Read, Op. cit., p. 10.

proclamation; but when one little word of the question is changed, the tension becomes a realistic opportunity for the preacher. The opportunity happens when the word "want" is changed by the hearer to the word "need." Very often the people of God, just like any children, do not really know what they want, but they certainly can find out what they need. Not only does the secular world help people find out their needs in life, but God Himself makes that a priority in His Word of proclamation to them. The preacher, then, remaining sensitive toward his hearers, also asks the right questions about his preaching task: (1) "Am I saying anything urgent?" (Am I talking about specific hearer needs?) (2) "Am I pressing for action?" (Am I helping the hearer to grasp by his faith and respond with his life to that which God's Word makes available to him?) (3) "Is this more than a lecture?" (Am I effectively making relevant God's Word for life and salvation?) (4) "Am I addressing this congregation as fellow pilgrims in the life of faith?" (Am I identifying with the hearers as I recognize their difficulties, yet their pilgrimage, in their Christian lives?)¹⁹

The constant attention of the preacher, then, is focused on his unique calling as a herald of the Word of God; he is a "servant of the Word, a teacher of the Christian faith, and at the same time, a live contemporary human being, a disciple among disciples, sensitive, approachable, and receptive."²⁰ The preacher is always balancing the apostolic admonition, "If anyone speak, let him speak as

¹⁹Michael Jenkins, "Four Questions For Better Preaching" Leadership, VI (Fall, 1985).

²⁰Read, Op. cit., p. 28.

the oracles of God," with the plight of the hearer, caught in a web of sin and circumstance, world news and real life. The preacher "bridges the gulf between pulpit and pew . . . blends the authority of the word with the human touch."²¹

If the preacher's sermon does not give a clear indication that he has been in regular contact with his people, feeling their deepest anxieties, experiencing their greatest joys, and sharing their true concerns of life, then the Word he proclaims is not accomplishing its purpose in the preaching task. For "behind the act of preaching each week are moments spent with people in hospitals, sickbeds at home, classrooms, homes for the aged, and visits with parishioners at their place of work."²² Lueking equates preaching with what he calls the "people-connections." Without those connections, he observes, there can be little personal application in a sermon. Those people-connections are in abundance in real life; there is an "incomparable wealth of meaning that is found in the congregation itself."²³ The real art of preaching is "weaving that personal richness into sermons. Such an art is rooted in something deeper than homiletical technique . . . In a real sense, then, people are sermons, not only hearers of sermons."²⁴ Lueking seems to have gotten carried away with his thoughtprogression, equating people with sermons. His point, however, is well taken: there can be no sermon without the people.

²¹Ibid.

²²Lueking, Op. cit., p. 43.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 9-10.

The love and caring of God becomes evident in the revelation of His Word. The love and caring of the pastor-preacher becomes evident in the formulation and proclamation of his sermon. The two are to be congruent -- the loving message of God and the loving message of the pastor -- if the proclamation is to be heard. So, as the pastor-preacher becomes immersed in the ministry of love and caring toward his parishioners, God's love and caring becomes more relational to the hearers of the proclaimed Word. In fact, Stott says it well, when he says, "The paradox is this, that the more I am absorbed as a preacher in the needs of my listeners, the more I am responsive to the gospel . . ."25

God's love and care in the ministry of the Word always seems to be a cyclical process: the more you give of yourself in His ministry of loving and caring for His people, the more you receive of that same ministry in your own life. The paradox for Stott, as a preacher, is really the paradox of the Christian life in general, and of God's Kingdom on this earth. Jesus, as God's Word made flesh, was the ultimate demonstration of the paradox: as He emptied Himself, even unto death, so God exalted Him, even unto the highest heaven. Insofar as God's Word did become incarnate in the person and work of Christ, so that Word became the authentic Word of God for His people. And insofar as God's Word does become incarnate in the loving and caring person of the preacher, so also that Word becomes the authentic proclaimed Word of God for His people assembled for worship.

²⁵Jabusch, Op. cit., p. 53.

Paul is constantly speaking about the authenticity of his message, defending that with his account of his apostolic commissioning by the Risen Christ. He says that he is the "least of the apostles" (Ephesians 3:8), but an apostle indeed! He says that he cannot help himself, that "it would be misery for me (him) not to preach" (1 Corinthians 15:1), but that he preached "only what had been given to him." Authenticity, so important to the hearer of the Word, was also important to the proclaimer of the Word, as Paul says: "We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Authenticity, as Paul illustrates so well in his epistles, is more than truth in the content of the Word; it is truth in the person who proclaims that Word. Caemmerer says that "he (the proclaimer) speaks as a man who has been trying out these wonderful guarantees of God and has found them to hold good. He is not a ranter or a medicine man covering up the fakery of his own craft with bluster. But he is a witness to Jesus Christ, who is his Lord."²⁶ The preacher not only declares God's Word to be true, he speaks from experience as one who can illustrate God's Word with his own faith and life. The foolishness of the Gospel is no longer foolishness for him, and the burden of the yoke of proclamation is no longer a burden for him. He is not ashamed of the Gospel any longer, for it has become for him the power of God unto salvation. This authentic witness to the fullness of God's Word in the life of the proclaimer enables the hearer to be connected with God's Word itself, and the resultant power God's Spirit gives through the Word. Not only has

²⁶Caemmerer, Op. cit., pp. 37-38.

the hearer been heard by the preacher, but now the Word of God has been heard through the life and proclamation of the preacher.

The Preached Message: For Proclaimer and Hearer

It is quite clear in the Scriptures that God gives the church two gifts: one is the reconciliation we have in Christ Jesus ("Christ reconciled us to Himself") and the other is "the ministry of reconciliation" along with "the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18, 19). It is quite obvious from that Scripture section that those who proclaim the Word are also those who have received it, and that once the message has been received, it must be proclaimed. We have become Christ's ambassadors, Paul says, and so we are commissioned to herald the one and only reconciliation which God has accomplished through His Son at Calvary for mankind.

Something happens to the one commissioned to be proclaimer of that Word when he studies the Word he is to proclaim. God's Holy Spirit causes him to tremble at the authority of the Word (e.g. Ezra 9 and Isaiah 66) and at the power of its message for his own faith and life. It becomes a personal Word, as God inspires him and relates the Word to his preaching task. A form of wrestling takes place within the preacher, as he struggles with the reality of his own sinful flesh, in contrast to the Spirit's conviction of sin, and as he struggles with the reality of the sinfulness of the world of his hearers, in contrast to the Spirit's motivation toward newness of faith and life. As the Spirit confronts the preacher with the Word, a personal formulation of that Word comes to be expressed by the preacher. It finds the appropriate language; and

that language might well be called a translation,²⁷ for the Word is expressed in the current language and circumstance of the preacher and his hearers. The translation is not the creation of the preacher alone, but of the Spirit guiding the preacher with his sensitivity toward the Word and his sensitivity toward the hearers which make up his congregation.

The creative formation of the Word for the preacher and his hearers keeps the Word of God as current and relevant as the local news broadcast. The Spirit's work is never finished in this persuasive process. The Word is His gift to begin with, and the received translation of that Word is also His gift in the life of the hearer. As the Spirit moves through people in the process of applying that Word, God's gift of faith enables them to live out His newness in their lives.

The Holy Scriptures show that the church has always been dependent upon the Spirit for the faith to hold fast God's reconciliation in Christ, and also for the power to proclaim the message of reconciliation. And yet, the Scriptures also make it quite clear that the men and women of God, armed with God's Word, play a real part in the actual conversion of people to God. We are told that Paul, Barnabas, and Apollos "made disciples," that they "instructed people in the way of the Lord," that they "persuaded Greeks," that they "besought them to be reconciled to God," and that they "had increasing anguish of heart and uttered deep prayers of the heart that they might be saved." The preached message does accomplish what it is intended to accomplish; God promises that to the one who proclaims His Word.

²⁷H. J. C. Pieterse, Communicative Preaching (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1987), p. 19.

God's promise of His Word not returning to Him void (Isaiah 55:11) is still His promise today! He made sure that His Word would be a liberating Word through His Son, Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate. He makes sure that His Word will be a liberating Word today through the proclaimed Word, which He makes incarnate through those who receive Him as Lord. The divine and human elements are clearly present in the preaching task, as Read says.²⁸ They are also clearly present in the hearing of God's Word, for that Word, divine as it is, becomes incarnate in real life. And the very fact that the preacher is a servant, not only of the written Word, but of the Word made flesh, should help shape and form the type of proclamation he gives to his people. Abstraction and generalization do not coincide with a personal Savior, who shed His blood on a cross outside Jerusalem's wall and said, "It is finished," noting the completion of the act of salvation for everyone who believes in Him.

God always relates His inspired Word to His people in relational ways. As Luther reminds us: originally, the Word was not a book, but a sermon, and the church, not a Federhaus (quill house), but a Mundhaus (mouth house).²⁹ The Word was always a Word proclaimed to the people, in their language and with their understanding of meaning. The theological and exegetical study, so necessary in preparation, should not be demonstrated in the proclaimed Word in any technical way. Read illustrates with building terminology, "just as the scaffolding used in the construction of a good building is not visible in the completed edifice, so the

²⁸Read, Op. cit., p. 39.

²⁹Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957) 10, I, 1, 2.

solid theological and exegetical work that underlies a good sermon should be skillfully hidden in the finished product."³⁰

If the sermon, God's proclaimed Word, is only a replication of the Scriptures, God's written Word, then the preaching task is hardly necessary at all. God does, however, clearly entrust that task of preaching to those who are called by His Spirit to communicate His Word to His people. The Word becomes very relational in preaching, because it is filtered through the preacher's person. "His whole person is the means!" Caemmerer says. "He is not just a loud-speaker fastened to a pulpit, but he is a man. He speaks a message which has stirred him first and which shows its effect over his entire body."³¹ God engages the preacher for his task, and God utilizes the preacher's person in the proclamation. Walter Burghardt can even say: "Ultimately, I am the word, the word that is heard. And -- I say it fearfully -- it is not a clever rhetorician the people need, but a holy homilist. Holy in what sense? Because I am aware that I am only a word, not the word: if God does not speak through me, I am 'a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal' (1 Corinthians 13:1)."³²

God's promise in the sermon proclamation is to speak through the preacher in order to connect with the hearer. "The preacher seeks to move his hearer," Caemmerer emphasizes, "to the point that he says, 'You are right. I need the help of God Himself to repair my life and move it His way.' When the preacher has done this, he is ready for the last great art of persuasion, the applying of the thrust of God Himself that will

³⁰Read, Op. cit., p. 31.

³¹Caemmerer, Op. cit., p. 114.

³²Walter J. Burghardt, Preaching: The Art and The Craft (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 15.

help the hearer to change."³³ The preacher now speaks the message "which actually produces the change, moves the hearer out of the clutch of his dependency, thrusts him back into the field of God's own power again . . . the message of the cross."³⁴ Caemmerer confirms what the Scriptures say about the proclaimed Word, that it is the power of God, that it accomplishes what God intends, that it makes a difference in people's lives. If the preacher is to persuade his hearers to accept God's promises through faith, and live the life of the Spirit, then his total being needs to be "aflame" with the message that is proclaimed, Burghardt says. "To challenge, the word must come alive."³⁵

The Word takes on life for the hearer in the person of the preacher, but it is always interpreted by the preacher's presentation. Whenever we speak the Word, we present two messages: the verbal or discursive message, conveyed by the actual words, and the non-verbal or nondiscursive message, conveyed by the presentation of the message. Very often, as the old saying goes, "actions speak louder than words." The preacher's general appearance, manner of presentation, and style of verbal projection, all influence the receptivity of the Word that is spoken. The discursive is often overpowered by the non-discursive, as Ken Andersen says, "When our words do not agree with our actions, the truth of the action is communicated and not the message of the words."³⁶ If I ask someone, "How are you doing?" as I walk right past him, that person knows that I really do not care to know the information that I ask. If I preach about God's personal love and caring for each of us and use hard words, non-relational eye

³³Ibid.

³⁴Caemmerer, Op. cit., p. 37

³⁵Burghardt, Op. cit.

³⁶Kenneth E. Anderson, Persuasion: Theory and Practice (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1978, p. 83.

contact, and rigid body language, the hearers know that I really do not believe that God's love is very personal at all. They do not evidence a God who even cares. There are many forms of non-discursive body language that express thoughts and feelings in the process of communication. Within the arena of preaching and teaching, Allan Jahsmann has listed some of the more obvious non-verbal communicators: "facial expressions, body postures and movements, gestures, vocal sounds such as coughs and screams, twitches and other tics, smiles, sighs, grimaces, gasps, a little wink or twinkle in the eye, the distance one keeps between himself and others, and the direction of one's gaze."

The preached message that is received by the hearer is so dependent on the preacher. Not only does the preacher have to be persuaded first by the very message he proclaims, being the representation of the message of the hearer, but the preacher needs to be very aware of his nonverbal, as well as his verbal, forms of communication. The love of Christ needs to be evident within his spirit and throughout his proclamation.

³⁷ Allan Hart Jahsmann, Power Beyond Words (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), p. 82.

CHAPTER 3

APPLYING LAW AND GOSPEL TO THE HEARER

The Hearer's Faith and Life

Sensitivity to the life and circumstance of the hearer is of crucial importance in the preaching task, but more specific structure is needed. A commonly accepted secular sequence for speech structure lists five steps in the normal process of motivating the hearer: (1) attention, (2) need, (3) satisfaction, (4) visualization, and (5) action.¹ This section of the paper will consider the need, satisfaction and action steps required for the act of preaching. The attention and visualization steps will be considered somewhat later.

Everyone has needs, all kinds of needs. Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), one of the first writers of "pragmatic psychology," introduced what has come to be known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. His model of human needs has been widely accepted and adapted into a myriad of different situations. It is presented here from a biblical perspective in order to aid the preacher in understanding the needs of his hearers. In his hierarchy, Maslow was saying that as one progresses through life, different stages of need are encountered: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs.²

¹Raymond S. Ross, Persuasion: Communication and Interpersonal Relations (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), p. 114.

²Abraham Maslow, Motivation and Personality (New York: Harper and Ros, 1954), pp. 200-210.

It was Maslow's theory that the more primary needs will remain more important to a person until they are satisfied. In other words, a person's physiological needs are stronger than the safety needs, which are stronger than the love needs, which in turn are stronger than the esteems needs, which are stronger than those needs which are called self-actualization.³ It should be noted here that although Maslow misses much of the complexity of the created human personality, and although his concept of self-actualization is contrary to the central doctrine of the Scriptures, justification by faith, there is much to be said about his general understanding of human need and the satisfaction of that need. From a homiletical perspective, using his theory, we could say that it would be most inappropriate to preach about mission outreach when there has been a major tragedy in the congregation, or about the nature of heaven when there is a current spirit of dissension that needs some attention. The more basic needs have to be addressed before the others can be understood.

The physiological needs, according to Maslow, include the need for food, water, warmth, and sexual contact. When the body is deprived of these basics, it becomes ill, and when it is preoccupied with them, it is blocked from growth. Jesus recognized some of these basic needs in Matthew 25, as one of the indications of love to others shared by His people: food, drink, clothing, medicine, housing and visitation to "the least of these my brethren." Bread for a starving man is needed before he can even consider the Bread of Life.⁴

³ Abraham Maslow, "A Dynamic Theory of Human Motivation," Psychological Review, 1943, pp. 50, 370-396.

⁴ Maslow, "A Dynamic Theory," pp. 370 ff. and Joseph C. Aldrich, Life-Style Evangelism (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1981), pp. 92-93.

The safety needs include the needs for security, stability, freedom from fear, anxiety and chaos. These needs deal with injustice, unfairness, inconsistency, family quarreling and abuse, separation, divorce, violent weather, criminals, murder and tyranny. Historically, spiritual protection has played a key role in the church and its proclamation. Even a portion of the church building, the sanctuary, implies safety from worldly forces. But the ultimate safety offered by the Gospel is salvation or eternal safety: "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).⁵

The belongingness and love needs include love and affection in meaningful relationships, with a loved one, family member, group or companion. It is a feeling of being "in," "in the know," accepted and attractive. In the Scriptural sense, sin always tries to break belongingness and love, and move relationships toward separation and concealment. That was the problem with the "woman taken in adultery" in John's Gospel (John 7:53 - 8:11); she prostituted her body to try to obtain a form of belonging which ended in disillusionment. Only Jesus' understanding and forgiveness gave her what she really needed.⁶

The esteem needs include reputation, prestige, attention, recognition, appreciation, value and importance. They include a feeling of being competent and in control of one's own life (self-esteem), and a desire to be well regarded by other people ("pure esteem"). Everyone needs affirmation from others. Yet, there is certainly no better news than to

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

hear that you are "somebody" to God! "I know my own, and my own know me . . . and I lay down my life . . ." (John 10).⁷

The self-actualized needs are more singular in focus. They deal with a person's destiny, his or her purpose in life, the fulfillment of an inner potential. As Maslow himself states, "Self-actualizing people have a wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods of life, with awe, pleasure, wonder and even ecstasy, however stale these experiences may have become to others."⁸ The self-actualized person is really in touch with the many facets of himself, other people, the world and God. Jesus said it clearly for the Christian, when He said, "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). "You are the salt of the earth . . . the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13, 14).

The needs of the hearers greatly determine the goals of the preacher in his proclamation. "Satisfaction," which follows the "need" step in the speech structure listing, could be considered comparable to any of the particular goals for a sermon. If a sermon relates accurately to the needs of the people, and if it also brings God's Word to bear on those needs, satisfaction would be the very minimal outcome for the hearer. Satisfaction, of course, is a secular term; contentment, peace and joy might more accurately describe the "satisfied" hearer in the spiritual sense.

Goals should be specific if the hearer's needs are going to be met. Jesus always approached people at their point of need, in very

⁷Ibid.

⁸Maslow, Motivation and Personality, pp. 214-215.

effective ways. Through His conversation and dialogical preaching form, He penetrated the symptoms, discovered the real needs of the people, and directed them toward specific new ways of living (goals). Different people with different needs called for different kinds of goal setting.

Leighton Ford, in his book Good News Is For Sharing, relates the following:

He talked to the woman at the well about "living water." But when the rich young man came up and asked what he had to do to have eternal life, Jesus did not talk to him about living water. Knowing that money was this man's god, he said, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." He was basically calling him to a total switch of gods. On the other hand, he didn't tell Zacchaeus, the tax collector who went up in a tree, to give away everything he had. He simply said, "Zacchaeus . . . I must stay at your house today." By the end of that day, Zacchaeus had decided on his own to give half of his possessions to the poor.⁹

Out of the many possible ways of describing the kinds of goals a sermon could have, the terminology of Caemmerer remains primary. He says that "the great aim and purpose of preaching . . . is not to inform but to empower toward goals and ends."¹⁰ And those goals are just two in number: faith and life. "The first great goal that God has for His people is that they believe in Him as their Father who forgives their sins for the sake of Jesus Christ."¹¹ Faith is more than an assent to the facts about God and His work of salvation on man's behalf. Faith takes hold of the promises of God in Christ and makes them one's own. The second possible goal for the hearer is a life goal. "Preaching aims to aid the Christian . . . and help him day by day be a better servant of God in Christ."¹² Life means to be strengthened and steadfast and

⁹Leighton Ford, Good News Is For Sharing (Elgin: David C. Cook, 1977), p. 90.

