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Homiletical aesthetics: A paradigmatic proposal for a holistic experience of preaching

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Abstract

The article is a proposal for a paradigmatic change in homiletical pedagogy. In North America today, most homiletical training at the seminary or divinity school is either text-driven or know-how-driven (or, at times, topic-driven). Thus, the homiletical training focuses on (1) how to exposit a text for a key topic, (2) how to structure a sermon, (3) how to deliver a message, and (4) how to analyze the text-driven sermon. While admitting the usefulness of this current textual or know-how pedagogy, the article suggests the addition of a holistic-aesthetic component of preaching, which I will later call *numen-participatory* education or a numinous pedagogy of preaching. This proposed pedagogical paradigm has two great advantages that the ecclesial situation today demands: (1) the spiritual formation of the preacher and (2) the holistic-aesthetic and multisensory exposition and experience of the text both by the preacher and the audience.

Keywords

homiletic, preaching, pedagogy, aesthetics, performativity, mysterium

Introduction to the situation

The situation demands something else or something more. In North America today, most preaching education at the seminary or divinity school is text-driven, know-how-driven, or topic-oriented. In other words, the primary homiletical training focuses on how to interpret a text for a good sermon topic, how to structure a sermon, how to deliver or perform a message, and how to analyze the

text-driven sermon. Thus, in a pedagogical sense the strong, if not sole, emphasis is on the “how” and also the “what” of preaching.¹

Let us recall how the typical introduction to preaching course begins, proceeds, and ends. Most likely, the class will begin with discussion on definitions of preaching and the preacher; namely, the theology of preaching. Then, it will proceed to the practice of sermonic exegesis on the given text as the fundamental preparatory step of preaching. Finally, the class will spend the last weeks of the semester on miscellaneous issues like sermon design, illustrations, body performance, gender issues, social concerns, and wedding and funeral homilies. Normally, the students will each preach twice, once in the middle and once toward the end of the course. That is it. In short, the class begins with “theology,” proceeds with discussion on “text,” and ends with quick concerns on “polishing.”

The end result has been quite devastating. Seminary students who embark on drafting their first or second sermons tend to be heavily text-driven, dogma-obsessed, topic-oriented, or orality/aurality-focused in their efforts to produce effective preaching. With few exceptions, they end up finding their sermons boring and irrelevant, highly dogmatic, obsessively entertaining, or too performative to give the audience a solid message. What went wrong? What is still going wrong?

It’s a rhetorical question, since I gave the answer at the beginning. Homiletical training over the past decades has focused exclusively on the textual “what” and the literary and performative “how” of preaching. The sad result is that we have had no time to discuss and act upon the “who” and “why” of preaching in the classroom, which is a, if not the most, fundamental aspect of the preaching activity.

Preaching education has become mere sophisticated textual reverie or technical workshop. What we urgently need now is the (re)discovery of what we have lost, namely the “who” and “why” of preaching, which can lead us again to the holistic or numinous understanding of preaching activity and its training in the classroom.²

I argue for the recovery of the “who” and “why” of preaching in homiletical training or, more specifically, for the implementation of a numen-participatory, holistic-aesthetic pedagogy of preaching in the classroom. This proposed pedagogical paradigm will help preaching students achieve their multifaceted homiletical intentions of exegetical depth and breadth, theological soundness, spiritual profundity, topical attraction, effective communication, high congregational attention, and more. Fundamentally, this recovered paradigm will be beneficial for the very spiritual formation of the preacher.

1. In the recent homiletical discourse, the distinction between the “what” and “how” of preaching, or sermon content and sermon form (including delivery style), is obscured. Sermon content and form are now considered “organically related.” Or as William Willimon says, “form itself is the content.” Thus, whenever I distinguish the two in the article, the distinction is only functional, not substantial. See O. Wesley Allen, *Determining the Form: Structures for Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 1–5; William H. Willimon, “Preaching: Entertainment or Exposition?” *Christian Century* 107, no. 7 (February 28, 1990): 204.

2. For a detailed discussion on the concept of the numinous, see footnotes 17 and 18.

What happened before and after 1971?