¹⁰Caemmerer, Op. cit., p. 16.

¹¹Ibid., p. 17.

¹²Ibid., p. 18.

watchful. It means to endure in hardship, to grow in knowledge, and to act in love. Life is what God offers in Christ for eternity.

When goals are clear and concise and understood by the hearer, the sermon has a much greater possibility of being persuasive. "Persuasion depends on the hearer's awareness of what he is being freed from and on his desire for that freeing."¹³ The preacher does a great service for the hearer when the faith or life goal is focused on one clear thought. That thought needs to be very clear for the preacher before he attempts to proclaim the Word to his hearer. The target should always be in focus. God's Word may not return void, but we presume upon God and His Spirit if we think we can make a vague presentation of the Gospel and then expect specific results. We are toying with that Word if we think we can present it in a way that would apply to anyone in any circumstance, and then expect God to make all the application to the lives of the hearers.

The "shot gun" sermon is somewhat like a child shooting darts at a wall and then drawing circles around the darts to signify excellent marksmanship. We may kid ourselves, as if we were playing a game, but the preaching task is one accountable to God and empowered by His Spirit. God's Word does not return to Him void, but why should we settle for little better than nothing in expectation? He gives us the promise of abundant results: 30, 60, and 100 fold (Matthew 13:23). God does not put marks on our foreheads or halos over our heads to signify His excellent marksmanship. He makes it quite clear that the specific results of the proclamation of His Word will come with a change in one's attitude (faith) or in one's behavior (life).

¹³Ibid., p. 88.

Behavior change can certainly be more noticeable and dramatic.

Emory Griffin's book, The Mindchangers, makes that observation:

Behavior change provides satisfying evidence of successful persuasion. It is readily observable and often dramatic. We can see the effectiveness of Jesus' ministry by viewing the behavior of his listeners. Peter leaves his nets, Zacchaeus comes down from his tree, the blind man washes in the pool of Siloam. It's obvious that Jesus placed a premium on action. In the parable of the two sons (Matthew 21), a father asked his two sons to work in the vineyard. One said he would, but he didn't. The other said he wouldn't, but he did. Our Lord makes it clear that despite his reluctance, the second son is approved because of his actions. It's not without reason that the history of the early church is called the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁴

Attitudinal change applies to what is going on within a person.

Jesus talked about the "heart," or the inner man, that determines what a person actually does (Matthew 15:19). Attitude affects one's behavior, and faith affects one's life. The inner man, in his credal posture of believing "that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31), has life-changing qualities. In Mark's Gospel, the father of the epileptic boy pleads with Jesus, "If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us." Jesus responds, "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:22, 23). Alton Wedel, talking about the Word as the very power of God, says, "the Gospel of the cross is not primarily a comfort Word that convinces people of its truth and asks them to sit down and put their slippers on, or at best to wander absentmindedly around the world, mumbling prayers, and hoping for a better day in heaven . . . it works a crucifixion and a resurrection."¹⁵ The proclaimed Word of God not only speaks to the needs of the hearer in a specific way, it also moves the

¹⁴Emory A. Griffin, The Mindchangers (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1976), p. 14.

¹⁵Alton Wedel, The Mighty Word: Power and Purpose of Preaching (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), p. 34.

hearer toward specific faith and life goals through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Word Divided: Law and Gospel

The Law and Gospel are the total truth of God's Word to the hearer. They are the real substance of the proclamation of God's Word, for in and through both of these doctrines of Scripture, God confronts man and motivates man to respond to Him. The Law shows the hearer what God demands of him and what he cannot accomplish in his life now and for eternity. The Gospel shows the hearer what God has done for him and continues to accomplish for his salvation now and for eternity. These two doctrines are God's Word, but they are also in direct contrast to each other.

The Law is a subtle trap for the person who uses it for his own outward piety. The pious person, using the Law, will be able to demonstrate his goodness in life, but, like the Pharisees, he will delude himself into a false security, motivated by the wrong reasons. Ultimately, the Law by itself will cause a person to despair; he will see his complete inability to abide by the Law's demands.

The Law of God has always been written on the hearts of mankind; it is, after all, the indisputable will of God. Adam and Eve knew they had sinned against God, and they felt the effects of the Law's condemnation as they hid from God, even though God had not yet written out His Law, as He would many years later on tablets of stone. Not only does the Law concern itself with the external forms of righteousness, but its main thrust is the fear, love, and trust in God above everything else and the love of one's neighbor as oneself. When the Law is not obeyed, God

disciplines the disobedient person with temporal or eternal punishment.

The Law's function can be described with three metaphorical terms; it can be called a curb, a mirror, and a rule.¹⁶ As a curb, the Law gives some outward boundaries to the aimless wandering of one's life of sin. As a mirror, the Law accurately reflects a person's sinful condition, so that he can recognize his real separation from the image of God. As a rule, the Law helps the Christian measure his life and guide the new man to do what is pleasing to God, as Paul describes in Galatians 5:22-25. When these three terms are used to describe the Law of God, it becomes very clear that no one can accomplish what God requires. It also becomes clear that the Law cannot help a person do all God requires. So, the Law's effect upon the hearer takes one of two directions. Either the Law will drive a person to despair, knowing that he cannot do what God requires, and is guilty of eternal punishment; or, the Law will move a person in the direction of repentance, turning from his sinfulness and turning toward God in contrition, like the repentant publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13); or, it works self-righteousness.

The Gospel is radically different from the Law. It does not confront the hearer with God's demands; rather, it offers the hearer exactly what the hearer needs but cannot acquire himself. The Gospel offers life and salvation. It offers that to the hearer because of God's forgiveness through the sacrificial death and miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ. This Gospel, proclaimed to God's people, is the very heart of God's love to man. It is grace freely given. It is

¹⁶John T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. 478.

the Law fulfilled. It is Christus pro nobis. It is God's gift to the church, edified with His redemption and sanctification. Above all, it is a proclaimed Word of grace, without which God's people would not know or have His salvation and life through His Spirit. After the Law has accomplished its purpose in bringing man as sinner before God, the Gospel can accomplish its purpose in bringing to man God's new life. Eggold talks about the complete change that happens in the hearer when the preacher proclaims the Gospel:

He creates in him a new life -- absolutely new -- a life of fellowship with God, a life of faith in Jesus Christ who died for him and rose again. This faith -- let the preacher never forget it -- is not merely intellectually believing something. It is a genuine alteration of the person, a transformation. By the gift of faith a person is born again (John 3:5); he has passed from death to life (1 John 3:14), from darkness into light (1 John 2:8-10), from estrangement to fellowship (1 John 1:3), from disenfranchisement to citizenship (Eph. 2:19), from being a slave to being a son (Rom. 8:14-17).¹⁷

As important as it is to preach the Gospel in all its truth and joy, it is equally important to preach God's Law with its fulness of demand. Both Law and Gospel need adequate proclamation, and they also need adequate distinction. Carl F. Walther has written the classic work on this subject, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel.¹⁸ The failure to make the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, Walther contends, certainly makes the Word of God an unclear Word. It does not let the sinner be what he is before God, and receive God's punishment. It also does not let God be the saving God of grace that He is, and convey forgiveness to the hearer through Christ. "The proper understanding of

¹⁷Eggold, Op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁸Carl F. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928).

this distinction between the law and the gospel is the foremost task of the preacher."¹⁹ As the Lutheran Confessions make it clear:

Through this means (namely, the preaching and the hearing of his Word) God is active, breaks our hearts, and draws man, so that through the preaching of the law man learns to know his sins and the wrath of God and experiences genuine terror, contrition, and sorrow in his heart, and through the preaching of and meditation upon the holy Gospel of the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ there is kindled in him a spark of faith which accepts the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake and comforts itself with the promise of the Gospel. And in this way the Holy Spirit, who works all of this, is introduced into the heart.²⁰

Helping the Hearer Grow in Faith and Life

The proclaimer of God's Word lets that Word influence his own faith and life, so that what he faithfully preaches is also what he has personally received in his life. The Apostle Paul, for example, helps his readers handle the same issues he has struggled with in his own life:

I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

Paul relates to his hearers the proclaimed Gospel message, a message personally demonstrated in his own life. He does that, moreover, only after he has thoroughly exhausted his application of the Law, both for the church at Corinth and for himself. The application of the Law for the church seems quite obvious in the areas of group divisions, immorality, sex and marriage, conscience, church order, gifts of the

¹⁹Vajta, Op. cit., p. 80.

²⁰Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II, 54.

Spirit and the resurrection. That application is powerful for his people, because Paul frequently relates to his own personal struggle with the Law and the consequences of the Law on his work as an apostle. "The Lord is the one," he says, who ultimately "passes judgment on me" (1 Corinthians 4:4). Paul wanted his people to learn through his example of being under the judgment of the Law as well as under the freedom of the Gospel in Jesus Christ. One cannot be an example unless both doctrines are clearly proclaimed and personified. Paul would agree with the following Caemmererian assessment:

Let the pastor himself grow in the resourcefulness with which he alerts to the meaning of eternal life and with which he deploys the spiritual gifts of all his people, so that he constructs a congregation that is a community of people rich toward God, visibly strong in praise and adoration.²¹

The church of God needs the proclaimed Word, both as Law and Gospel, in order to be rich toward God in faith and to be visibly strong as a community in God's life. When the Law has sufficiently related God's judgment to the sinfulness in the lives of the hearers, the preacher then proclaims the Gospel to them in all its fulness. The Gospel creates the faith that it seeks in the hearer. "The Gospel is ek pisteos eis pistin, out of faith and for faith," Eggold states. "The sinner is righteous before God out of faith, not out of works. Moreover, the righteousness of God is for faith; it is designed that it should be received by faith. It calls for faith. And it works the faith it calls for. The Gospel is 'the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth' (Romans 1:16)."²² One goal of preaching is the establishment

²¹Richard R. Caemmerer, Feeding and Leading (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), p. 29.

²²Eggold, Op. cit., p. 46.

of such faith in the hearer. The corollary goal of preaching is the empowerment of the hearer with the implications of faith for his life. That includes dedicated worship (Romans 12:1), love of the brethren (1 John 4:11), ministry to the needy (Matthew 25:35-40), and growth in sharing the love of God in Christ (Ephesians 3:18). Growth in the faith and life of the hearer is an expected result of the proclaimed Law and Gospel from God's Word.

SECTION TWO

The proclaiming of God's Word for the church is part of God's intent in giving us His Holy Word. The second section of this paper focuses on the persuasive nature of the proclaiming of that Word.

Chapter four looks at the meaning of persuasion, its nature and history. Persuasion is defined in ethical and transactional terms, as it relates specifically to the preaching task. The theory of persuasion is illustrated in its three Aristotelian modes: logos, ethos, and pathos.

Theory takes on form and substance in chapter five. The three Aristotelian modes are demonstrated in terms of the proclaimer's sensitivity to the hearer's need and circumstance. The transactional nature of the communication form also reveals the artistic quality persuasion really has.

Finally, the Word of proclamation is seen in all its persuasive power in chapter six. The Holy Spirit, God's source of persuasion, is the basis of faith and life for the proclaimer and hearer; He makes the Word come alive in the proclamation event as He makes the church come alive through His persuasive power.

CHAPTER 4

PERSUASION UNDERSTOOD BY THE ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Understanding Persuasion's Roots and Ethical Base

The subject of persuasion is one of the oldest subjects studied in western civilization. Otherwise known as rhetoric, persuasion played a major part in what Pieterse calls the "historical model of communication."¹ Today's communication models, even in homiletics, have evolved from, and resemble, the communication models of the past. They may be more contemporary, but they still include much of the historical model in their form. Since the art of preaching comprises many skills of persuasive communication, it is important to understand the historical background and influence of persuasion, its connections with the practice of homiletics, and also its ethical standard.

From what history can tell us, the ancient Greeks were actually the first people to design a model of communication. It can already be seen in the work of Socrates (469-399 B.C.), who used marketplace dialogue as his method of acquiring knowledge. Plato (427-347 B.C.) improved on much of his teacher's methodology, and made Socrates' dialogical principle a standard of communication. The principle, moreover, was then adapted by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), who eventually designed the historical model of communication known as the Aristotelian triad. He established the triad in his work, The Rhetoric; the three key elements of the model came to

¹Pieterse, Op. cit., p. 23.

be known as ethos (credibility), logos (logical argument), and pathos (stirring appeal.)²

Aristotle became the first one to study the subject of rhetoric in depth; he called it "the faculty of observing in a given case the available means of persuasion."³ In ancient Greece, persuasion was equated with power and winning in the courts of law. It soon became a flourishing science and art, a main part of Greek education. The Greek historical model of persuasion gained world acclaim. The famous Roman orator Cicero enhanced the Aristotelian model with his own five point system of persuasive speaking: "inventing or discovering evidence and arguments, organizing them, styling them artistically, memorizing them, and finally delivering them skillfully."⁴ Cicero's works, Rhetorica (c. 82 B.C.) and De Oratore (55 B.C.), added more structure and depth to Aristotle's basic model.⁵

The historical model of communication, with enhancements added by influential orators like Cicero and Quintillianus, became the means by which the preaching form was studied and developed.⁶ Today there are many other contemporary models of communication, but Aristotle's model still remains quite useful and influential. With this model, a sermon can be examined in its various parts: form and style, organization and rhetorical devices, the preacher's presentation and character, his language and persuasiveness, and so forth.

²Ibid.

³Larson, Op. cit., p. 9.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Pieterse, Op. cit., p. 24.

It is interesting to note that the so-called "father of modern communication science" was the Danish Lutheran theologian and philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1955). Kierkegaard made a radical change in the ancient historical model. He refocused what had been established for over two milleniums; he removed the speaker or preacher from being the primary key to communication. Instead, he put the hearer, or receiver as he liked to call it, on an equal level with the preacher, or sender. He believed that the receiver was equal to the sender in the communication event, because no communication could take place without the receiver interpreting the message, and then relating a new message. Kierkegaard's theory was not accepted by the church of his day; preachers for over a century would not revise, or even rethink, their historic Aristotelian model. And there is still strong resistance today.⁷

Despite all the efforts to analyze and define the communication process, from Aristotle to Kierkegaard, and even to our own time, we still know very little about influencing, or persuading, others. We have many theories, but no laws, many principles, but no established system. Communication, and especially persuasive communication, is an art and not a science. It has many variables and complexities; it is never predicable or consistent. Because it is based on human personality and behavior, the study of persuasion can only look for probable tendencies in communication, even from extensive research and acquired knowledge.

A textbook definition of persuasion can be very vague and general; persuasion can be defined as "a process that changes attitudes, beliefs,

⁷Ibid., pp. 25-26.

opinions or behaviors."⁸ That definition only states the purpose or goal of persuasion; it does not indicate any information about the sender, the receiver or the means of persuasion. Bettinghaus gives the preacher much more information with his definition: "a conscious attempt by one individual to change the attitudes, beliefs, or the behavior of another individual or group of individuals through the transmission of some message."⁹ While Bettinghaus does indicate the goal of persuasion (to change the attitude, beliefs, or the behavior), he does not give any indication of the mode of change; and while he does state the means of persuasion (through the transmission of some message), he does not state how the sender will use the means. Minnick, emphasizing a response-centered, behavioral approach, has some very definite ideas when he defines persuasion as "discourse written or oral, in which the author controls all appropriate communication variables in an attempt to determine the response of the receiver toward a particular choice of belief or conduct."¹⁰ His goal of persuasion is quite specific (to determine the response . . . toward a particular choice of belief or conduct), and the means of persuasion is also quite specific (controls all appropriate communication variables). It is at this point that the ethical aspect of persuasion becomes an issue.

Persuasion is a tool of communication, and like any other tool, it can be used positively or negatively according to the ethics of the persuader. Minnick's definition of persuasion is very ethical in theory,

⁸Larson, Op. cit., p. 10.

⁹Woodward, Op. cit., pp. 17-18.

¹⁰Winston L. Brembeck, Persuasion: A Means of Social Influence (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 77.

but it could easily be used in an unethical way. Although he does use the qualifying adjective "appropriate" when he describes his means of persuasion, the word "controls" might very well give unethical license to a persuader. The same is true when he describes his goal of "determining the response." Even though he uses the word "choice"¹¹ in his definition, it is the sender's choice that is meant, not the receiver's choice. Persuasion, in that case, can easily turn into an unethical form of manipulation or propaganda which is to be avoided at all costs by the one who proclaims the persuasive Word of God.

In the history of the rhetorical arts, when persuasive communication is used in ethical and productive ways, the ability to make a choice is crucial for the receiver. In fact, when there is no choice among alternatives for the receiver, or hearer, there really is no persuasion taking place. Andersen, in his textbook Persuasion: Theory and Practice, incorporates the highest standards of ethical persuasive communication when he gives his definition of persuasion: "Persuasion is communication in which the communicator seeks through the use of symbolic agencies, particularly language, to effect a desired voluntary change in the attitudes and/or actions of the receiver(s)."¹²

Since bringing change into the life of the receiver is the goal of the persuader, that change, according to Andersen, must be voluntary. The receiver, led by the Spirit, is enabled to choose to obey the Word presented. That makes a persuasive communication very ethical, and it is the only kind to be used by the proclaimer of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Donald McGavran writes about the Christian proclamation, "In

¹¹(suggesting available options for the receiver)

¹²Andersen, Op. cit., p. 7.

the free persuasion and counterpersuasion which is life, men must not be forced, tricked, or bribed into doing what they do not wish to do -- even if we are very sure it would be good for them."¹³ The preacher of God's Word cannot force his proclamation on his hearers. Not only would that be unethical, but it would be unproductive as well. Furthermore, he should avoid any intentional distortion of the truth through exaggeration, stacking the evidence, or overgeneralization, according to Ray McLaughlin.¹⁴

Persuasion is an important aspect of the preaching task, and the Word itself should help the preacher place it in proper perspective. The term per suasio (from the Latin) means "by sweetness," indicating what the ancients already knew as a basic necessity in the art of rhetoric, that in order to initiate and direct a course of action in a hearer, it was necessary to make the proposal quite attractive.

Three Modes of Persuasion

Aristotle's historical model of communication consisted of three modes of persuasion. The first mode, which depended on personal character, is what he called the ethos, or credibility of the speaker. The second mode, the logos, pertained to the message or speech itself. The third mode was labeled pathos, or the passionate part of the speaker which related to the audience. In The Rhetoric, Aristotle wrote that "the ideal persuader should put the audience in the right emotional frame of mind (pathos), state the best arguments (logos), and have the right kind of character (ethos)."¹⁵

¹³ Donald A. McGavran, Understanding Church Growth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), p. 35.

¹⁴ Raymond W. McLaughlin, The Ethics of Persuasive Preaching (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 23.

¹⁵ Woodward, Op. cit., p. 151.