In 1971 Fred Craddock published his landmark book, *As One without Authority*, opening and popularizing the era of the New Homiletic, and thus a new era of the “how of preaching.” The key argument of the book was an urgent call to shift from the deductive way of preaching to the inductive way. Craddock pointed out three main reasons for this change. First, the listeners of the sermon no longer appreciate the authoritative figure at the pulpit who alone purportedly knows and delivers the truth. Second, the inductive way of preaching is good for utilizing images and stories that can help the preacher easily identify with the lives of listeners. Third, inductive preaching invites the listener’s participation in the sermon narrative. In sum, Craddock was seeking a homiletical strategy that could sincerely reflect this cultural turn to the non-authoritative pulpit and to democratized sermon hearing. Immediately following this call for inductive or narrative were Eugene Lowry’s still all-time bestseller, *The Homiletical Plot* (1980), Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles Rice’s *Preaching the Story* (1980), Henry H. Mitchell’s *The Recovery of Preaching* (1977), and David Buttrick’s *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (1987). In a strong alliance with Craddock, their main focus was on the best inductive or narrative strategy for sermon composition and delivery, and thus a strong emphasis on the matter of “how.” Not that there had been no concern for the “how” of preaching before Craddock. There had been, though it was not strictly inductive- or narrative-oriented; just to name a few, H. Grady Davis’s *Design for Preaching* (1958), John A. Broadus’s *On the Preparation of Sermons* (1944), Charles R. Brown’s *The Art of Preaching* (1922), and Ozora S. Davis’s *Principles of Preaching: A Textbook Based on The Inductive Method, for Class Use and Private Study* (1924; 2010 newly released). In fact, scholars of the New Homiletic have shown in one way or another their academic debt to these pre-1971 figures. It was Craddock, however, who truly broke the homiletical convention of deductive preaching and introduced a listener-oriented, induction-based how of preaching, which gained much popularity both in the pulpit and in academia. Thus, it was natural that for the last half century we have seen an enormous number of how-to-preach publications on the market, which have gradually gone beyond the simple narrative or inductive approach. A few examples include Thomas G. Long’s *Preaching and Literary Forms of the Bible* (1988, biblical literary approach), Lucy A. Rose’s *Sharing the Word* (1997, collaborative approach), Paul Scott Wilson’s *Four Pages of Preaching* (filmic-literary approach), and Jana Childers’s *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre* (1998, communicative and performative approach). All these publications discuss effective hows of preaching from the different approaches listed above. The “what” of preaching is only the second matter or step that follows the first “more important” matter.

The dominant focus on the “how” of preaching, however, has not quenched entirely the ever-burning zeal for the “what” of preaching in the homiletical pedagogy, that is, the mostly text-driven preaching education. John R. Brokhoff’s *As One with Authority* (1989), the predecessor of Fred Craddock at Emory University,

is a fine example. He does not appreciate “overhearing the gospel” in the midst of illustrative stories or the inductive flow of the sermon, but wants to hear the straightforward, overwhelming gospel. At first, he might appear to suggest another way or how of preaching, but his real focus stays on the carefully explicated text, that is, the core what of the sermon. In his poignant article in *Christian Century* in 1990, “Preaching: Entertainment or Exposition?” William H. Willimon also deplores the loss of the serious “what” of preaching in the current obsession of narrative at the pulpit. He says that “so-called narrative homiletics, preaching as story and inductive preaching,” has only entertained and amused people, taking on “the same rhetorical characteristics of a TV commercial.” On the contrary, he continues, the expository sermon, “whether in print or pulpit, makes demands on body and mind . . . We must work to hear exposition and devote ourselves to tracking the speaker’s sequence of thought.”³ In 1997 Charles Campbell threw a fatal punch to the “how paradigm” of preaching when he published *Preaching Jesus* (2006). For Campbell, the New Homiletic’s narrative concerns or any related discussion on sermon forms only distract the preacher’s focus on the text itself, that is, the key what of the sermonic message. Instead, he urges us to remain attentive to “the particular story of Jesus in the gospel, and in the fullest sense, the story of God in the entire Bible.”⁴ Adding our own stories to the text or reshaping the biblical stories into our own narrative mold is either redundant or a distortion of the original narrative of the Bible. Finally, Campbell throws a sarcastic jab that the New Homiletic’s preaching since Craddock, the ambition of which was to gain the hearers’ attention to the Christian message, has only witnessed the decline of main-line church membership. He feels that the pulpit has lost its dynamic and real attraction because of the loss of the genuine “what” of preaching.⁵

Since 1971, the homiletical foci of “how” and “what” have dominated both the preaching field and classroom. Students expect to learn “how” to preach “what” in a rather technical sense. In reality, however, the instructor and the students tend to place more emphasis on “how” because “what” is, they think, much too personal or subjective to be taught. The unfortunate result of the whole situation is that the classroom has become nothing more than a homiletical workshop where fancy techniques of preaching are introduced and learned. Thus, the greatest loss has been the holistic-aesthetic ground of preaching or the holistic-aesthetic formation of the preacher, namely, the fundamental “why” and “who” of preaching. Here we need to avoid a misunderstanding that the homiletical teaching of “how” and “what” itself is wrong, or the two foci do not contribute to the good learning of preaching or spiritual formation of the preacher. That is not true at all. Rather, my argument is that the biased or text-driven mono-dimensional focus of “how” and “what” has prevented the holistic-aesthetic and multidimensional education of

3. Willimon, “Preaching,” 204.

4. Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 202.

5. *Ibid.*, xi–xii.

preaching. The classroom is now full of voices for homiletical technicality alone. We can do better, and the homiletical situation in and out of the classroom demands it.

The urgency felt in the field

The urgent need for a pedagogical paradigmatic shift, from “how” and “what” to “why” and “who,” is felt strongly both in the current homiletical literature and the ministerial field. To begin, Thomas Long in one of his 21st-century publications, *From Memory to Hope* (2009), recognizes the rapidly fading effect of the half-century-old “how” of preaching since Craddock, namely, narrative preaching.⁶ “What used to bring hearers to the edge of their pews now often elicits a yawn or a bewildered look.”⁷ He observes that in the place of the failing old “how” of preaching and in the hope of reviving preaching performance, recently “many pastors kicked into high experimental gear,” infusing their sermons with new technologies (e.g., screens, video clips, 3D holographic projection), new approaches (e.g., breakout discussion groups mid-sermon and key points and outlines of the sermon laid out in the bulletin), new forms of delivery (e.g., preaching while wandering around the worship space like an Odysseus), and even new wardrobes (e.g., sweaters, jeans, and Hawaiian shirts instead of robes, dark suits, and albs).⁸ For Long, these new “hows,” though beneficial to some extent, do not address the fundamental challenges of the pulpit today, such as lack of theological depth, disappearance of ethical discernment, loss of congregationality or communality, weakening of faith-forming dynamics, blurring of eschatological vision, and evaporation of the presence of God in human history.⁹ In agreement with Long, Paul Scott Wilson expresses similar concerns when he summarizes “8 Keys to Faithful Preaching” in his article in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*.¹⁰ Not a single one of those eight keys is about how to preach well, but are about the fundamental characteristics of good preaching. As good as both of the established voices sound in their analysis of the current challenges, their proposed resolutions for it look quite disappointing. Long suggests a revised or “chastened form of narrative preaching as essential to the proclamation of the gospel” today, while Wilson urges good “sermon composition and delivery” (the characteristics of which he does not specify in the essay).¹¹ Once again, they seem to think that

6. Thomas G. Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

7. *Ibid.*, xiii.

8. *Ibid.*, xiv.

9. *Ibid.*, 18–26.

10. Paul Scott Wilson, “Marks of Faithful Preaching Practice,” in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy*, ed. Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 190.

11. Long, *From Memory*, xv.

teaching good “hows” in the preaching class will help to resolve the current challenges of preaching, yet this does not seem to match at all for what they passionately argue.

Another voice, this time presenting a critique of the heavy homiletical focus on the “what” of preaching, comes from the congregational side. In 1999 Ronald J. Allen and others, funded by Lilly Endowment, performed remarkable field research in preaching, for which they interviewed 260 laypeople in 28 African American and Caucasian congregations. Their collaborative work produced four series books, *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* being the first among them.¹² They listened to and analyzed what the interviewed people thought about their own preachers, standards for good sermons, expectations for preaching performance, listening habits or obstacles, issues and subjects they wanted to hear, any suggestions for better preaching, and so on. Among the many discoveries from the research, one thing really surprised the project team. Fully 90% of the interviewees, “often with considerable energy,” mentioned the preacher’s moral and ethical integrity as the deciding factor regarding whether or not they would trust and live out what the preacher says.¹³ Moreover, they would become more attentive during the preaching moment if and when they realized that their preachers “walk the walk,” rather than just “talk the talk.”¹⁴ This, of course, does not really “cancel out the claims of the traditional doctrine *ex opera operum*. That is, the efficacy of preaching, as with the sacraments, is not finally dependent on the character of the preacher,” as the editorial team acknowledges.¹⁵ Also, their research is not saying that the “how” and “what” of preaching is of less importance these days. Still, the critical voice from the pew indirectly yet poignantly demonstrates a grave complaint about what has gone wrong with the heavy focus on the how and what of preaching in the homiletical classroom. People have increasing distrust in the “sacred” figure of the preacher who only knows what to and how to preach but not how to live out what is preached.