The first element of importance in persuasion, according to Aristotle, is ethos. Even before the speaker speaks, this mode is already being judged by the audience. It has to do with one's reputation, the way the speaker is perceived; it is also based upon what the audience sees -- the physical demeanor, dress, and apparent readiness of the speaker. The speaker's ethos becomes more obvious to the hearer as soon as the speaker begins his speech; the audience sizes up his eye contact, interest of message, word choice, smoothness of argument, voice quality, and so on. These are the artistic proofs in rhetoric, because the speaker can control them. Ethos, then, has two parts: the reputation or character of the speaker, as well as the image of the speaker as he delivers his message. Aristotle summarizes his thoughts concerning ethics:

The character (ethos) of the speaker is a cause of persuasion when the speech is so uttered as to make him worthy of belief; for as a rule we trust men to probity more, and more quickly about things in general, while on points outside the realm of exact knowledge, where opinion is divided, we trust them absolutely. This trust, however, should be created by the speech itself, and not left to depend upon an antecedent impression that the speaker is this or that kind of man. It is not true, as some writers on the art maintain, that the probity of the speaker contributes nothing to his persuasiveness; on the contrary, we might almost affirm that his character (ethos) is the most potent of all means of persuasion.

The speaker's reputation or character is certainly important, but Aristotle concludes that the presentation will communicate the real "probity" of the speaker.

In the same way in which ethos reflects the person of the speaker, logos reflects the logic of the message. It is the content of the argument itself; it is the meaning of the words and the way in which they

¹⁶Lane Cooper, trans., The Rhetoric of Aristotle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932), pp. 8-9.

are constructed into a logical order, or at least an order that appears logical. "It is the string of literal meanings, the story that carries the hearer along," as noted by Roen. The logos does not sound quite as interesting as the speaker's ethos, but it is the vital part of the presentation for the hearer. It appeals to his rational side and relies on the hearer's ability to process information in a logical way. Aristotle liked to use the form of syllogism to bring a logical thought to some conclusion in the mind of the audience. This would always be most effective when the persuader knew his audience and could almost predict how they would respond to his message.

The third mode of persuasion is pathos, or the passionate part of the speaker which relates to the audience. It includes appeals to the emotional, or feeling part, of the hearer. Emotion is a valid and necessary part of the process of communication; it is neither good nor bad in and of itself. It does, however, tend to overshadow logical thought, and, therefore, needs to be used with the utmost care in the process of persuasion. Emotional appeals are often very subtle; the hearer might even be very unaware of their impact on his thinking. But because man is a rational and emotional being, thinking and feeling are closely related and very difficult to separate. Aristotle's observations gave him a listing of seven emotions that affect the process of persuasion. Without enumerating the psychological explanations of the seven, it should be stated that "until the listener is able to feel what the speaker feels about his position, persuasion is incomplete . . . If he uses pathetic

¹⁷Roen, Op. cit., pp. 4, 50.

appeals too grossly," according to Marsh, "he will offend his audience; yet, if he uses them too sparsely, he will fail to persuade them."¹⁸

Persuasion Affected by Hearer and Language

Persuasion is affected by the hearer, his receptivity and circumstance; the persuader takes into consideration all the factors of influence when he makes his presentation. Persuasion is also effected by the hearer; that is, the hearer, in a very real sense, is the one who persuades himself, if persuasion is to take place at all. "If the receiver is persuaded, he is persuaded by his own message and not necessarily by that planned by the speaker. Ideally" Brembeck says, "the message structured by the receiver is an approximation or duplication of that intended by the speaker."¹⁹ As Caemmerer puts it, "persuasion is the art of getting the hearer to think the one thing that you want him to think."²⁰ When the hearer is thinking that "one thing you want him to think," persuasion happens within the person, voluntarily, after having a choice of alternatives. Otherwise, it is not persuasion; it would be called coercion. Persuasion is called an "art," however, because it does take some skill, some keen awareness of the hearer, and some humility to let the hearer think it was his idea all along. We should not think for a moment that this is some new technique of proclaiming the Word of God. It is the way God works within the heart and life of the hearer. (2 Corinthians 4:6 - "made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God...") And it is also the way Satan works his deceit in us. (James 1:14 - "Temptation arises when a man is enticed and lured by his own lust...")

¹⁸ Marsh, Op. cit., p. 196.

¹⁹ Brembeck, Op. cit., p. 15.

²⁰ Caemmerer, Op. cit., p. 36.

"Communication is a process," says McLaughlin, "a transaction between preacher and listeners involving intent and purpose."²¹ This is much more than an unfolding or linear development, with an introduction and a conclusion. There is an interchange that is going on, a transaction. The proclaimer of the Word utilizes all of his perception skills to understand the hearers as he speaks his message to them, and the hearers of the Word, in turn, utilize all of their perceptivity of the proclaimer and the Word as they are receiving the message, and also indicating back to the proclaimer their reception of the same. The Holy Spirit is the energizer in the entire process. The transaction of the proclaimed Word is, therefore, a complex and dynamic functioning of the Word, not a simple or static giving of information from God's Word.

The dynamic Word demands a dynamic proclamation! The presentation is very important in the preaching task because of the nature of the Gospel; the Gospel is the proclaimed Word for the hearer. "The bringing is as important as the bringer. The telling is as important as the teller," Sleeth emphasizes.²² The medium is the message of the Gospel itself; it can be no less in the proclamation of that Gospel. Some preachers emphasize the presentation, while giving little content; other preachers insist that the content is all that matters and do very little with the presentation. Both, however, are important for the Word to be proclaimed, for the Gospel to be communicated. It is a holistic endeavor, as Sleeth writes:

The preacher who emphasizes delivery to the exclusion of the message is a showperson who forgot the importance of the gospel.

²¹McLaughlin, Op. cit., p. 13.

²²Sleeth, Op. cit., p. 70.

The preacher who ridicules delivery because the content is primary usually affirms that when you have something to say, how you say it is unimportant. The former is a Sophist; the latter misunderstands the gospel, assuming it is a body of content, and does not realize that the bringing of the gospel is part and parcel of the gospel itself.²³

The persuasive process in the preaching task is holistic in nature. The credible preacher (ethos) proclaims in a passionate way (pathos) God's logical answer (logos) to the hearers' specific needs. This process, furthermore, takes a measured amount of time and persistence; it does not happen in very brief, disjointed encounters. Relationship is the key word here. In this age of instant replay and instant satisfaction, the process of persuasion seems to demand the qualities of a bygone era. "Persuasion demands time," says Marsh. "Attitudes that are well entrenched are seldom abandoned after only one appeal, yet persuasive speakers seldom have exactly the same audiences on successive speaking engagements. Persuasion, like dripping water, can erode the granite of belief, but it takes time."²⁴ The pastor-preacher has the advantage of being able to know his "audience" very well. He also has the advantage of speaking to their needs on "successive speaking engagements."

The proclaimed Word needs repetition and relationship in order to be persuasive. It also needs to come to the hearer with great precision of the language form. Andersen's clear definition of persuasion highlights the importance of language as a symbolic agency in communication: "Persuasion is communication in which the communicator seeks through the

²³Ibid.

²⁴Marsh, Op. cit., p. 84.

use of symbolic agencies, particularly language, to effect a desired voluntary change in the attitudes and/or actions of the receiver(s)."²⁵

Language, as a communication symbol, always stands for something else. It represents things, people and events. Even the preacher is a symbol is the art of communication; he presents God and the beliefs and values found in God's Word. In the language of communication, moreover, words are the commonly agreed upon symbols which describe a reality. As Woodward and Denten illustrate in their text on persuasion, "we need only say 'chair' and we know that it is an item upon which we sit. We do not need to describe and explain that a 'chair' is an item with a seat, back, and legs that supports one's weight."²⁶ A language symbol, therefore, is an approximation of the real article. There is a relationship between the symbol, or word, and the article, or reality it represents. The relationship is called meaning. "Meanings are responses to symbolic stimuli grounded in commonality or experience," Woodward and Denton explain, and there are several conclusions that they draw between the language symbol and that which they symbolize:

- 1 - Meanings are in people and not in words.
- 2 - Words have more than one meaning.
- 3 - The meaning of words change with time and culture.
- 4 - No word is inherently "good" or "bad."
- 5 - Words do not reveal everything about a thing, person or event.
- 6 - People have authority, not words.²⁷

We know how persuasive language can be; we have been frequently influenced to buy a product through some catchy lingo, or, at least, buy into the thought process that would influence us toward a future purchase. We are persuaded that "soup is good food," that "at Ford, quality is

²⁵Andersen, Opt. cit., p. 7

²⁶Woodward, Op. cit., p. 52.

²⁷Ibid.

Job 1," or that "nobody can do it like McDonalds can." Words can have a powerful influence on people, depending on the precision with which the words are used and the person who is using them. Words do not stand alone. They are always symbolic of something else. The proclaimed Word does not stand alone. It is always symbolic of God Himself and His interaction with His people. The hearers of the Word of God evaluate the action of God behind the Word, just as they evaluate the life of the preacher behind the proclamation. Harms concludes, "Since language which carries the Gospel is so fragile and fallible, the preacher needs to forge his sermonic words and ideas with precision. 'For language and meaning are indissolubly connected,' writes Bryant and Wallace. (Isn't that statement a pale but accurate reflection of 'the Word made flesh'?)"²⁸

²⁸Harms, Op. cit., p. 22.

CHAPTER 5

PERSUASION IS BASED ON THE TRANSACTION OF THE PROCLAIMER WITH THE HEARER

Transaction Is An Art Form

Transaction in communication involves both the sender (proclaimer) and the receiver (hearer). It takes seriously the understanding that the total person, his cognitive, emotive and behavioral parts, are included in any transaction, and that in the communication event there is the sending and receiving of messages in the person of both the sender and the receiver. Transaction, therefore, is inter-relational. It is constantly subject to adaptation and refocus, dependent on the sensitivity of both the sender to the receiver, and the receiver to the sender. Change can happen within the actual communication event itself, in order that the message might be received and interpreted in the most meaningful way, as John Wilson, et al., relate in their public speaking text.¹

Transaction in communication theory supports the very nature and function of the preaching task. The sermon is to be inter-relational and dialogical. It is to include the hearer into the very preparation and presentation of the sermon. It is to be more than an imparting of information, even God's authoritative Word, to a group of people assembled for worship. Transaction in preaching, furthermore, is more involved than just a process of trying to relate God's Word to the perceived

¹John F. Wilson, Carroll C. Arnold and Molly M. Wertheimer, Public Speaking As A Liberal Art (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1990), p. 69.

hearer and his need; it also demands an interactive response on the part of the hearer. Caemmerer reminds us that "preaching represents an act in which all the worshippers join. Very easily the sermon can deteriorate simply to a message from the preacher to the people."² Howe keeps emphasizing the Scriptural "interactions between God and man"³ in the revealed and proclaimed Word of God. He says that in the dialogical proclamation of that Word, there is a "reciprocal relationship in which each party 'expresses the other side.'"⁴ For him, preaching is "an address and response between persons in which there is a flow of meaning."⁵ Transaction is a vital part of the preaching task. The early Christians practiced transaction in their proclamation of the Word (1 Corinthians 14:26); such interaction was termed "a homilia," according to Caemmerer.⁶

To be sensitive to the hearer's needs as well as the hearer's interactive response, the preacher utilizes more than his best preaching knowledge and technique; he draws upon his God-given, artistic judgment, as well as his "spiritual aptitudde" (habitus spiritualis).⁷ His artistic judgment is so important because he deals with the proclamation's language symbol, the hearer's personal need, and his interpretation of the present circumstance. The preacher creatively moves between the Word and the hearer, artfully applying resource to need and response to implementation. He functions as an artisitic painter utilizing all the

²Caemmerer, Op. cit., p. 56.

³Howe, Op. cit., p. 50.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 37.

⁶Caemmerer, p. 56

⁷Pieper, Op. cit., I, p. 46.

shades of coloring on his palette to make a dynamic scene of nature come to life on the canvas. It takes time and patience and a craftsman's experience to interpret the scene artistically as well as accurately; many strokes of the brush will move across the same canvas spot, with differing highlights, in order to bring the quality of life into the inanimate object. Such is the artistic task of preaching. The proclaimer of the Gospel has the innumerable shades of God's revelation at his disposal, on the palette of the Word. His goal is to bring that dynamic revelation of God to bear on the canvas of the hearer's life. It will take a great amount of time spent in relationship to the Word, a great amount of patience in understanding and being sensitive to the hearer, and a great amount of thoughtfulness in drawing upon all his past experience, to interpret God's Word to the hearer. The preacher will artistically move, with many strokes of the Word, across a targeted area of the hearer's life, highlighting the full strength of God's Spirit, as He brings His creative life to bear on the receptive, but artless form. The hearer is an interactive participant in that transaction. He is constantly reflecting the impact of the proclamation, as well as setting the agenda for the continued artistic application of God's Word.

The artistic judgments of the pastor-preacher are connected with his "spiritual aptitude," in making his proclamation one which God uses persuasively. This habitus spiritualis is the quality, or gift of God within the preacher, which not only relies on the Holy Scripture as God's divinely inspired Word, but is in communion with, and reliance upon, the Holy Spirit as the preacher's personal strength and comfort. The

creativity of the Spirit of God, along with the creative artistry of the preacher of His Word, combine with potent result. A persuasive proclamation moves the hearer with newness of faith and life. It is a powerful, convincing proclamation, because a powerful Spirit and a "moved" proclaimer have converged in and through an oral Word of God. There the Gospel is proclaimed. There the Law is brought to bear. There the "precious spark" of the inspired preacher is observed. Jabusch says that that spark, so much a part of a persuasive proclamation, is the same as the spark which is "so cherished by poets and artists and inventors."⁸ Only in this case, for the preacher of the Word, the spark is the ultimate spark of life itself, God's Spirit!

With the Law-Gospel message as his content, and the Holy Spirit as his guide, the preacher also shares his "personal Christian experience"⁹ with his hearer. The hearer responds with eye contact and body language in the pew. The predictable time and place takes on a touch of the unpredictable, an element of surprise, as Jabusch describes it.¹⁰ The sure doctrinal content of the Word breaks out of the stereotypes of theology, and breaks into living color on the canvas of the hearer's life. There is an exchanged dynamic of the Word, a translation, as the proclaimer enlivens the hearer, and the hearer returns the affirmation of that Word. It becomes a mutual uplifting of the Spirit, as the Word is proclaimed "through faith for faith" (Romans 1:17). This is the power of the Word proclaimed. This is what God has promised all along.

⁸Jabusch, Op. cit., p. 65.

⁹Pieper, p. 66.

¹⁰Jabusch, p. 72.

This is the gift of faith and life which opens up for the proclaimer and hearer alike the wonder of God's created, redeemed, and sanctified newness.

The proclaimed Word is persuasive in its proclamation between proclaimer and hearer because there is a specific focus. The Word speaks to me -- my needs, my desires, my problems, my joys; it also speaks collectively to the same areas of life in the gathered community, the assembly of believers. It is a Word that does something in proclamation to change specific target needs or problems in the life of both the hearer and the proclaimer, for the Spirit of God is at work. In a very real sense, the preacher cannot persuade any hearer with God's Word, just as the preacher cannot be persuaded by anyone else to believe and live by God's Word. Not even the Spirit of God can persuade the preacher or the hearer toward a specific goal, unless there is the personal faith of reception. The hearer ultimately persuades himself, through the enabling of the Spirit, just as the preacher has persuaded himself, through the same enabling Spirit. God, who has created, redeemed and sanctified each person in Christ, has also enabled each believer to be persuaded in his own rational-emotive being, that what he believes and lives by is, in fact, his own personal faith in God. (Romans 1:16)

"The ancients discussed the art of influencing a person to action and called it persuasion. That is the psychological counterpart of what in theological terms we have been calling preaching to repentance -- working a change in the hearer. Persuasive speech isn't just entertainment. It makes a difference in people."¹¹ If God had no intention for change to

¹¹Caemmerer, p. 35.

take place in the preacher or hearer of His Word, He would not have given us the Word to proclaim. God wants change and enables change to take place through the proclaimed Word. (Romans 10:17) It is certainly all a part of the receptivity and persuasive ability He has placed within man. Caemmerer says that "the preacher seeks to move his hearer to the point that he says: 'You are right. I need the help of God Himself to repair my life and move it His way.' When the preacher has done this, he is ready for the last great act of persuasion, the applying of the thrust of God Himself that will help the hearer to change."¹² There is no way to dissect the transaction of persuasion in order to state exactly what part of the Spirit plays and what part man plays in the direction of change. In one sense, we would have to say that man is completely responsible for the choice of his own faith and life, and the persuasive ability to have both. But, in another more encompassing sense, we would have to say that man would have no faith or life at all, or the ability to be persuaded, unless the Spirit were within him as believer. The crucial understanding here, however, is the fact that persuasion is not just some form of manipulation or coercion, some excessive adaptation to the hearer, which Plato called "pandering."¹³ It is a part of God's plan for His chosen people, with His proclaimed Word, through the power of His Spirit.

God wants man to move in the direction of greater faith or life; persuasive preaching enables Him to achieve that goal in the hearer. Moreover, the hearer himself plays a significant part in that persuasion, for, as Woodward and Denton tell us, persuasion occurs "when it becomes

¹²Ibid., p. 37.

¹³Woodward, p. 92.

apparent to a person that there is an inconsistency between two or more related attitudes or behaviors. The revealed inconsistency produces dissonance or mental stress. The removal of the stress may take the form of changing an attitude or behavior to reduce the inconsistency."¹⁴ This is one of the more popular psychological theories of persuasion called cognitive dissonance. The theory places a great amount of importance on the hearer's ability to analyze his difficulty (dissonance) and then take some cognitive or behavioral action to eliminate it. The validity of that theory is not the issue right here; rather, it should be well noted how this theory uses the qualifying phrase for persuasion: "when it becomes apparent to a person." "Becoming apparent" rightly stresses the persuasive posture of the hearer in a voluntary sort of way. For if the change is not voluntary, it is not persuasive, as Andersen notes.¹⁵ Coercion takes place when the desired change is forced upon the hearer. Then, the one who is coerced might very well act against his will, but he will also retain his original attitude, with no real change having taken place.¹⁶ In persuasive communication, the persuader's desired voluntary change in the hearer is also the hearer's desired voluntary change.

Persuasion in preaching is an art form which takes a great amount of time, patience, and thoughtful application on the part of the proclaimer of the Word. Sensitivity to the hearer's need and present circumstance extends itself to a transactional form of communication, where the preacher and hearer together are sharing the proclamation. From a rich variety of Scriptural nourishment, the preacher then carefully,

¹⁴Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁵Andersen, p. 7ff.

¹⁶Marsh, p. 17.

under the guidance of the Spirit, selects the most appropriate and persuasive Word, and brings it to the receptive hearer with the right blend of rhetorical artistry. Jabusch compares it to the work of a friend of his, who is a good amateur chef:

His specialty is Italian cuisine which depends on very fresh ingredients, spices, and wine. He goes first to a market where there is a rich variety of possible foods for the meal which he is planning. After looking at the many things which are available, he selects, perhaps, some fish which looks especially fresh that day. Of course, when he makes sauce for the pasta, fish or veal, it will be carefully prepared with the right seasonings and left to simmer for a long time. When the pasta is al dente and everything is just right, he dramatically pours the sauce and serves the meal with style. It will both taste and look magnificent.¹⁷

The Three Modes of Persuasion in Preaching

"Many people are wary of persuasion," Stott exclaims. "It has questionable connotations. They think of politicians haranguing an audience with empty phrases, or revivalists using cheap sentimentalization to play upon the emotions of their listeners . . . There is an understandable abhorrence of high-pressure salesmanship in relationship to the Gospel."¹⁸ Obviously, persuasion, like any tool of communication, can be used as a means for good or evil. That very dilemma was the reason why Aristotle developed his historical model of communication, with its three modes of rhetoric, or persuasion. The present day form of preaching could be described in terms of the following three hearer appeals listed by Tim Timmons: (1) Can I trust you? (ethos) (2) Do you know what you are talking about? (logos) (3) Do you care for me? (pathos)¹⁹

¹⁷Jabusch, p. 75.