All the literature implicitly or explicitly suggests that homiletic education with a focus on how and what has failed to prompt the (student) preachers to think seriously about who really they are (or should be) as the preacher and as the model figure of the congregational life, and why they are to preach after their encounter with and in the presence of the divine—in short, such education has overlooked the matter of the formation of the preacher. Therefore, now is the time to push for a pedagogical paradigm shift in the preaching classroom for the sake of both the preacher and the faithful hearers of preaching. Accordingly, below I propose such an educational shift from the how and what of preaching to the who and why of preaching, or in other terms, a shift from text-driven,

12. John S. McClure et al., *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2004).

13. *Ibid.*, 136.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 191.

know-how-obsessed pedagogy to holistic, aesthetic, and numen-participatory pedagogy that can initiate the “who and why formation” of the preacher.

A proposal

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!” (Isa 6:1–8, NRSV)

In the preaching classroom today, students are asked to “go” to the text, extract the main idea, and figure out a good strategy for sermon structure and delivery. This is a conventional text-driven, know-how-oriented education of preaching, that is, mono-dimensional, topic-oriented, and heavily technical. In contrast, based on the biblical text above, I suggest a different homiletic pedagogy. In this pedagogy, the text itself comes to the students, gets numinously experienced in the life of the preacher, and eventually the sermon content and delivery style emerges as the preacher holistically responds to the text. The expected results of this latter approach are the provision of the reasons for preaching activity (i.e., the “why” of preaching) and the spiritual formation of the preacher (i.e., “who”). I name this latter educational approach in preaching a holistic-aesthetic or numen-participatory pedagogical paradigm.

Reread the biblical passage above where the would-be-preachers experience the Word of God coming to them, which is so overwhelming for them, yet at the same time allows them to actively respond to and participate in what is mysteriously happening. Eventually, their holistic-aesthetic experiences of the divine vision provides the reason why he is to preach and bestow the fundamental identity of the preacher, namely, who who they are as preachers. Each significant component of the above Word event (i.e., the Word coming to the preacher, the holistic-aesthetic experience of the Word, and the participation in the Word) deserves further elaboration in close relation to the development of the envisioned holistic-aesthetic and *numen-participator* pedagogy of preaching.

The word coming to the preacher

Unlike our preaching students today who “go” to the text for preaching preparation, the prophetic preacher in the above passage confronts the Word of God coming to him. When we “go” to the text, inevitably the text becomes the object of serious human investigation. Moreover, when we “go,” we tend to read the “text” for the sake of intellectual inquiry, but not the living Word given for the sake of its holistic experience. Yet, when the Word of God comes to us, the very reverse occurs. We humble ourselves before the Word and become ready to listen. Further, we might feel undeserving of *mysterium tremendum* of the Word, to borrow Rudolf Otto’s terminology, coming deeply into the midst of our lives.¹⁶ The text above depicts precisely this and its ramifications in colorful language. For Isaiah the mysterious vision happens or comes to him; it grasps his entire existence in a flash, and he is so awestruck that he cannot but spit out, “Woe is me!” He subsequently listens to the Voice of God that commissions him as the preacher and gives the word (or in today’s language, the content) that he is to proclaim (vv. 7–13). In sum, in the tremendous experience of *numen*,¹⁷ he is commissioned to preach and has bestowed on him the detailed message for his upcoming preaching ministry.

I propose that preaching education should emulate what happens in the magnificent biblical scene above. As a summary, three things happen in the passage; (1) the Word of the Lord initially comes to and sums up the preacher’s entire existence; (2) the faithful one is commissioned as the preacher; and (3) the preacher’s mouth is filled with the living Word of God, namely, the content of the sermon. These three things are another designation of the why, who, and what (and how) of preaching. The Word experience itself is the reason why a person is authorized and encouraged to testify, while the explicit commissioning defines the identity of the preacher. Last but not least, God fills the mouth of the preacher with the divine Word, that is, what to preach and basic instruction on how to preach. This threefold Word experience is a holistic exposure to and embodiment of the Word in the preacher’s life. Since the experience is holistic, all four aspects of the human preacher—mind

16. For Otto, *mysterium tremendum* refers to the “determinate affective state” of human mind or feeling gripped or stirred by that which is a mystery inexpressible and above all creatures. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford, 1958), 12–40.