¹⁸John R. W. Stott, The Preacher's Portrait (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmann Publ., 1988), p. 9.

¹⁹Tim Timmons, "Why Should They Listen To Me?" Leadership, VI (Fall, 1985), pp. 14-15.

"Can I trust you?" That is the first question! The one who delivers the proclaimed Word answers his hearer's question as he personally stands before the people. Emerson once said, "What you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say." The hearer of a message, in other words, finds it almost impossible to separate the message from what he believes the speaker to be.²⁰ The ethos, or ethical appeal, is one of the most important aspects of the persuasive speech; Aristotle thought it to be the single most important element. In the famous "Day of Infamy" speech by President Roosevelt in 1941, it is interesting to note that there were no proofs given for the many assertions which ultimately committed the United States to war. The ethos of the president was so high, that few, if any, questioned the message. Marsh tells us in his Persuasive Speaking text: "If from a speaker's first words onward he is able to identify with the listener's standards and expectations, by the time he reaches the confirmation, he will have established himself as a sufficient authority to make undocumented assertions that will be accepted simply because he said them."²¹

In the preaching task, as with any secular communication, the credibility is connected with the authenticity of the one speaking the message. The medium is the person, to adapt a Marshall McLuhan thought! When the pastor-preacher can witness to his humanity as well as his spiritual calling, when he can testify to his need for forgiveness as well as his evidence for faith, when he can mingle with his people as sinner as well as rejoice with them as a saint, then he has established

²⁰Brembeck, Op. cit., p. 251.

²¹Marsh, p. 201.

his trustworthiness for the hearer. Roen says it well: "The life and character of the preacher reflected in the sermon is . . . what establishes closeness or distance between speaker and hearer, and that relationship is part of the message of the sermon. The 'ethos' of the preacher is what first attracts our attention and makes us listen to what is being said."²²

The proclaimer of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the same one who has experienced the Gospel of Jesus Christ in his life. He has felt the hearer's pain of suffering and agony of doubt. He has been uplifted with the same kind of personal victories and spiritual conquests as his hearers. And through it all, he has known God's powerful Word for faith and life, just like that offered to each of his hearers. The preacher's identity with his hearers, as well as with the Word of God, is the most convincing of reasons for unbelievers to be converted and believers to be enriched with the Gospel. The Apostle Paul consciously identified with those he sought to reach: "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I became all things to all men, that I might by all means win some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

The Apostle could speak with forthrightness and conviction, with strong directive and challenge, because of his indisputable ethos. He carried the power of persuasion with him wherever he went; people knew of his saintly character. As Quintilian writes: "The same language is often natural when used by one speaker, foolish in the mouth of another, and arrogant in that of a third."²³ There was no question of ethos for

²²Roen, Op. cit., p. 16.

²³Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 319.

anyone who knew Paul. Not only was his life a living witness to his message, but his message was a proclaimed and demonstrated crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He embodied the person and message of his Lord. What Wedel says in general, applied directly to Paul: "The preacher is a man possessed."²⁴

"Do you know what you're talking about?" That is the second question to be answered. The preacher speaks words as he presents the Word made flesh; it is that Word which dwells among us full of grace and truth. It is that Word which is the content of the proclaimed Word. It is the incarnate Word and action of God which is persuasive for the faith and life of the hearer. A simple word is just an entry in Webster's dictionary, but the Word made incarnate is God's entry into the fabric of men's lives. God accomplished it perfectly through His Son, Jesus Christ, and He still accomplishes it relationally through the proclaimed Word of the preacher-hearer transaction. This is the "logos," the content of "the story that carries the hearer along."²⁵ It is the very heart of God conveyed to the hearer in a logical way for understanding, as Roen says.

The "logos," as Word of God for the Christian, has a divine and human quality in its origin; it also has a divine and human quality in its subsequent proclamation. It is holy because it is of God's eternal substance, and it is relevant because it is of man's created form. Like its spiritual revelation to man, its physical revelation of God is both a truth and a revelation. As Roen summarizes the form of the logos in the preached Word, he describes it as "a holy essay . . . an

²⁴Wedel, Op. cit., p. 34.

²⁵Roen, p. 50.

attempt at answering the question -- What has God done for us in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ? And because that question is always fertile and can never be exhausted, every holy essay is a new beginning at describing infinite love."²⁶ It is like a treasure chest loaded with God's riches beyond measure and His resources beyond comprehension. As Jabusch says, it is like a "magnificent Steinway grand piano, well-tuned and with open strings . . . a chord played forte will start reverberations throughout the concert hall and in the hearts of the audience."²⁷ It is ready to carry God's greatest Word and Life into the words and lives of His people. The proclaimed Word of God is God's, and, as such, it is persuasive!

"Do you care for me?" This is the third and most relational question! The hearer wants to know that a relationship exists, not just between the Word and the preacher, or between the Word and the hearer, but between the one proclaiming the Word and the one hearing the Word. "Pathos" is a relational word which connects the speaker with the audience. It is a quality that stirs the emotions of the hearer through the persuasive passion conveyed by the preacher. As Burghardt says, "Our people should sense from our words and faces, from our gestures and our whole posture, that we love this sinning, struggling community with a crucifying passion; that we agonize over our own sinfulness, our failure to be holier than we are; that we weep with the refugees whose tears water the ways of Lebanon; that we too are awefully vulnerable, prey to the loneliness that ravages the human heart; that we too must at times cry out ' I believe, Lord, help my unbelief!'"²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., p. 52

²⁷ Jabusch, p. 77

²⁸ Burghardt, p. 35.

Pathos is a necessary part of persuasive preaching. Every age has seen those who exploit the emotions of those whom they attempt to help. There is an inherent danger in the very usage of passion in the proclamation of the Word, but the opposite -- no usage at all -- is fraught with greater danger. "A spiritless sermon," Roen states, "is inhuman, without vitality, and by emotional blandness the messages of God have often been robbed of their immediacy and power . . . Emotion should not be repressed but restrained."²⁹

There are a number of communication principles that deal with the functioning of emotive power. Wilson tells us that (1) the emotional power of communication (pathos) is not in the communication itself, or its delivery, but in the readiness of listeners to respond with reason and feeling to the logos and ethos of the speaker, (2) feelings are not created by the speech or speaker; they are already latent in the listeners, and (3) the listeners do not feel or reason; they reason because they feel, and they feel because they think they have adequate reason to do so.³⁰ On the other hand, Caemmerer responds to the question, "Should the preacher be emotional?" His response is thoughtful: "Actually he (the preacher) has no choice. The human organism operates in a bath of mood and emotion every waking moment. Every speaker is always emotional. The only question is whether the speaker is going to reflect those emotions which are appropriate to his purpose."³¹ The appropriateness of the emotional transaction is the issue in question, and that issue has to be settled in the faith and life of the preacher. Feeling the power of the

²⁹Roen, p. 36.

³⁰Wilson, p. 393.

³¹Harms, p. 30.

Word, the emotive and cognitive play a combined function in helping the hearer catch that unique passion which is the persuasive power called "pathos."

Aristotle's concern in this third mode of communication was to enable the hearer to be stirred into some action through an emotional connection with the speaker and the message. Marsh calls that a "vicarious empathic experience;"³² and that experience, when appropriately handled, can be a powerful and very legitimate means of persuasion. God's incarnate Word is far from sentimentality, yet it is filled with passion to rescue fallen man and restore his created being. The proclaimed Word can be no less passionate in its conveyance of the message of God's action on behalf of mankind.

The Persuasibility Factor

Woodward tells us it is "impossible to overestimate the extent to which we are influenced daily to be the kind of person other people want us to be."³³ With over 5,000 persuasive messages each day bombarding us to buy or use some product that will make our life easier or burden lighter, it is no wonder that so much of what we do and have replicates what others do and have. We have been strongly persuaded in many ways: the style of music we listen to, the kind of food we eat, the manner of affection we display, the restraint on the anger we express, and so forth. Persuasive advertizing, as subtle as it may be, will always attempt to narrow the attitudinal gap between the sender and the receiver. "You

³²Marsh, p. 198.

³³Woodward, p. 13.

can persuade a man," notes theorist Kenneth Burke, "only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his."³⁴ The advertizer will always work on the "persuasibility factors" of his probable audience.

St. Augustine once noted that a person is persuaded if he "embraces what you commend, regrets whatever you built up as regrettable, rejoices at what you say is cause for rejoicing," in short, "when the person thinks as you do."³⁵ But what are those factors that determine who will be persuaded, under what circumstances, in what period of time? Are there predispositions toward gullibility? Are there certain determinants for being persuaded into action? Is persuasibility a trait? There are so many questions that need answers for the serious communicator, but specific answers seem to be quite elusive in one's search. Studies made by Hovland and Janis in 1959 do indicate that there is such a thing as a persuasibility trait; various categories of people, according to their studies, seem to be influenced in certain ways, under certain circumstances.³⁶ In other words, some people, at certain times, and in certain circumstances, seem to be more easily persuaded than others.

The characteristics which had the greatest variance in persuasibility, according to Hovland and Janis, were in the areas of sexual determination and self-esteem. It was observed that sexual differences in persuasibility stem from social conditioning as well as biological fact. Two significant differences could be noted: (1) Women were more easily persuaded than men; changes in attitude were also more

³⁴Ibid., p. 73.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Raymond S. Ross, Persuasion: Communication and Interpersonal Relations (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 37.

frequent among women than men. (2) Men were more persuaded by logical argument than women.³⁷ It was also observed that self-esteem differences stem from the ways people placed value upon themselves and their image. People with low self-esteem, in the judgment of the study, were "more generally susceptible to persuasion," while those with high self-esteem were "more specifically susceptible."³⁸ In other words, people with low self-esteem seem to be more persuasible in general, while people with high self-esteem seem to be more persuasible in very limited areas that deal with gratifying specific needs.

There are many other human characteristics which are influenced by persuasion. Some of those characteristics or qualities seem quite obvious; others seem very questionable. Take age, for example. There is no hard evidence proving that age plays a significant role in persuasibility determination. In some studies, however, it has been observed that older people in general are more rigid, and therefore less persuasible, than younger people.³⁹ There is also some evidence that children up to the age seven are more persuaded by adults than they are after that age. But those two observations are neither very surprising in substance nor very specific in focus. They are not very significant for any application to the preaching of the Word. The entire subject of persuasibility tends to be quite subjective in psychological study and communication form.

³⁷Ibid., p. 39.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 39-40.

³⁹Ibid., p. 38.

Persuasibility in preaching ultimately depends on the preacher's careful analysis of, and sensitivity to, his congregation-audience. He knows, for example, that Grandma Jones is always spiritually "moved" when the preacher relates a compassionate healing story of Jesus. He knows that Elder Schmidt is convicted in his heart when the preacher lifts the Bible and holds it during a crucial point in his sermon. He knows that New Member Jane is meaningfully enabled when the preacher uses simple but thoughtful illustrations and children's messages. These particular needs seem very insignificant to the preacher, but they are important factors in the reception of God's Word for the hearer. Even though the sensitive pastor-preacher cannot always present the Word in the most persuasive way for the most receptive people at the moment of proclamation, yet the hearers will know and feel the obvious connections the preacher tries to make to the hearer's faith and life. Marsh says it well:

Because persuasive speaking is an ultimate interaction of the personalities of the speaker and the listeners, it is necessary for the former to examine his own personality as well as the personalities of his listeners. It is to the speaker's advantage to make a conscious and continuing effort to achieve qualities of the confident, cooperative, and predictive personality. The accompanying flexibility and freedom will enable him to compensate for the possible character weaknesses of his audience. Normally, confidence and a cooperative spirit on the part of the speaker breed similar attitudes among the listeners.⁴⁰

The Word "communicate" comes from the Latin word, *communicare*, which means "to make common to many."⁴¹ That is the preacher's task: to make God's powerful Word common, but not commonplace, to his many,

⁴⁰Marsh, p. 107.

⁴¹Woodward, p. 74.

congregational hearers at worship. It means having a compassionate heart and a perceptive soul for each one of his hearers, knowing them intimately. It means ministering to them lovingly, and preaching to them with a pastor's understanding of where they are and where they will be going. Seeing the preaching task through their eyes, and feeling the preaching task through their hearts, the pastor truly comes to grips with the persuasibility factors of his people. He does not have so many surveys to study (eg. Hovland and Janis), but hearts to know, in order to make his preaching the God-blessed, persuasive power that it is in people's lives.

The hearer seems quite perceptive of the preacher's heart; he can often tell at once if what is being expressed by the preacher, is, in fact, his experience and feeling also. Schwartz believes that the most effective persuasive acts are a stimulus to trigger experiences and feeling already within the hearer. He notes that a persuader "must deeply understand the kinds of information and experiences stored in his audience, the patterning of this information, and the interactive . . . process whereby stimuli evoke this stored information."⁴² Identification is the issue here. When the preacher has identified with the hearer, and the hearer knows it, the proclamation becomes a sharing of experiences and faith-values from God's Word and the lives of the hearers. Persuasion toward greater faith and life is often a dynamic result.

The hearer's identification with the preacher is just as important as the preacher's identification with the hearer. In fact, persuasion can be defined quite properly as Burke does: a "co-creation of a state

⁴²Ibid.

of identification or alignment between a source and a receiver that results from the use of symbols."⁴³ Burke's idea of co-creation means that what is inside the receiver, or hearer, is just as important as what is inside the sender, or preacher. This idea coincides with self-persuasion, or the thought that we are never really persuaded to accept or do anything unless we ourselves participate in the process. Aristotle already hinted at that in his time when he talked about the "common ground" of the sender and receiver.⁴⁴ The shared values, goals and experiences -- in other words, the common ground -- of the sender and receiver are very important for persuasion to take place. Sometimes the "common ground" is called the "overlap," or those areas of value or experience which are shared equally by sender and receiver. Persuasive preaching will always take place within the "common ground" or "overlap" areas. For it is in those areas that the hearer is at one with the preacher; he is comfortable and has identified with him, and is ready to move in the direction that the preacher takes him. The "alignment" Burke talks about is a real sharing in conversation, as the preacher continues to observe and respond to the needs and reactions of his hearers.⁴⁵

Persuasibility, then, is an important factor in the preaching task. The preacher is sensitive to the hearer and his circumstance. He is atuned to the listening congregation. He speaks God's Law-Gospel message confidently because there is a pastoral connection between

⁴³Larson, Op. cit., p. 10.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ralph L. Lewis, Persuasive Preaching Today (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theol. Seminary, 1979), p. 90.

himself and his people; he has identified with them. As he has aligned himself with the hearer, so the hearer is moved to align himself with the preacher, who uses the inspired Word to be the means by which both gain the Spirit's newness of faith and life. As the hearer stands convicted in his sin and is empowered by the Spirit to stand in God's forgiveness, he is assured in his life that the Word alone is "the power of God unto salvation to all those who believe."

CHAPTER 6

PERSUASION IS IMPLEMENTED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The Holy Spirit is God's Persuader

The Holy Spirit is known by what He does in the faith and life of those who know Him. God the Father is known by His many creative and protective attributes, as well as by His creative and protective activities. God the Son is known by His many compassionate and redemptive attributes, as well as by His compassionate and redemptive activities. But the Holy Spirit is known almost exclusively by His activity in the faith and life of the believer; we have, in other words, little knowledge of His personal attributes outside that activity. The Holy Scriptures do frequently speak of the activity of the Spirit in a direct coming or empowering of His people. As an infant in the womb, for instance, John the Baptizer is "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:15), just as his mother, Elizabeth, is filled with the same Spirit (Luke 1:41). In 1 Corinthians 3:16, we read that God's people are called "God's temple" because "the Holy Spirit lives in you!" More frequently, however, God's Spirit is depicted as One who works through God's powerful Word or life, in and through His people, toward a specific goal of faith or life. In John 20:22, the resurrected Christ breathes the Spirit of God on the disciples, so that they would have God's power to forgive or retain the sins of others. In Acts 2, we observe the Spirit of God coming directly upon the apostles, so that the Word of salvation in Christ could be proclaimed, and the people converted and baptized. In Acts 2:38, 39,

Peter proclaims that in the repentance of one's sins and the reception of forgiveness in Christ through baptism, one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the only gift, to redirect a popular slogan, "that keeps on giving." "For the promise," as Peter says, "is to you and to your children, and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to Himself" (Acts 2:39).

The Holy Spirit is God's persuader! What He sets out to accomplish, He accomplishes. What He influences in life is never left the same. What He gives through God's Word is the very power of God to believe and have life. But even those who "are led by the Spirit of God" (Romans 8:14), who are His children, are still influenced by and made captive to "the law of sin" which dwells within the flesh (Romans 7:22,23,25). Paul says quite clearly to the Galatian Christians, "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would" (Galatians 5:17). It is to that conflict, that war within, that the preacher of God's persuasive Word can bring God's precious Gospel in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit enables the true believer of that Gospel to resist the flesh and grow in faith and life.

If the Spirit of God would not continue to be active in the believer through the Gospel proclamation, the believer's old sinful nature and the power of his flesh would eventually win the war within him. Paul tells his hearers, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3,4). As Christ Jesus has died for man's sin and has been raised again, and as

we have been united with him in every way, Paul concludes his Gospel thought, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:5-11). The Word that Paul proclaims here has the power of God within it and behind it. That power of God, however, is not the believer's automatic possession. God continues to offer it to those who have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection and who now, through the Spirit's action in their cognitive--emotive being, decisively, yet with some weakness, are moving away from their old sinful nature and claiming their new nature in Christ. The Spirit is the persuasive power by which the believer continues to claim that new nature in Christ; the flesh is the persuasive power by which the believer is tempted to return to his old sinful nature. So Paul reminds his hearers, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

The proclaimed Word, directed by the Holy Spirit, must be a persuasive Word if it is to be the power within man to "stand fast" in God's will. Since the Holy Spirit is God's persuader, the ethos of the Spirit is one of the most important modes of communication to consider. The Scriptures do not tell us much about the ethos of the Holy Spirit, but a few thoughts are quite clear. We do know about His "character" or "reputation," and we do have some clear indication about His perceived "probity." His character always seems to be viewed through the modus operandi, or the character, of one of the other persons of the Trinity. He is called the "Spirit of the Father" (Matthew 10:20) and the "Spirit of the Son" (Galatians 4:6). Jesus not only conveys the Spirit to His disciples when he "breathes" on them (John 20:22), but He talks about the Spirit as a continuation of His own ministry when He calls Him "another Helper" or

"Counselor" (John 14:16). And as such, Jesus tells His disciples, He (the Spirit) will not only be with them then, as He (Jesus) was with them now, but the Spirit will be in them, and remain forever (John 14:16, 17). The ethos of the Spirit can be known, Jesus is saying, through His own ethos. In other words, if Jesus is a reputable demonstration of God's love for the hearer, then the hearer can certainly find the same reputable demonstration of God's love in the Spirit.

The Spirit's "probity," or integrity of action, is equal with His reputation. The Apostle Paul makes it quite clear in his Epistle to the Romans that the Spirit has all the qualities found in Jesus' sensitive and relational ethos. Paul says that the Spirit "bears witness with our spirit" that we are the children and heirs of God (Romans 8:16). Being sensitive, not to overpower our spirit, but bearing witness with our spirit, the Holy Spirit uses His inciteful and persuasive skill. He helps us to discover in our own spirit that we are God's children, and that we are also His heirs. That Spirit also "makes intercession" for us when we cannot speak what we need to say (Romans 8:26, 27); He not only understands what is going on inside of us, but speaks the very words we would want to say to the Father when we cannot. Furthermore, He brings forth fruits (Romans 8:23), His fruits, for they are of the Spirit, but also our fruits, for we see them working in our own personal lives, as we wait for adoption as sons (Romans 8:23, 24).

The Spirit of God is a sensitive Spirit, relating to the deepest thoughts within us, all the while He is the "guarantee of our inheritance until we receive what God has promised" (Ephesians 1:13, 14). He works within us in order to understand and minister to us, as well as to assure

and motivate us toward life eternal. He is a most unique "Comforter" and "Helper" for us. His most demonstrative trait of "probity," moreover, is His quality of trustworthiness. Jesus calls Him the "Spirit of truth," who will guide us into all truth (John 16:13). He takes what has been made evident from the Word of Truth, Jesus Christ, and declares it to us, as He seals it in us with His own personal promise (Ephesians 1:13). That witness to, and demonstration of, the Truth of God is His most persuasive act in keeping us in the faith and life of Christ.

The Spirit of God also is most apt to use the Scriptures as His means of grace, His "logos," or persuasion. The Scriptures themselves are filled with countless illustrations of God's grace and power. They are vivid portrayals of common people who believe uncommon beliefs and live out uncommon lives. Jabusch makes that point clear: "People experience much passion, the intense feelings of love and envy, naked ambition and wild delight, abject sorrow and burning remorse. King David dances and leaps in the streets. A woman washes the Lord's feet with her tears; Peter quickly cuts off the servant's ear."¹ The Word contains the passion of life, and God's Spirit relates that passion to the lives of those who hear the proclaimed Word. The Spirit unites with the Word and forms a unity; the Word is not without the Spirit and the Spirit is not without the Word. So, when that Word is proclaimed, all the force of the original content is related by the Spirit to the hearer of that Word. It comes to life for the hearer, as it has come to life for the preacher. It is a true revelation of God through the words of the preacher, and so he prays before he speaks: "Veni Creator Spiritus!"

¹Jabusch, pp. 81, 82.

The proclaimed Word is more than informational, relating God's past action to today's hearer; the proclaimed Word is the mighty Word of salvation to all who believe! It is Christ's appeal, "Come forth!" as the Spirit breaks the bondage of death and the grave. It is Christ's promise, "Your sins are forgiven!" as the Spirit breaks through the chains of sin's prison. Only through the Spirit can the Word become the dynamic power of God. We confess that very fact with Luther in his explanation of the third article, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith . . ." ² The Spirit of God has called me "by the Gospel" Luther emphasizes! Wedel explains:

Not a summary of news events gleaned from the morning headlines, not a series of short stories to illustrate the power of positive thinking, not a doctrinal dissertation against the devilish prophets, but the Gospel. (author's italics) Through the Gospel, by the power of the Holy Spirit, comes the miracle of faith and the miracle of a gathered people. God works, God acts, God moves, God changes human hearts by the foolishness of preaching. ³

Luther even went so far as to say that the Holy Spirit was present in the Word and only there. During one of his sermons in Wittenberg, he made a personal comment, saying that after he had preached the Word, that same Word would be working in the hearts and lives of the people by the Spirit, even while he would be having a beer with his friends Amsdorf and Philipp. ⁴ The Holy Spirit was indispensable in connection with the proclaimed Word, and the proclaimed Word was vital for the activity

²Martin Luther, The Small Catechism, The Apostles Creed, Explanation to the Third Article.

³Wedel, p. 23.

⁴Sleeth, p. 2.

of the Holy Spirit. As Luther also said, "Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ or believe in him and have him for our Lord, except as it is offered to us by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel."⁵

The Holy Spirit, using the Word as His means of grace, carries out His inspirational activity with passionate fervor. His work is His passion (pathos), and His passion is a part of His nature (ethos). The frequent refrain in the Acts of the Apostles is that the Spirit of the Lord came upon them and inspired them, motivated them, enabled them, or spoke through them. In fact, the mission of proclaiming the Word could not even begin, Jesus said, until His Spirit would come upon them. He said that His disciples should go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the triune God, but that they should not go until the Spirit came upon them. "You shall receive power," He said, "after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; then you shall become witnesses. . . ." (Acts 1:8).

The Holy Spirit is God's passion made available to man! Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians that he did not come to them with eloquent words of wisdom or great learning, but simply with the cross of Jesus Christ, delivered to them with the "demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4). The term apodeixis, meaning demonstration, is a technical term used only here in the New Testament to signify the formal study of rhetoric, as John Stapleton says.⁶ This was the secret of Paul's preaching success. People were persuaded to believe the

⁵Vajta, Op. cit., p. 71

⁶John M. Stapleton, Preaching in Demonstration of the Spirit and Power (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), p. 13.

proclaimed Word, not by his human effort or artistic skill, but by the inner, convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Paul's proclamation demonstrated the "rhetoric of the Spirit," as Stapleton calls it,⁷ a quality of passionate connection with the hearer through the preacher. That persuasive Word was of the Spirit of God as much as it was of the Apostle Paul. The logos of the Word was demonstrated empathetically through the Apostle Paul and the trustworthy ethos of the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit Makes the Word Come Alive

Persuasive preaching demonstrates the passion of the Spirit of God through the preacher, just as persuasive preaching connects the Word of God with the faith and life of the hearers. Lueking makes clear the connection:

Preaching barren of reference to people is preaching that is critically deficient. If, time after time, in the pulpit or wherever the setting, the biblical Word has no sermon connection with the lives of people who are on the receiving side of it, the Spirit's work is hampered in a major way. Then preaching has taken on the nature of reciting Bible passages or hanging on dogmatic summaries of them. A phonograph record can do that.⁸

Without true sensitivity for the hearers, and the inclusion of the human situation in the preaching event, the passion of the Spirit cannot be "demonstrated," and the preaching is devoid of any persuasive activity. "Preaching unconnected to people," Lueking adds, "is like a blueprint without building materials. It is in trouble. It hovers over and around life but does not come all the way to the human situation."⁹ The

⁷ Ibid., p. 13, 14.

⁸ Lueking, p. 21, 22.

⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

Holy Spirit makes the Word of God come alive in and through the faith and life of the believers of that Word.

Receiving the Word, moreover, means receiving the Law of God as well as the Gospel. The Law needs to be focused specifically to the needs of the hearers. It should cause pain and tension in the hearer, toward the sinfulness that still wants to cling to the life that is of the Spirit. To the believer, receptive to God's Word, the Spirit's usage of the Law has the conviction of conversion, as Jesus said, "When he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged" (John 16:8-11). Part of the Spirit's persuasive role in making the Word come alive in the hearer, is to bring the Law of God to bear on all those sins that hinder the hearer's full expression of God's life. The preacher's task is to be aware of the specific and personal sinfulness at work in the faith and life of each hearer, and then skillfully use the Spirit's power of conviction to bring about contrition and repentance. Without the Law's judgment, and the Spirit's conviction of the hearer's sin, the Word of salvation in Christ will not come alive in the hearer, and the deception of well-being will continue. A recent New Yorker cartoon revealed the agony of truth for the preaching task: a pompous gentleman and his equally pompous wife are coming down the steps of an imposing Gothic cathedral after a service, with the wife saying to her husband, "I thought the rector gave a particularly fine sermon this morning. You know, it's easy to offend people like us."¹⁰

¹⁰Burghardt, Op. cit., p. 37.

If the Law were all there were to proclaim, offense would be the primary response. The Spirit, however, does not leave the hearer convicted and judged; He connects the hearer with the living Christ, whose compassion heals his hurt and whose redemption seals his salvation. The proclaimed Word, with the guidance of the Spirit, declares that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Reconciliation is the redemptive Gospel message of the Spirit to sinful man, as much as it is the redemptive action of God in Christ for sinful man. Through the message of reconciliation, the Spirit of God takes the crucifixion event and declares to the hearer the forgiveness and salvation already won for him by Jesus Christ, through His sacrificial death on Calvary's cross. The Law that once spoke nothing but sin and death for the hearer, now is declared to be fulfilled in Christ Jesus, who is the hearer's Lord and Savior. As Paul says, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). The Spirit of God delivers genuine freedom to the hearer -- freedom from the power of sin and freedom from the judgment of God against that sin. The Spirit, in connecting the hearer with the saving act of Jesus Christ through His crucifixion and resurrection, brings God's saving Gospel to bear on the faith and life of the believer. The Spirit gives victory over the power of death, and He gives life eternal in Jesus Christ to all who believe. The Gospel becomes good news in the hearer's faith and life, not just good news in some abstract, confessional form. Franzmann beautifully describes the victory of the Gospel: "Life in Christ Jesus is human life as it has

not been since Adam, life to the hilt, life to be lived to the full, the feast of God with no death's head at the feast, no sword suspended over the feaster's head, no moving finger suddenly writing doom upon the wall. Life is no longer merely death deferred; this is life that breathes the fresh eternal air which rushes into the vacuum left by the destruction of death."¹¹

The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of the proclaimed Gospel for the hearer. He enables it to be put into understandable words, He enables it to be received in the act of faith, and He empowers it to be utilized in the life of discipleship. He is the catalyst for the hearer's faith relationship with Christ, and He is the energizer for the hearer's life of service in the church. He uses the means of grace in Word and Sacrament to accomplish His purpose, and He utilizes the God-given resources and gifts of the preacher and hearer to make it a transactional relationship.

With the Word of reconciliation applied to the hearer's faith and life, the Holy Spirit then persuades the reconciled to be the proclaimer of the very Word that has made him God's own in Christ. As Paul writes, "So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). There is an urgency expressed here by Paul. The proclamation of the Gospel is expected to accomplish reconciliation in the hearer. The Spirit is the guarantee of the proclamation transaction and of the actual reconciliation within the hearer, but the one who speaks the proclamation, the "ambassador for Christ," is the one through whom God

¹¹Martin Franzmann, Alive With the Spirit (St. Louis: Concordia Publ., 1973), p. 11.

actually makes His appeal. Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says that "parakalēn is used for the wooing proclamation of salvation in the apostolic preaching."¹² In this passage (2 Corinthians 5:20), the preferred translation, according to Kittel, reads, "as though God exhorted through us," with the supreme authority given to the preacher's word of admonition.¹³ There is no question that the Spirit of God, who has invested God's best in the faith and life of the believer, and who has given that believer the message of reconciliation, now is counting on that person to make God's appeal to others. In the case of Paul and the apostles, God had specifically called them to make this appeal to unbelievers as their full-time vocation. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood up in front of thousands of people in Jerusalem. He had been filled with the Holy Spirit when he made his appeal to the people, and "with many other words he urged them . . ." (Acts 2:40). Further on in the Book of Acts, Peter is "bold" in his proclamation (4:13, 31), and he gives witness to the Gospel "with great power" (4:33). The proclamation of the Gospel to the unbeliever was to be the vital ministry of the church; it was to be the specific calling of those God had chosen to be His ambassadors, making His appeal through them. The Holy Spirit planned the outreach, empowered the church's witness, and "added to their number each day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

The Holy Spirit Makes the Church Come Alive

The vitality of the church is dependent upon its ministry of proclamation to those who are not yet saved. Even before Pentecost, and

¹²Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), Vol. V, p. 795.

¹³Ibid.

the subsequent giving of the Holy Spirit, Jesus chose the twelve disciples to be his "apostles" (Mark 3:14), to be sent out to preach the Word. Mark 6:7-13 and Matthew 10:5-15 show that Jesus sent them out at a later time. Luke 10:1-16 states that Jesus commissioned 72 men to go out before him, to tell the people that the Kingdom of God is near, for, as Jesus was well aware, there was a large harvest but not enough to harvest it (Luke 10:2). After our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection, there is the more official commissioning to proclaim the Gospel to all the world. This commissioning is found at the conclusion of all four Gospels (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:46-48, and John 20:21). Jesus then makes the ministry of proclamation a vital ministry by sending His Holy Spirit upon them and empowering them for their task. The church is born and comes to life with some 3,000 converts who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior and are baptized in His name. Jesus not only promises to be with those He commissioned for the ministry of proclamation, but He promises through His Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, in and through the testimony of those proclaimers of the Word. Romans 1:16 makes it clear that the proclamation of the Word of God becomes the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. The preaching ministry, guided by the Spirit of God, was and is the means by which God brings people to faith in Him, and then brings these people into a vital relationship with each other and those yet to believe.

The ministry of proclamation, with the Spirit as its power, is a self-perpetuating ministry. That is not to say that it has any ability to grow on its own, for it is completely dependent on God for its content

and empowerment. The ministry of proclamation, however, by its very God-given nature, and through its Spirit-directed activity, causes those who receive the Word to want to share the Word. It causes those whose life has been turned around by God to want to be utilized by God to cause others to be turned around for Him. That is exactly what Paul meant when he said that God has now given to him and those reconciled to God a message of reconciliation for others, to tell them how God now makes them his friends also (2 Corinthians 5:19).

In Acts 17 the early church comes to life through the proclaimed Word. God uses Paul in dramatic and fruitful ways. Paul preaches in the synagogue in each town he visits. He spends much time with the people there; it was his "usual habit," Luke says (Acts 17:2). And through his proclamation of the Word of God, the message that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, many people became believers of that Word. Luke writes that in the town of Berea "many believed," that is, many Greek men and women; and they not only studied the Word with eagerness, but they defended and protected Paul from the enemies of the Gospel (Acts 17:13-15). In Thessalonica, after Paul's numerous exhortations in the synagogue, "some were persuaded," Luke writes, and they "joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women" (Acts 17:4). In Athens, not too far away and not too much later, Paul made his famous persuasive speech concerning the true identity of the "unknown god." Luke says that "some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (Acts 17:34). Since Paul's mission was to preach the Word of God in order to convert unbelievers in each of these

places, and since Luke gives specific names and actions of people who believed and joined Paul in his task, it is logical to assume that these people, at the very least, promoted that proclaimed Word among their fellow-countrymen simply by their identification with Paul's controversial message.

Throughout Paul's missionary activity of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it was reported that people were persuaded to believe God's Word; they were not just converted to a new religion. The word which Luke uses for persuasion is the verb *πειθω*, and it is found in Acts 17:4, 18:4, 19:26, 28:23 and 24. Stott writes that that verb form means the apostles were teaching a body of doctrine and "arguing towards a conclusion."¹⁴ Their intent was to make a logical, cognitive-emotive, case for the truth of their message, in order to bring the Spirit's life-changing power to bear on their faith and life. Stott makes two interesting observations in conjunction with this persuasive activity of Paul:

The first is that Paul sometimes stayed for long periods in one place. The most notable example is his visit to Ephesus on the third missionary journey. After three months' ministry in the synagogue, he withdrew and 'argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus (some manuscripts add "from the fifth hour to the tenth")...for two years' (Acts 19:8-10; cf. 14:3, 16:12, 14, 18:11, 18). A daily five-hour lecture throughout two years! That works out at over 25,000 hours of gospel teaching! No wonder we read in verse 10 that, as a result, 'all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks'. There is no doubt that the early apostolic kerygma was full of solid didache. The second . . . is that in the New Testament the conversion experience is frequently expressed in terms of response not to Christ but to 'the truth'. It is 'believing the truth' (2 Thess. 2:10-13), 'acknowledging the truth' (2 Tim. 2:25, Tit. 1:1), 'obeying the truth' (Rom. 2:8; 1 Pet. 1:22; cf. Gal. 5:7) and 'coming to know the truth' (John 8:32; 1 Tim. 2:4, 4:3; 1 John 2:21), while the preaching itself is 'the open statement of the truth' (2 Cor. 4:2).¹⁵

¹⁴ Stott, p. 56.

¹⁵ Ibid.

What we have in Paul's persuasive "arguing toward a conclusion" is what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call an epideictic kind of oratory, since its intent is to "strengthen the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds."¹⁶ Paul's intent of argumentation is not just to effect an intellectual response, but an emotional one as well; he sought an "intensity of adherence," until "the desired action is (was) actually performed."¹⁷ Using New Rhetoric terminology, Donfried relates it to Romans:

The argumentation in (Paul's) epideictic discourse (Letter to the Romans) sets out to increase the intensity of adherence to certain values, which might not be contested when considered on their own but may nevertheless not prevail against other values that might come into conflict with them. The speaker (in our case Paul) tries to establish a sense of communion centered around particular values recognized by the audience (in Romans it is the faith stance and faith commitment of speaker and audience), and to this end he uses the whole range of means available to the rhetorician for purposes of amplification and enhancement. In epideictic oratory (as here in Romans) every device of literary art is appropriate, for it is a matter of combining all the factors that can promote this communion of the audience.¹⁸

Paul, inspired by the Spirit, constantly uses all the means at his disposal to achieve his proclamation task of persuading his hearer toward a new life in Christ. He talks to the people, stays with them, lives in their homes, holds discussions, explains the Scriptures, testifies to the Messiah, speaks boldly in public, speaks in front of the Athenian Council, speaks in the synagogue, speaks in the marketplace, dialogues in the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 17, 18, 19). Even his enemies are well aware of his proclamation and its persuasive ability, as they bring Paul before the tribunal and accuse him of "trying to persuade

¹⁶Perelman, p. 50.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 51; Karl Donfried, ed. The Roman's Debate (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1977), p. 166.

people to worship God in a way that is against the law!" (Acts 18:13). Paul is so effective in his task of persuasion because the Spirit of God makes his Word persuasive. The Spirit would not have had the same effect, however, if Paul had not been the reputable saint he was (ethos), using the skills of argumentation and epideictic oratory with the Word he proclaimed (logos), in a manner that passionately identified with the hearer's need (pathos). God's Spirit used the best of Paul's artistic skill of rhetoric, and his sensitivity of relationship, to bring about His ministry of reconciliation.

"And the church grew!" The source of growth became obvious! "The number of disciples was multiplied" (Acts 6:1), "the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly" (Acts 6:70), "the churches, upheld by the Spirit, were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). It is easy to see how the Holy Spirit caused the church to grow from 12 to 120 to 3000 to 5000, when God's very purpose and power was in it!

God has always wanted His church to grow. He expects results! Luke 15 points out God's searching, receptive heart for the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son. There is rejoicing in each situation because the lost became the found! Mere searching is not what God wants; He wants the lost to be found. And His Spirit's prime activity is to see that that happens in the church, and through the church. It is the entire world that is to be saved (John 3:16, 17), because God does not wish "that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). And against all odds, even the gates of hell, it is God's specific plan, through the proclamation of the Gospel, that "Christ will build His church!" (Matthew 16:18).

SECTION THREE

Sections one and two have analyzed the transaction of persuasion in the art of preaching for the church. This third section focuses on sermon evaluation as a means of keeping the preaching task on target.

Chapter seven analyzes the expectations of the preacher and the hearer in relation to the preaching task. It looks at the seven steps of the communication process and then defines and categorizes the expectations of both preachers and hearers from specific surveys taken.

Evaluating those expectations through the use of a measured instrument is the content of chapter eight. Objective and subjective elements of evaluation are developed in a simple and unique way. They are then used in various congregations through a specific sermon evaluation instrument.

Finally, in chapter nine, the lay-people are integrated into the preaching task on a very basic level, through a three-part Bible study. As the pastor and his people study God's Word together and understand its implications in "Hearing the Word," "Working the Word," and "Sharing the Word," they begin to understand a shared responsibility in the preaching task.

CHAPTER 7

ANALYZING THE PREACHING TASK TODAY

A theological student was about to preach in his fieldwork congregation when he noticed a little sign tacked onto the pulpit. The sign was very brief and quite disturbing: "What are you trying to do to these people?"¹ That was the question of the supervising pastor, but perhaps it was also the question of the congregational members. And even though the question might have been asked in a more sensitive manner and appropos time, it is a question every preacher of the Gospel needs to ask before he tackles his preaching task. The question is related to the content of his proclamation (logos), the manner of his presentation (pathos), and, of course, the credibility he brings with him as the proclaimer of God's Word (ethos). In all of this, moreover, the focus of attention is on the people themselves. They are the very reason why the Word is being proclaimed. What are they feeling at this moment of time? What are they thinking? What are their expectations? How do they make choices regarding what they hear and what they ignore? "Without this respect," as Andersen refers to it, "persuasion becomes either a matter of force and coercion, or, on the other hand, an empty ritual."²

In this chapter, the preaching task will be analyzed according to the expectations and criteria of those who are the designated hearers as

¹McLaughlin, Op. cit., p. 9.

²Andersen, Op. cit., p. 7.

well as those who are the designated preachers. In a certain sense, according to dialogical principles, the hearers should be a part of the preaching task, and the preacher should be a part of the hearing process; in this chapter, however, the designations will be formally established for purposes of evaluation. Another designation will also be used, as a third category for evaluation; the label "homiletic professionals" will stand for those who represent the homiletics departments of various theological seminaries as well as those who publish current homiletical journals. To know the criteria these three categories of people use in sermon evaluation is to begin to understand the areas most critical in the persuasive communication of the Gospel. In other words, if the preacher does not really know what his hearer's expectations are for the preaching task, how can he (the preacher) effectively prepare and deliver a persuasive message? And if the hearer does not really know what the preacher's expectations are for the preaching task, how can he (the hearer) be persuasively moved toward greater faith and life? There needs to be a clear understanding and sharing of expectations for the preaching task, and there needs to be a clear understanding and sharing of the criteria that make up those expectations on the part of the preacher and the hearer. That detailed analysis will follow a summary description of the preaching task, as Reid applies the seven phases or steps in the communication process.³

Communicating The Word

Relying on the pioneer work of DeFleur and Larsen in the field of communication, Reid integrates the specifics of the preaching task

³Reid, Op. cit., pp. 68-72.

through the seven phases of communication. Phase one is transmission. The preacher proclaims the Word of God to the hearer. He presents the Word; he delivers his sermon. This is the first step in any communication transaction, but there is no knowledge about reception. The preacher makes assumptions about his task and his listening congregation. Does he get his message through the many obstacles in the circumstance and life of his hearers? Or does the proclaimed Word fall on deaf ears? Even if there seems to be responsive activity on the part of the hearers, will it translate into some growth in their faith and life? Phase one is closely connected with phase two: contact. When the transmission of the Word is heard by the congregation, contact is said to have happened. The hearers have heard the proclaimed Word. Hearers, however, hear on different levels, with different degrees of reception. They may have listened superficially, not catching the essential meaning of the presentation. They may have listened intermittently, not getting the full impact of all of the presented applications from the Word. They may have listened intently and grasped everything that was presented, or misunderstood the symbolic language completely. Contact, following transmission, leaves the preacher wondering about the reception of his proclaimed Word.

Feedback is the third phase. This is the crucial part of the communication transaction. Feedback occurs when the hearer reflects some form of communication back to the proclaimer. It is the preacher's reception that the message has been heard, and that there has been some understanding and interpretation on the part of the hearer. Feedback is dialogical in nature; it is a process by which misconceptions can be clarified and interpretations can be focused. Without this phase of

communication, there is no possibility of transaction, because there is no sharing of understanding about the message delivered. Comprehension, phase four, follows closely behind feedback. When it has been determined that the hearer has understood what the preacher has proclaimed in the Word, then comprehension has taken place. This happens only after misunderstandings are restated and listening gaps are replaced with insight. Howe points out that there are quite a few areas where comprehension is in jeopardy in the preaching task. Language is, perhaps, the most obvious area. Since words have different meanings and connotations for different people, it is easy for the proclaimed Word to be misunderstood. The theological language of a sermon makes the comprehension an even more challenging task. Other factors, such as age, cultural background, current anxiety level and defensiveness, further complicate communication, imposing barriers which can easily inhibit dialogue from taking place. Comprehension happens, however, when the hearer genuinely understands the message, according to Eggold.⁴

Acceptance is the fifth phase. A hearer may hear the Word proclaimed, may understand it, have it further clarified in dialogical reflection, but yet reject its application to his own faith and life. The proclaimer has no idea if and when the hearer has rejected the message. He may have some signals during his presentation of the Word, that is, if his hearers are looking the other way and not paying attention; but unless he knows his hearers very well, he may be speaking words that have absolutely no acceptance for the hearer. Rejection is a reasonably predictable response for the preacher, moreover, when he tries to use

⁴Eggold, Op. cit., p. 15.

God's Word to persuade his hearers to change their long-standing attitudes on a certain issue. If he is speaking to an all White congregation, for instance, and he tries to persuade them to accept Black Christians into their fellowship and neighborhood, he may very well cause great conflict and rejection. The hearers may comprehend the Word about the love of God and the love of neighbor as one's self, and Christ's mandate to be united in deed as well as word, but acceptance does not necessarily follow comprehension. The long-standing credibility of the person who brings the Word to his people (ethos) and the compassionate manner in which he relates that Word to the faith and life of his hearers (pathos), will directly influence the persuasiveness of the proclamation for the hearer, and, in turn, the acceptance.

The sixth phase is called internalization. In this phase the hearer not only makes the message of the Word his own personal message, but he begins to integrate the Word into his personal life. Internalization has direct effects on living patterns. A person may accept something as true, as in the case of loving his neighbor as himself; he may even accept as true the act of loving his Black Christian neighbor as he loves himself. He may, however, strongly resist any direct application of that love toward his Black Christian neighbor by continuing to ignore and reject all Black people. He will not yet have internalized the message of love.

Action is the final phase of the communication process. The eventual result of a persuasive message is accomplished in this phase. A transfer of meaning has taken place which influences conduct, says Reid.⁵

⁵Reid, p. 71.

Communication specialists agree that communication remains incomplete until the message is converted into action on the part of the hearer. When the Word of God is proclaimed in a Christian congregation, the action might be on an individual basis, but the effect will be on a corporate level. Paul writes to his Thessalonian Christian readers: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Word was addressed to an assembly of believers, and the resultant action in the Thessalonian congregation was a corporate action: "imitators of us" (1:6), "suffered the same things" (2:14), "always remember us" (3:6), "love all the brethren" (4:10). God's Word did accomplish exactly what it had promised through the Spirit of God — a Word that came to life in the hearts and lives of His people.

The proclaimed Word of God came to life in most of the places visited by the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys. The Word became active in the faith and life of God's people, as they continued to search the Scriptures and hear the Word preached to them. Paul did, however, meet with great resistance. Many people opposed his message and his presentation. They did not even think that he had the appropriate artistic ability, or eloquence, to be a preacher of the Gospel. He was accused of having inadequate apostolic accreditation. Some even found fault with his Word's logical appeal. Paul's proclamation was attacked in all three Aristotelian modes: ethos, logos and pathos. Paul did not have to guess the location of his hearers on the seven phase scale of communication. It became obvious right away. There was open

rejection and there was Spirit-enabled acceptance, obvious both vocally and baptismally. Paul did not minister on a regular basis to congregations which were well established in the Christian faith. He did not have to proclaim God's Word to one particular congregation over a long period of time. He did not have to answer some of the communication questions today's church needs to answer. The nascent church was in a somewhat different situation than the more formal church of today.

Analyzing The Expectations of Preaching

The proclamation of God's Word today, in our sophisticated Christianity, can be blocked quite effectively anywhere from phase one through phase seven. The question is this: How does the preacher know where his hearer is located on the communication scale? Unless the hearers of the Word are systematically incorporated into the task of proclaiming the Word, the preacher will have no way to evaluate his preaching task. The hearer needs to move well past the contact phase, through feedback and comprehension, in order to acquire acceptance and internalization, and, eventually, action in his Christian life. And the hearer is the only one who can communicate his position back to the preacher. Guessing where the hearer might be in his receptivity of the Word might be an interesting ecclesiastical game, but it comes miserably short of God's expectation. Direct assessment and measurement gives much more reliable information than the best clerical estimate; assumptions have killed even the best means of communication. Survey research, while being time-consuming and often incomplete, does enable the hearers of the Word to express their thoughts and feelings in an honest way. It also aids the preacher in his work of proclamation.

Discovering the receptivity of people in relation to the preaching task is an important process, for only in that discovery can the preacher proclaim the Word persuasively. Assuming that people are willing to express their best judgment in sermon evaluation, as critic-partners, a few questions need to be answered: What form of evaluation would the people use? What would the criteria be? Who would decide the kind of questions or the type of ratings? How could an evaluative form get at the process of judging persuasion?

Asking the questions always seems easier than getting the answers. If accurate evaluation is to take place so that God's Word can be proclaimed more persuasively on a regular basis, a survey procedure needed to be established. The people of Good Shepherd congregation were agreeable to the task. A very simple instrument asked congregational members, on a random basis, to name the three most important thoughts that came to their mind when they evaluated sermons. Of course, everyone seemed to think that they knew how to evaluate sermons. They did not seem to understand what terminology to use, but they felt they knew when a sermon was effective or ineffective. They thought they knew what a persuasive sermon should include and should not include. Almost to a person, the people were eager to share their thoughts and opinions. But many questions remained: Do the people understand the process well enough to be able to evaluate it? Are they qualified to make significant suggestions for change in the preaching of the Word? When does the proclaimer of the Word let the hearer determine what he says or how he says it? A survey or evaluative instrument from a pastor's congregation could prove to be a threat to his pastoral security; but, aside from that

concern, the hearer's evaluation was felt to be most necessary. To keep the survey balanced, however, input was needed from other sources as well.

People were very sensitive to the survey task, and they were also quite honest. A balanced input was obtained in the survey by asking parish pastors to answer the same question: What are the three most important thoughts that come to your mind when you evaluate sermons? The pastors seemed very willing to give their thoughtful answers. They also seemed to think that they knew how to evaluate sermons. They seemed to know when their sermons had been effective or ineffective. They thought they could tell when the message had been persuasive--when they had moved the hearers toward a faith or life goal. They were not sure, however, that they could describe how they knew; but they were sure they knew. Very few pastors used any kind of evaluative instrument; most of them used personal intuition to give them their sense of evaluation. They judged their sermons on the comments or the lack of comments from the people, the general visual feedback during the proclamation, or the general comments of the people as they left the worship service. Many questions still remained for the survey: Do the pastors themselves understand the process well enough to be able to evaluate it? Are they qualified to make critical adjustments without a professional consultant? Are they too close to the task to be able to evaluate it objectively? A survey form needed to have the additional input of those who are professionally skilled in this area of ministry. Those who teach homiletics in the theological seminaries, and those who write extensively in homiletical journals, could add some additional balance to an evaluative form. Professional articles and periodicals were consulted.

As a result of these concerns, three different sources were "questioned" in regard to sermon evaluation: laypeople, pastors, and homiletical professionals. Added to the laypeople from Good Shepherd, laypeople from ten different Lutheran churches were polled in the survey. The churches represented a cross-section of middle-America: laypeople from small and large rural, suburban, and urban congregations. They were all asked to name the three most important thoughts that came to their mind when they evaluated sermons. A total of twenty-four pastors were asked the same question. The twelve homiletical journals or articles studied, however, were summarized by the content and emphasis of a sampling of their writings.

The following chart (Figure 1) gives the interpreted summary of all the responses made. It should be understood that this survey is very limited in scope and accuracy. There were no control groups, and the representation is far from equal in the different categories. The surveys were done in various congregations according to specific instructions (Appendix A), but there was no insistence on regularity of polling. When this survey was taken, there were no helps or check lists for selection; the people and the pastors listed in their own way the three most important thoughts that came to their mind when they evaluated sermons. The thoughts expressed on paper were then interpreted and grouped into certain categories. The homiletical journals did give a few evaluation forms for the preaching task, but most of them were very long and placed much emphasis on the style of presentation. The journals and articles did, however, provide a few good structural ideas for the survey. Those ideas, along with the polled thoughts of the pastors and laypeople,

provided enough material for a survey summary sheet. After a careful analysis and consolidation process, the summary chart was formed.

Area of Evaluation	Evaluators			Total
	People	Pastors	Professionals	
Proclamation:				
1. Clear Focus	11	19	11	14
2. Scriptural Base	18	20	17	18
3. Authenticity	7	11	17	12
4. Relevance	20	11	14	15
Sub-Total	56	61	59	59
Presentation:				
1. Interesting Style	11	11	5	9
2. Convincing Delivery	10	11	17	12
3. Persuasive Application	13	17	14	15
4. Appropriate Length	10	0	5	5
Sub-Total	44	39	41	41
Totals	100	100	100	100

Figure 1 - Tabulation of Survey: Percentages

The subject most mentioned in the survey is listed on the chart as "Scriptural base." The actual tabulations included the following: The Bible, Gospel content, Law-Gospel, the Word, God's message, the text, and so forth. All of the entries so indicated were placed under the heading of "Scriptural base." Since all of the laypeople and pastors were Lutheran, it is understandable that this category received the highest number of entries. Either the people knew that a Scriptural

base was the most important part of any sermon delivered, or they remembered that that was what they had been told. Even though only six of the twelve journals or articles were of Lutheran origin, as a group they also mentioned the importance of Scripture most frequently.

"Relevancy" and "persuasive application" were tied for second in the over-all frequency of evaluation. While persuasive application was rated very high among all three "evaluators" in the survey, relevancy was the most frequently mentioned area for laypeople. In comparison, it was one of the least frequently mentioned areas for pastors. The laypeople indicated their concern as listeners: "Choose topics listeners relate to," "it has to speak to me today," "what does the text say for my life?" Even when the layperson (taking the survey) did not seem to have much education, the emphasis was clear: "make it relevant to our life!" Relevancy, for the laypeople, rated a slightly higher frequency of mention than Scriptural base. The general implication from the comments seemed to say, "preach the Word from the Bible, but please make sure that the Word relates to my life!"

One of the more troubling areas uncovered by the survey falls under the presentation division; the area is labeled "appropriate length." The laypeople evaluate the sermon length as being important, but not of primary concern. In other words, relevancy, Scriptural base, and persuasive application are concerns that come well before their concern about the length of the message. However, their fear of a rambling, theological discourse seems to have some basis, if for no other reason than the actual rating given to that area by the pastors. The frequency of mention by pastors concerning the length or concise nature of their

message was zero. Pastors seem to assume that the length of a message is inconsequential to the meaning of its proclamation. As one lady put it: "Remember, I have small children." The pastor-preacher needs to be very sensitive to his people and their ability to receive what he wants to give.

The people certainly do want to receive God's proclaimed Word for their faith and life. The sermon is an important part of their worship experience. And if the area of relevancy would be combined statistically with the area of persuasive application, very similar in evaluative thinking, there would be a 33% tabulation for the laypeople. It would be 28% for the other two evaluators. Since relevancy and persuasive application seem to be related to a Scriptural base (one or the other almost always being mentioned with some indication of Scriptural base), the laypeople are saying quite strongly: we want a persuasive, relevant Word for our faith and life.

Authenticity did not seem to be much of a concern for the laypeople, probably because they knew and trusted their present pastor. This seemed to be an area -- the pastor's credibility -- which was assumed by most of the people. It was even assumed by the pastors. It certainly was not assumed by the homiletic professionals; they were dealing with the subject in a more objective fashion than the laypeople or clergy. Authenticity would occasionally be mentioned among the laypeople, when they would ask, for example: "Does the pastor really believe what he says?" "Was the sermon prayerfully prepared?"

Most of the homiletical journals and articles studied were heavily influenced by Aristotle's historical model of communication. There seemed

to be, among them as a group, a more even distribution between the Scripture base (logos), convincing delivery (pathos), and authenticity (ethos) in terms of sermon evaluation. Pathos, for many of them, could also include "persuasive application."

Aside from the helpfulness of the information gained from the survey, the process itself was meaningful for most of the pastors and their laypeople. There was a renewed sensitivity to each other in most of the congregations surveyed. Occasionally, the pastor would receive personal notes of support or thankfulness. Occasionally, there were notes of expressed anxiety, like one which read: "I'd like to evaluate, but I fear hurting the minister's feelings." Overall, the people seemed most willing and reflective; as one person put it: "How difficult it must be for a minister to prepare a sermon."

Categorizing the Expectations of Preaching

When comments are made in an evaluation, an accurate interpretation of those comments is very crucial to the evaluative task. It is also very helpful to place those comments in certain categories to further understand what it all means for the preacher. In a recent video series done by Concordia Publishing House -- "Preaching For Pastors"⁶ -- helpful comments were made regarding the preached Word. People said they looked for "something to take home," a "simple message, memorable," something "related to life," something upon which "to reflect," "food for the week," a "message of salvation." Those helpful comments, however,

⁶Stephen Carter, "Preaching For Pastors" Video Series, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House).

were never interpreted and grouped according to categories -- a necessary task for the preacher who wants to learn how to be more proficient and persuasive in the preaching task. Figure 2 shows a sampling of the comments of this study, made by the laypeople (L), the pastors (P), and the homiletical professionals (H) from the survey shown above. This is a representative sampling of the comments to show congruence with the eight terms selected for the evaluative instrument.

Throughout the entire process of interpretation, terminology and ecclesiastical jargon were tested against the "gut" feelings and real life issues of people. The end result became very useful in actual sermon evaluation, for the people felt that they had a voice in the evaluative instrument. They had been heard, and they were more sensitive to their part of the preaching task. For "preaching is an encounter involving not only content but relationship, not only ideas but action, not only logic but emotion, not only understanding but commitment."⁷

⁷Howe, Op. cit., p. 42.

Focus

- L - simple language, focus
- P - clear message, understandable, easy to follow
- H - presents ideas clearly and understandably

Scriptural Base

- L - Biblical truth, Biblical teaching
- P - articulate Gospel, Law-Gospel distinction, soundly Scriptural
- H - the power of the Word of God is bigger than the preacher

Authenticity

- L - preacher needs to be real person with real Word
- P - believable preacher, message congruent with person
- H - the character or reputation of the speaker is most important

Relevancy

- L - message relevant for my life, applies to everyday life
- P - practical application, congruent with people, specific applications
- H - to be contemporary is to make relevant, meaningful and personal the message of the Gospel

Interesting Style

- L - strong introduction and conclusion, picture words and symbols
- P - does the sermon grab you, hold you, catch you?
- H - understand people's interests and speak their language.....if (you are) to be interesting to them

Convincing Delivery

- L - convincing way of presenting the message
- P - preacher talking to me, good eye contact with people, passion
- H - the whole person should be aflame with what is proclaimed

Persuasive Application

- L - will I remember and apply meaning to daily life, take home?
- P - motivates toward change, persuasive, uplifted by Gospel
- H - help people confront their need for Gospel as quickly and easily as they can

Concise

- L - not lengthy, to the point, precise
- P - (nothing listed)
- H - the Christian pulpit has the least room for a babbler or windjammer

Figure 2 - Understanding the Evaluative Instrument From Survey Comments

CHAPTER 8

EVALUATING THE PREACHING TASK FOR THE CHURCH

Trying to measure the results of the proclamation of the Word in the hearts and lives of the hearers is a difficult task. God alone, in fact, is the only One who truly knows the measure of one's faith or life. But evaluation is very necessary if the task of preaching for the church is to be the persuasive means of grace God wants it to be. Some aspects of evaluation will be more subjective than others, since the hearers can easily cover or disguise their true feelings and thoughtful response. Some aspects of interpretation will likewise be more subjective than others, since the preacher is trying to look into the often illusive, cognitive-emotive framework of the proclamation event. Caemmerer puts the entire evaluative process in perspective:

After the service hearers often speak a polite and sometimes fervent word of appreciation to the preacher. He should not belittle these comments, for they are part of the relation between pastor and people. But they themselves need investigation, nor do they always indicate thoughtful reaction to the sermon. Sermons are supposed to change people for the better. That change runs counter to the flesh, and its dynamic is a Gospel which is an offense for that flesh. If the hearer has really listened, he may want to get home and think the matter through again; he may want to see the preacher for more help. Hence the preacher must look for more than indications that the hearers are pleased.¹

The Measured Instrument of Evaluation

A marksman on the firing range needs to have his targets spotted so that he can adjust his line of sight, should corrections need to be

¹Caemmerer, Op. cit., pp. 241-242.

made. The preacher of the Gospel also needs to have his targets "spotted" so that he can adjust his Word of proclamation, should adaptations need to be made. Lowell Erdahl, in his book, Better Preaching: Evaluating the Sermon, tells his hearers: "We preachers are like golfers driving golf balls in the dark. We may swing hard and feel that we are driving well, but we have no way of knowing if we are hitting the green. The only way for us to know if our preaching is reaching or missing you is for you to let us know."² Feedback is the third phase in the communication transaction. The preacher wants to have feedback from the hearers, and the hearers want to give feedback to the preacher, but how can that be expedited in the most meaningful way?

From the analysis of the survey on preaching evaluation, completed by laypeople, pastors and homiletic professionals, eight areas of concern surfaced from the hundreds of responses. Two major divisions seemed appropriate for the preaching task, with the eight areas equally divided under each division. "Proclamation" became the first division, with the following four sub-headings: Focus, Scriptural Base, Authenticity, and Relevancy. "Presentation" became the second division, with the following four sub-headings: Interesting Style, Convincing Delivery, Persuasive Application, and Appropriate Length. These areas of concern could be evaluated in a relatively objective way, having immediate effect on the hearer. Other areas of evaluation, more subjective and long-range, included application, internalization and

²Lowell O. Erdahl, Better Preaching: Evaluating the Sermon (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), pp. 27-28.

action. Accurate assessment was the purpose of the evaluative form, and so there needed to be some kind of balance between the objective and the subjective, the short-range and the long-range, in making the instrument. Whatever the form of the instrument, however, measuring the true persuasiveness of the proclaimed Word would be just an estimate; it could not accurately measure its impact like the methodology of scientific research, as Marsh states.³

The subjective aspects of the evaluative instrument followed the objective section. The laypeople needed to have a place to respond to a question on the central thought or message of the sermon. They also needed to have some place for expressing the persuasive character of the sermon on their faith or life. Responding to those two questions would give an indication of comprehension and application. Obviously, there could be no internalization or action on the part of the hearer in faith and life unless there were some indication of comprehension and application. The persuasive nature of the proclaimed Word toward a voluntary change in the hearer could be evidenced, however, in some comment demonstrating the Gospel's application to the hearer's faith or life.

The criteria for the two questions became clear. Keep it short, personal, reflective, and specific. Most people do not want to spend a lot of time doing an evaluation. They appreciate something brief and focused. They will be more apt to write a comment when the line is short, as Erdahl has discovered.⁴ The questions developed into the

³Marsh, Op. cit., pp. 435-438.

⁴Erdahl, Op. cit., pp. 30-33.

following: "What was the sermon's central message for you?" and "How was it meaningful for your faith or life?" Some room was left on the bottom for "other comments."

The "test group" doing the evaluation came from those people who were involved in some form of Bible study in the congregation. They would be involved at a later time in a three-part Bible study on preaching and hearing. The other evaluators each Sunday would be picked by the elders of the congregation; different people would be chosen for each Sunday. Both the test group and the other evaluators would be picked at random, and the pastor would not know who the evaluators would be. Ten evaluations would be done each Sunday, with five from the test group and five picked from the congregation. The evaluators were to fill out the brief form immediately after the worship service on three successive Sundays. Figure 3 shows the form used.

SERMON EVALUATION	Date _____
THE PROCLAMATION	(please circle) low high
1- Clear focus; easy to follow	1 2 3 4 5
2- Scriptural; Christ-centered	1 2 3 4 5
3- Authentic and believable	1 2 3 4 5
4- Relevant for personal life	1 2 3 4 5
THE PRESENTATION	
1- Interesting style	1 2 3 4 5
2- Convincing delivery of message	1 2 3 4 5
3- Persuasive application of Word	1 2 3 4 5
4- Concise; appropriate length	1 2 3 4 5

<p>What was the sermon's central message for you?</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>How was it meaningful for your faith or life?</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Other comments?</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Thank you for helping in this evaluation process.</p>

Figure 3 - Sermon Evaluation Form

Sermons Evaluated By Means of an Instrument

The people of Good Shepherd were very willing to evaluate their pastor's sermons. The actual procedure took a few minutes of their time, and it was not threatening to anyone. Having been informed about this procedure in advance by newsletter, the people knew the purpose of the project and the board of elders reaffirmed its validity through their support. The results were tallied after each service, and the following chart (Figure 4) gives the averages in each category on the evaluative instrument.

Very few people circled the same numbers down any particular row of the form (e.g. all 4's). If there were a significant number of people who had done this, it would have reflected a careless evaluation or a poor evaluative instrument. Since there were only eight items with a manageable range of choice, from one through five, most people reflected their

Area of Evaluation	Dates of Evaluation			Average
	2/11	2/18	2/25	
PROCLAMATION				
1. Focus	4.3	4.7	4.2	4.4
2. Scriptural base	4.4	4.7	4.4	4.5
3. Authenticity	4.4	4.6	4.0	4.3
4. Relevancy	4.6	4.6	4.2	4.5
PRESENTATION				
1. Interesting Style	4.0	3.9	4.3	4.1
2. Convincing Delivery	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.2
3. Persuasive Application	4.0	4.4	4.2	4.2
4. Appropriate Length	4.5	4.2	4.4	4.4
Total Averages	4.2	4.4	4.3	4.3

Figure 4 - Evaluation Results: Objective Part

opinion on each item separately, as they should have done. Great care had been taken in the labeling of each area of evaluation so there would be accuracy of interpretation, and, hence, greater accuracy of reflection. The procedure went very smoothly. There were no complaints, only words of encouragement. And the resultant evaluation seemed to reflect the over-all congregational feeling about each sermon.

Accurate reflection was the most important goal for the usage of the instrument. If the terms and the procedure did not foster accurate, evaluative reflection, then the entire project would not have much value. Good Shepherd congregation became the testing ground for the instrument, with the goal of utilizing it on a larger scale in other congregations. Each week, following the preceding week's evaluation, the Bible Class

would discuss its own cumulative evaluation, and then compare that with the tabulated results of the instrument. The similarity was quite impressive. What had been objectively evaluated individually with the circling of a number on a five-point scale, was also confirmed corporately through open discussion. Each area was discussed and evaluated. There were no variations of more than two-tenths on any particular number of any Sunday, and the ratio of numerical relationships on the scale were almost exactly the same (eg. 4.3, 4.4, 4.7 on one scale, compared with 4.4, 4.5, 4.7 on another scale).

The difference between the "test group" and those chosen from the congregation at random made little difference in evaluation scoring; they were virtually the same. The real difference, however, came in the more subjective part of the evaluation -- the two questions. The "test group," comprised of members of the Bible Class, indicated more accurately the appropriate answers to the two questions. They did that in every case. There could, of course, be any number of reasons for that difference, and since the sampling number was significantly small, no real distinction will be shown in this paper. The chart that follows (Figure 5), however, will show some indication of the understanding and application level of the hearers as a group. This is the more subjective part of the evaluation. It is also, in some ways, the more important part in determining the effectiveness of sermon persuasion for voluntary change of faith or life.

The evaluation results, as with the survey results, were based on an interpretation of the comments by one person. The primary function of the exercise was to have the laypeople actually participate in the

Questions	Evaluations	Dates			Avg.
		2/11	2/18	2/25	
What was the sermon's central message for you?	Accurate reflection	80	90	80	83
	Vague reflection	20	10	20	17
How was it meaningful for your faith or life?	Accurate application	60	80	80	73
	Vague application	40	20	20	27

Figure 5 - Evaluation Results: Subjective Part (percentages)

evaluative process, and see the results of their evaluation. The class discussion that followed every week brought much interest and a lively participation. The pastor was trying to listen carefully to the "choices hearers make"⁵ with regard to the preached Word, and the hearers were feeling a sense of "shared responsibility"⁶ in the preaching task. As the sharing continued each week, the number of class periods on sermon evaluation were doubled to complete the scheduled Bible class study guides: "Hearing the Word," "Working the Word," and "Sharing the Word" (c.f. Appendix B, C, D).

The evaluative instrument was now ready to be used on a larger scale. Ten Lutheran pastors agreed to help with this project in order to study the persuasive role of their preaching through sermon evaluation. After they had been given the evaluative materials, with complete instructions (Appendix A), they proceeded to duplicate the procedure tested at Good Shepherd. The testing proved effective;

⁵Andersen, Op. cit., p. 7

⁶Roen, Op. cit., p. xii.

they all had similar, positive experiences with the project and felt they had gained a better understanding of hearer choice and response. Each Sunday, after the evaluations had been completed, they tallied the results and compiled the scores on the objective part. Then they judged each hearer's response to the two questions. Figure 6 shows the cumulative evaluation results for the objective part of the forms completed. The cumulative similarity of response to the original testing at Good Shepherd was striking. There were no areas rated under 4.0 in either case, and there were no major differences in evaluation. The two areas that showed a variance greater than two-tenths were "interesting style" and "appropriate length."

Area of Evaluation	Average
PROCLAMATION	
1. Focus	4.2
2. Scriptural base	4.6
3. Authenticity	4.2
4. Relevancy	4.2
PRESENTATION	
1. Interesting Style	4.0
2. Convincing Delivery	4.2
3. Persuasive Application	4.2
4. Appropriate Length	4.0
Total Average	4.2

Figure 6 - Cumulative Evaluation Results:
Objective Part

The subjective section was equally striking in comparison (Figure 7). While the average evaluative score of the three sermons

at Good Shepherd showed an 83% understanding level of the sermon's central message, the average evaluative score of the thirty sermons in other congregations showed a 76% understanding level. And while the average evaluative score at Good Shepherd showed a 73% application level for faith or life, the average evaluative score in the other congregations showed a 70% application level. In each sermon evaluation, moreover, there were an average of ten forms completed, making the number of evaluations for the project total: 330 completed.

Questions	Evaluations	Congregational Average
What was the sermon's central message for you?	Accurate Reflection	76
	Vague reflection	24
How was it meaningful for your faith or life?	Accurate application	70
	Vague Application	30

Figure 7 - Cumulative Evaluation Results: Subjective Part (percentages)

Evaluating the Instrument

The instrument developed and tested at Good Shepherd proved to be an effective tool for sermon evaluation. It became the means for the hearer's improved sensitivity to the proclamation of the Word and his involvement in that proclamation. It also became the means for the preacher's improved sensitivity to the hearing of the proclamation and his part in making that happen. The choices made by the preacher and the hearer in the proclamation transaction became the focus of interest. The pastor-preacher discovered the frequency of choice in the usage of

his literary, oratorical and persuasive skills when he wanted to proclaim the Word to his hearers. The hearers discovered the frequency of choice in the usage of their many listening, interpretive and responsive communication skills in the hearing and implementing of the Word. Both preacher and hearer, from reports of every congregation, grew in sensitivity, not only to the proclamation transaction, but, more importantly, to each other. The hearer understood more clearly Paul's question, "how can they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14), and the preacher understood more clearly Paul's corollary thought behind his question: "how can they preach without the hearer?".

The objective part of the instrument, completed by the hearer, showed many correlations to the original survey of the three most important thoughts that came to mind when evaluating a sermon. The proclamation division was rated on a higher level than the presentation division, as in the survey. The Scriptural basis held the highest rating of all the areas of the instrument, showing that what the pastors had indicated as the most important goal of the sermon in the survey, was, in fact, what the hearers found to be true. Relevancy and persuasive application were a little lower in the evaluative rating on the instrument than they were on the survey, but the two areas rated the lowest on both the instrument and the survey were the same, interesting style and appropriate length.

Regularity was also a key feature in the objective part of the evaluation. In every case of the more than 300 forms completed, not one item was left blank in the eight areas listed. That seems to indicate clarity of terminology and ease of completion. Also, only

that some are hard to sing, and keep those to a minimum." Most people, however, were positive and offered constructive criticism, helpful for the preaching task. People used interesting, tactful ways in making their points, like the person who said, "your sermons that start with a clear introduction without the use of notes and lead into the body of the sermon are easier to follow and gain initial attention." The people who made the most helpful comments were usually the ones who had the more thoughtful responses to the questions and the objective part. Those who made very general positive comments, like "good sermon," were often the same ones who wrote the more obvious answers to the questions.

The methodology of the entire project received favorable reviews from each participating congregation and pastor. They noted that the survey requests and the sermon evaluation instrument were clear, concise and adaptable. All of the laypeople could complete their assigned task with a minimum of time and effort, and it did not take any special set of instructions or educational level of competence to achieve the desired goals. In each case, whether urban or rural, large or small, formal or informal, liturgical or non-liturgical, the congregational people demonstrated their ability to evaluate the proclaimed Word in a helpful, reflective way. The pastors of those congregations, moreover, felt that they had been helped to proclaim the Word with a greater sensitivity to the hearer and the task. And what the pastors really liked about the project was the fact that it took little of their time or effort; it involved the board of elders in a supervisory way, as it had involved many laypeople in a reflective way.

Many pastors had used other instruments of evaluation, either with

eighteen percent of the responses indicated the same number in all eight areas (e.g. all 5's), which seems to indicate a high degree of reflectiveness in evaluation.

The subjective part of the instrument, however, was the most reflective and revealing. More often than not, on each question, people would write down more information than the two lines could hold. They were interested, and they worked hard to give the correct information. Many of the pastors were surprised at the reflectiveness of the answers, the correct interpretation of their message, and the faith or life language used for the application of the Gospel. It was a positive response on the part of the hearers which encouraged an even greater effort toward clarity and relevancy on the part of the pastors. As a result of the helpful feedback, the pastors expressed a greater interest in, and concern for, the "reciprocal relationship"⁷ Howe stressed as being so important between the preacher and the hearer in the proclamation of the Word. That relationship is the basis of dialogical interaction and persuasive communication.

The subjective section of the instrument concluded with an opportunity for the hearer to respond with any "other comments." Besides the usual "good sermon," or "nice message," there were the more thoughtful responses, such as the one which said, "the sermon was to the point and the length was good. I wish you could have said something of comfort concerning the war which has troubled so many of us." Sometimes people used the question as an opportunity to express their opinion on other items; "keep in mind," stated one person, "when selecting hymns,

⁷Howe, Op. cit., p. 50.

a very small number of people in periodic fashion, or with a Bible class or other group for a series of studies. They rated this project highly because it accomplished what they wanted a critical homiletical instrument to accomplish, without extensive training, experience, or time spent. They liked it because it could be used in conjunction with the three-part Bible study on sermon evaluation, thereby making it an educational, Christian growth experience as well. Furthermore, it permitted the preacher to have an accurate reflection of the congregational evaluation of the sermon almost immediately after the worship service without an extensive tallying procedure or reading marathon.

The percentage of pastors who agreed to help with this project was also very high. Of course, only those pastors who were thought to be open to evaluation were asked; they also seemed to have a good rapport with their people. Out of the fifteen pastors asked, only one said that he could not, and that was because he had just gone through a traumatic parish conflict. One pastor who had agreed to complete the three parts of the project (1-survey, 2-evaluation, 3-Bible study), said that he could not complete it within the time framework. Three other pastors also did not return the results in time for completion of this project, but at least two of them said they were using the materials in their congregations. Ten pastors who had agreed to do the survey, evaluations, and Bible study, completed all the work within the short three month time period allotted. Since a portion of that three month period fell in the Advent-Christmas season, and another portion fell in the beginning of the Lenten season, it is quite amazing that there was a 67% return of the materials completed on time. In addition, two other pastors in the

District, hearing about the project, asked if they could participate. Of the ten pastors who returned all the evaluative materials, eight of them had followed the instructions accurately in all of the parts of the project; two of them had not completed the tally of the instrument questions.

The instrument form, usage, methodology, and response were rated most favorably, but if the over-all project did not highlight the persuasive aspect of preaching, it had not accomplished its goal. Persuasion has always been a part of the proclamation task. The Holy Spirit has always used the proclaimed Word persuasively as a vital part of the life and growth of the Christian Church. And the persuasive aspect of that proclamation has always included the preacher's habitus⁸ and personal "experience"⁹ of the Word -- heralding God's message of reconciliation, while at the same time, participating in a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19,20). When that message and ministry of reconciliation are a unity in the proclaimer of the Word, the hearer of the Word, perceiving the Word's incarnate reality, is persuaded in faith and life. He will be ministered into acceptance of the Word's truth for himself. He will persuade himself to receive what that Word, through God's Spirit, most certainly gives through the proclamation. In other words, the preacher, hearer, Word and Spirit, all converge on a singular thought at a particular time. Caemmerer calls it "the art of getting the hearer to think the one thing you want him to think."¹⁰ Andersen, with a secular slant, labels it "communication in which the communicator seeks through the use of symbolic agencies, particularly language, to effect

⁸Pieper, Op. cit., I, p. 46.

⁹Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁰Caemmerer, p. 36.

a desired voluntary change in the attitudes and/or actions of the receiver(s)."¹¹

This project's educational value can be seen in its clarification of the goals of preaching, while its practical value can be seen in its understanding of the proclamation transaction. Unless the goals of preaching are clear to the preacher and the hearer on the same interpretive level, there can be little effective communication. Hence, the survey of laypeople, pastors, and homiletic professionals, was developed to answer the question: What are the three most important thoughts that come to mind when evaluating sermons? Unless the preaching transaction is clearly understood by the preacher and the hearer, using the same interpretive instrument, there can be little effective evaluation. Hence, the instrument was developed to rate the preacher's ethos, logos, and pathos, along with the hearer's reception and application of the Word. Unless the shared responsibility of the proclamation of the Word is clearly discussed by the preacher and the hearer, utilizing the same interpretive study, there can be little effective growth in the communication of the Word. Hence, the three-part Bible study was developed to help the preacher and hearer to openly discuss the goals, transaction and responsibility of the preaching task according to the guidelines of the Scriptures.

Many persuasive aspects of preaching were surveyed, evaluated, and studied. Andersen's emphasis on the "desired voluntary change" of persuasion became clear to preacher and hearer in all three phases of the project. Caemmerer's emphasis on the clarity and focus ("the one

¹¹Andersen, Op. cit., p. 7.

thing you want him to think") of the persuasive Word became the common denominator of all meaningful preaching. Howe's emphasis on the "reciprocal relationship" of the preaching transaction became the obvious basis of all dialogical, inter-relational, and persuasive communication of God's Word. Luther's stress, however, on the principle: "praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei,"¹² made the entire study of persuasion one of utmost importance for the preacher and the hearer, for God's means of grace, even the incarnate Word Himself, was at stake, when the proclamation was not proclaimed or received according to God's persuasive purpose. And part of God's persuasive purpose, according to Luther, was to use the physical presence and the literary form to convey God's spiritual reality, words for the Word, or as Goeser relates it, "Luther's use of language and imagery moves him to the arts. For here the physical image affects the heart and sense: the verbal icon, the visual icon, and the heard icon . . . thus Word when languaged does something close to what literature does."¹³ No literature, however, according to Luther is so filled with images and illustrations, pictures and verbal paintings, as the Word of God.¹⁴ When that living Word is proclaimed, it becomes a living proclamation, an incarnate Word, God's most persuasive means of effecting the hearer's faith and life.

¹²Patrick Ferry, "Martin Luther on Preaching," Concordia Theological Quarterly, 54 (1990), p. 272. "The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God."

¹³Robert J. Goeser, "Luther: Word of God, Language, and Art," Currents in Theology and Mission, 18 (1991), pp. 9-10.

¹⁴Luther's Works, Op. cit., 32, pp. 195-205.

CHAPTER 9

THE SHARED RESPONSIBILITY OF PREACHING

Howe emphasizes that "ministers must realize that in the task of correlation they are inescapably dependent on the laity."¹ That is, if the preaching pastor really wants to connect the dynamic Word of God with the lives of the people he serves, he must make every effort to know those people in a most personal way. And as he listens to, and is moved by, the needs and concerns of his people, the proclaimed Word becomes the powerful tool it was meant to be - moving the hearer in God's direction of fulfillment and salvation through Jesus Christ! For "the purpose of preaching is to cause the Word of God to take flesh in the lives of men and women."²

As the people in the Bible class of Good Shepherd congregation reflected on the sermons they heard in the preceding Sundays, they indicated helpful ways in which the Word of God influenced their faith and life. As one faithful woman put it, "I need, and usually find, the strong message of hope and reassurance, for my daily life!" When asked how she received that hope and reassurance, she indicated that it was more than just the preached Word of God, more than just "Jesus loves you and has died for you!" It was the "total package" of the sermon proclamation and presentation. It was "the feeling" of "God being right there" and "God caring personally for me." The others in the class

¹Howe, Op. cit., p. 43.

²Ibid., p. 46.

seemed to be in full agreement. They didn't want to be too critical of the evaluative form, but most said that they did not think in those terms of evaluation. They knew when they had been moved to make a change in their faith or life! But the question remained: How did they know, and what made the difference?

The class looked more closely at the evaluative form. "Let's say," the instructor reflected, "that a sermon message was most persuasive, but not focused on a specific aspect of faith or life? Or maybe, the sermon was extremely relevant to today's issues, and interesting in format, but not contained in a Christ-centered answer to make a difference or real change in your faith or life?" The class started to consider the need for "focus" as well as "persuasive application," for the "Christ-centered" message as well as "interesting style," for "authenticity" as well as "relevance for personal life." They are all one package, too be sure, but the package needs the sum total of all the parts. And the class did seem to know when parts were missing in sermons, but they had never considered exactly what the parts were.

Much time and effort was spent on word meanings, structure, distinctions of Law and Gospel, picture language and illustrations. But, perhaps, the most time was spent discussing purpose. What was the purpose of the sermon? What was it to accomplish? How was it to relate to the faith and life of the hearer? And what difference would it make for daily living? The class began to feel the real need to understand the entire concept of preaching, and their part in the "shared responsibility" of the preached Word of God.

The questions were important; searching for the answers, however, became more important. The Bible class was interested in finding Biblical answers to some of their questions. The word "sermon" was not even found in the Bible, but "preaching," and "proclamation," and "persuasion" frequently described God's activity among men through the communicating of His Word. The first lesson (Appendix B), entitled "Hearing the Word," delved into the preaching-listening transaction. Not infrequently did Jesus tell his disciples and the multitudes, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear!" The hearing was all-important when the message could easily get lost in the words. Jesus was not just saying, "Listen carefully or you will miss the point!" He was saying, "Parables are earthly stories of heavenly realities, just as words are earthly vehicles for the heavenly Word. Listen for the heavenly Word!" God can only use images, verbal pictures, visual paintings, parables, even an incarnate version of Himself, to demonstrate what He and Heaven are all about. He cannot tell us the way it is in His own language, because we would never begin to understand. So, he talks about His Kingdom in terms we can understand: seed and fields, pearls and lost coins, prodigal sons and prophetic strangers.

Finally, the Word becomes flesh for the sacrifice. The Shepherd finding the lost lamb, becomes the sacrificial lamb. The only-begotten Son describing the prodigal son, becomes the abandoned Son. The Lord and Master of all creation, becomes the victim and servant of that creation. The words pointing to the Word, now have a descriptive word of revelation. This is not just "God talk;" it is God's message of reconciliation in Christ Jesus. It is for us and our salvation. It is

to be proclaimed. But how will the people hear? "Their heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing" (Matthew 13:15). Some will hear and some will shut their ears, Jesus says, but the Word must be proclaimed! The Scriptures give countless proclamations of that Word, from the Sermon on the Mount to the Sermon on the Plain, from Peter's attestation of the Spirit to Paul's attestation of the Christ, from Jesus' surrender into His Father's hands to Stephen's confirmation of that same heavenly reality. John joins Peter, of early church fame, in saying: "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard!" Being persuaded by God's Spirit through His Word, Jesus' disciples carry that persuasive power to people through their proclamation.

The Bible class took a short detour away from the Word and considered the "hearing" or "listening" aspect of the proclamation on a purely physical level. Certainly Jesus had to put up with the same kind of communication problems we have today, but He was the Word! He spoke like no other prophet, for He was the Son of God! In His first sermon, He already had a problem with that fact. He was so persuasive that the people caught His point right away; they said, "Come, let's stone him!" Today the Gospel proclamation is not that dramatic in the process. It is an accomplished, applied reality. It is the same Gospel with the same power, but people have heard that Word hundreds and thousands of times. The preaching situation today is laden with many concerns, as Donald Campbell enumerates some of them:

1. The average congregant will tend to shorten, simplify, and eliminate details from the message; the longer the sermon, the more the "leakage."
2. The central section of the sermon is the least likely to be remembered.

3. The listener will qualify remarks to bring them into closer harmony with his own viewpoints and attitudes.
4. Researchers have found that people stop listening when the material is uninteresting.
5. Listeners are influenced more by the delivery than by the truth of the message.
6. People tend to be influenced more by the dramatic emotional elements of a sermon than by its logical elements.
7. A person can think at the rate of 400 words per minute, but speakers rarely talk at a pace of more than 200; listeners tend to think ahead of the preacher.³

Campbell lists some twenty-five obstacles for the preaching task today. Good Shepherd's Bible class discussed many of them. Just the awareness and sensitivity on the part of preacher and hearer go a long way toward handling, if not removing, the obstacles. The proclamation of the Word should be Good News in its presentation as it is Good News in its content.

The second lesson (Appendix C), entitled "Working the Word," discussed the dynamic quality of God's proclaimed Word. If the Word of God itself is dynamic, filled with God's purpose and inspired by His Spirit, then His proclaimed Word should be nothing less. It has the same purpose, the same inspiration, and the same Spirit. The Bible Class discussed the "work" necessary on the part of the preacher and the hearer in applying the Word to real life. In the first section of the lesson, there was great interest in the story of Jesus and the Woman at the Well (John 4:19-26). How easy it is to focus on the form or formality of worship (the woman seemed most concerned about the correct mountain of worship), rather than on the Fountain of Life Himself (He was standing

³"The Listeners in Preaching," Leadership, VI (Summer, 1985) pp. 31-32.

right there with her, just as He continues to be with us). The "work" comes in putting aside the secondary concerns of worship in order to concentrate on the primary concern, Jesus Christ. The second section illustrated the "work" part of the sermon in greater detail. The people began to get more honest about their expectations for the proclamation of the Word, as the question was discussed: "Is it entertaining communication or an encounter with God's Word?" Work is a necessary part of every sermon, for the hearer as much as for the preacher. The hearer, for one thing, has to struggle with mental labor on a day called the "day of rest." He also has to think through and evaluate his immediate past and present situation, as he relates God's Law and Gospel to himself. Finally, he has to discover exactly where in his faith and life he needs and wants God's persuasive Word to move him. The Bible study's last section of the lesson simply reaffirmed the inspirational quality of the proclaimed Word. It does, in fact, accomplish what it says it will. In Jesus Christ we do have access to the Father's Kingdom, and, through His Spirit, we stir each other to acts of love and service in His name.

Lesson three, "Sharing the Word" (Appendix D), was the most relational of all the lessons. It embodied the main point of the entire project of sermon evaluation. It connected the hearer with the preacher, as both shared the joy of "telling the good news" to each other. The people studied many passages in the Acts of the Apostles to see that preaching was not confined to the pulpit or public address. They discovered how much the pastor counted on them to share their faith with him to support him and help him proclaim the Word for the church. They

experienced the persuasive nature of being a "letter" to each other, as Paul says (2 Corinthians 3:2), not written on a scroll, but in their own lives. They shared their joy in Christ, being able to read God's love in each other "like a book!" Sermons were beginning to happen among the people where, formerly, a sermon was brought to them.

The laypeople felt that they had been brought into something rather "private" and "reserved" for most preachers; they were now, to some extent, "insiders." They felt the struggle and the joy of the one who is called to proclaim the Word publicly. They had a new understanding of the preacher as a "fellow pilgrim" traveling with them on the road of faith and life. And the instructor came to understand what he had read in one of the professional homiletical journals:

Loving intelligent criticism should be precious to any preaching pastor, because it is as rare and beautiful as golden apples among silver leaves . . . Good criticism is a great compliment because it requires an effort.⁴

⁴Roen, Op. cit., p. xii.

THE CONCLUSION

The Word of God has been given to persuade people to change their lives in the direction of God's will and kingdom. The Word is given in love by God the Father, made possible for us through the cross of God the Son, and backed up with the power of God the Holy Spirit. Results are expected. A response is anticipated. God means business! He is a searching, saving God. He was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself! He talks about finding the lost, bringing in the poor, blind and lame, compelling people to come in. But people "must not be forced, tricked, or bribed into doing what they do not wish to do -- even if we are very sure it would be good for them."¹ They must be persuaded by the Gospel to live the faith that is theirs. The Good News is to be "embodied in the lives of those who have received it and brought into dialogue with the lives of men."² For "the church's sermon is the one born in the hearer, and this is the only one taken and delivered in the world."³ Persuasion is indeed "the art of getting the hearer to think the one thing that you want him to think,"⁴ no actually, the one thing that God wants him to think, and do!

¹McGavran, Op. cit., p. 35.

²Howe, Miracle of Dialogue, p. 143.

³Ibid., p. 145

⁴Caemmerer, Op. cit., p. 36.

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APPENDIX A

Pastor's Information Sheet (2 pages)

The Evaluation Sheets and Survey:

Thank you for helping with this evaluative process. After you complete and send back the evaluation sheets and survey, and they are compiled with those of many other pastors, I will send back to you a composite analysis with some conclusions I have drawn from this process. The evaluation and survey instructions are as follows:

EVALUATION:(1) EXPECTATIONS OF THE PREACHING TASK

- a. Ask 10 people in your congregation to name the first three things that come to mind when they evaluate sermons. (e.g., relevant message, meaningful illustrations, Biblical focus, etc.)
- b. You may want to do this in your Bible Class or sharing group and simply have them jot down their 3 points on a piece of paper. No names, please! Then transfer the information onto the sheet labeled "Expectations of the Preaching Task."

(2) SERMON EVALUATION SHEET

- a. This evaluation sheet needs to be reproduced (could be 5½ x 8 size) to make 30 copies, after you sign your name on the bottom to show that you approve of the process in your congregation. (I will be glad to send you 30 copies if you have no access to a copier in your office.)
- b. Ten people need to evaluate your sermon each week for three consecutive weeks. (You could also use mid-week sermons as a part of your "three consecutive weeks.") Five of those ten people need to agree to evaluate all three sermons, while the remaining five need to be selected prior to each service on a random basis. (I had my elders do the selecting. They felt involved in the process, and I never knew who the people were.)
- c. The people are to fill out the sermon evaluation sheet immediately after the service and return it to the elder or usher so designated. (It only takes a minute or two to fill it out!)
- d. After you receive back all 10 of the evaluations, please look through the answers to the two questions. Since you are the only one who actually knows the "central message" of each sermon, only you can judge if each person has understood what it is. I need to know how many understood the message of your sermon. Please clip a piece of paper to the ten evaluation sheets and mark down a ratio, something like: Central Message — 7/10. (That would tell me that seven out of ten have, in your opinion, understood what your central message was about.) Do the same for the second question. (Use your best judgment.)
- e. Use this procedure for all three weeks. Please keep each week together in a unit with a paper clip. When all three weeks are completed, send all the forms, together with the "expectations" sheet, back to me in the envelope provided.

(over please)

(3) BIBLE STUDY ON SERMON EVALUATION

- a. This is a three-part Bible study intended to be used, at your discretion, with the intent of helping your people understand their part in "sharing the responsibility of the preaching task."
- b. The outline is fairly obvious. Much of the content is adapted from a workshop many years ago led by Dr. Caemmerer entitled: "When the People Preach."
- c. I will send you a one-page reflective guide and evaluation of this study immediately after I receive your "sermon evaluation sheets" and "expectations" form (parts 1 and 2). This one-page form will need to be returned to me upon completion of your Bible study.
- d. The Bible study has proven to be very effective in both a Bible Class setting (where dialogue can take place) and a small group setting. It is intentionally open-ended in style, but focused in content.

Please do not hesitate to call me collect if you have any question about this evaluation process. My telephone numbers are 335-3974 (office) and 335-6540 (home).

May your proclaimed Word be persuasive in Christ!

William A. Matzat
November, 1990

APPENDIX B
Bible Study ISERMON EVALUATIONI. Hearing The Word

Introduction: What is preaching? What is the role of the listener?

A. The Preacher Has To Listen First

1. Jesus is our model (John 8:28; John 17:8, 20) and the Holy Spirit is our motivator (John 14:26; John 15:26,27; 1 Corinthians 14:1, 15:1-4).
2. The "Good News" (our crucified and risen Lord) is the message (Luke 24:46-48; 1 Corinthians 2:2)..

B. The Word Comes In Pictures

1. Not only did Jesus use illustrations (Matthew 13:34), He was the primary one for us to see (John 1:14, 29; 20:30, 31).
2. The "Word" came|comes into the same world in which we live: beauty, ugliness; health, sickness; joy, sorrow; life, death.

C. The Word Is From God

1. Preaching is not just "God talk," it is talk from God. (1 Thessalonians 2:13, 14).
2. Preaching isn't merely talk, either; it is God acting among His people (2 Corinthians 5:19, 20), to accomplish His purpose (Ephessians 4:15; 1 Corinthians 1:21).

D. The Word Reaches The Listener

1. There are some who will not hear (Matthew 13:14-18), but when the Word reaches receptive people it will bear fruit (Luke 8:5-15).
2. Those who receive the Word do the Word (Matthew 5:13-16; James 1:22).

E. The Word Is Good News

1. Preaching is God's hot-line to people; the living God is on the other end (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:4).
2. The Word (Gospel) is told over and over because people need it again and again.

APPENDIX C

Bible Study II

SERMON EVALUATIONII. Working The Word

Introduction: Partnership: preacher and hearer. If hearing does not take place, preaching is of no benefit. Fate of Word of God as it reaches various kinds of listeners: Luke 8:11-15.

A. The Formality or the Fountain of Life?

1. Jesus and Woman at the well: John 4:19-26. What was important?
Woman: place of worship. Jesus: inner self and power of Spirit.
2. For many, worship is the obedience to a command of God to make God comfortable with them. For God, it was intended as an act of God's people by which they praise God, acknowledge His grace, express their need for Him, and reach out to replenish His life in them. 2 Corinthians 4:2-4 — "open statement of the truth...the light of the gospel..."
3. It is a part of the malady of our lives (sin) to overlook the gospel in the sermon/worship and focus instead on the form of the sermon/worship.

B. Is It Entertaining Communication or an Encounter With God's Word?

1. Sermon/worship experiences come during the leisure part of the week for most people, in contrast with the daily routine. We don't like to work during leisure time, and therefore, sermons are apt to make an unwanted demand on the listener.
2. Sermons require work: preacher and hearer. Preacher: familiarity/dull; new/misunderstood. Bear down too much/manipulated; comforting/weak. Humor/irreverent; serious/devoid of humor. Hearer: mental labor, reflection, soul-searching, a kind of work not a part of regular routine.
3. In the most engaging form of communication the hearer must see that he/she needs what God offers in the gospel.

C. Information from God or Inspiration

1. People must want to hear the Word of God if preaching is to be of any benefit. Luke 8:26-40 — the Gadarene wanted to follow Jesus but instead was sent back to his people; why? When Jesus reached those people "They were all waiting for him."
2. The sermon needs to be in a worship service and among a group of people attuned to man's need/God's grace. Same Word each week, different life situations for hearers. Hebrews 10:19-24 — keep on talking about gospel, because through Christ we have access to God and stir each other to acts of love.

SERMON EVALUATIONIII. Sharing The Word

Introduction: Preaching means "telling the good news." See what God has done for us through God's Son, Jesus Christ! Preaching is not confined to the pulpit or public address: Philip (Acts 8:35), Paul (Phil. 1:3-5).

A. Preaching as Witness

1. What qualifies people to "preach" and hand on the Good News to one another? Jesus says we are "witnesses" (Luke 24:47).
2. A witness simply tells what he has seen, what has happened to him in Jesus Christ. The Greek word for "witness" is "martyr" (willing to suffer and die for the faith). Implications?
3. Preaching produces witnesses -- people who translate the words of the Word into meaning, so that others can really see an "invisible God."

B. Preaching as Sharing

1. Peter writes: "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." (1 Peter 2:9)
2. Preaching implies a chain-reaction. People are sharing the message -- in worship and in life! If not, then where is the problem? Word? Preacher? People? Culture?

C. Preaching as Persuasion

1. We read about Paul's marvelous discourse on Mars Hill in Athens (Acts 17). Here is an excellent example of persuasion in preaching, worship in life! Read especially vv. 22-34.
2. Who are Paul's audience? How does he present the Gospel? What is the "point of contact" (where listeners are "caught")? How is the persuasive process used effectively?
3. Relate this account to preaching during worship and preaching in everyday situations.