17. Otto adopts the Latin term *numen* in order to designate the very primal concept of the holy. He thinks that the current religious use of the holy is much imbued with the moral or ethical good. That is, when people think of the concept of something holy, they automatically regard the thing as good. This whole situation has confined the concept of holy to the rational sphere. Yet Otto argues that the primal concept of holy or *numen* cannot and should not be reduced to something other than itself by moralization or rationalization. It (should) speak(s) for itself. Otto, *The Idea*, 5–7. In full agreement with Otto, I use the *numen* concept to speak of the prophet’s experience of the Lord or God. It was his raw or primal experiences of God or the Holy, with moral and ethical concern for world affairs following later. I want to bring readers to that dramatic biblical scene of the raw experience of the Holy, temporarily leaving behind any moral or ethical concerns.

(heart), reason (intellect), soul (spirit), and body (sense)—are imbued with the living Word such that the whole person of the preacher is ready to deliver the good news.

Thus, for the preaching class, I suggest that students not “go” to the text for intellectual investigation as the first main step of preaching preparation, but rather that they first submerge themselves in the *mysterium tremendum* of the Word, so that they may experience what the living Word says and how it feels. In other words, we need to stop having students poke around and “speak about” the “text,” and instead have them encounter the Word as it is and let it speak to them first, meaning to all aspects of their humanity. This is truly a holistic homiletical approach for listening to and absorbing what the text really says, performs, and transforms for the sake of the sermon preparation.

The holistic-aesthetic experience

For Otto, art is a wonderful medium through which the human experience of the numinous can be made possible and is also expressed.¹⁸ Art not only mediates the transcendent sphere into fundamental human existence in an ontological sense, but also renders the experience of the divine seeable, hearable, touchable, “tastable,” and even “smellable” in this physical world.¹⁹ Yet, according to Dostoyevsky, art is not a simple medium or static, lifeless conduit for the divine reality. Art itself and the transcendent beauty in it have the power to save the world as an active transformative energy.²⁰ J. W. De Gruchy, in strong agreement with Dostoyevsky, further claims that truth and goodness alone are not sufficient “to convince and therefore to save,” but that the aesthetical rendering of truth and goodness is required for the full salvific action of the divine.²¹

The biblical text that we are considering is full of things that are aesthetically seeable, hearable, touchable, tastable, and smellable. Isaiah not only sees the Lord sitting on the throne and the seraphs flying, he also hears their thundering voices descending on the earth. Further, he feels the shaking of the ground, smells the holy smoke, and gets the hot touch of the live coal on his lips by the seraph. The whole scene is so magnificent, aesthetic, and mysterious that Isaiah cannot but exclaim, “Woe is me!” wrapped in unspeakable *tremendum*. Obviously, the Voice of the

18. Otto devises the term “numinous” in order to name a particular state of the mind experiencing *numen*. The numinous state or status of the mind cannot be taught or learned; “it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes of the spirit must be awakened.” The *mysterium tremendum* is the fundamental nature and manifestation of being numinous, especially in terms of “feeling.” *Ibid.*, 7, 11–12.; *Ibid.*, 65–71.

19. “Tastable” and “smellable” are of course not correct English. Nevertheless, I opt to use the two forms of incorrect English as they are since they seem to show the very meanings I want to express.

20. See Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (London: William Heinemann, 1968), 103.

21. J. W. De Gruchy, “Holy Beauty: A Reformed Perspective on Aesthetics within a World of Ugly Injustice,” in *Reformed Theology for the Third Christian Millennium*, ed. B. A. Gerrish (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 15.

Lord does not simply speak to Isaiah through the hearing capacity alone, but appears in such enormous aesthetic beauty and awe that the whole person of Isaiah—mind, reason, soul, and body—experiences it. In the given passage, the salvific prophecy, which is nothing but God’s truth and goodness for the sake of humanity, is magnified, intensified, and revealed to humans by aesthetic rendering of the prophecy. It is, De Gruchy would argue, as if the Word of the Lord has less impact without the aesthetic beauty and vivid artistic images accompanied and actually experienced.

I propose that preaching education be a time and place where the students are exposed to the holistic-aesthetic experience—the very thing described above. Our preaching education today is highly obsessed with studying textual truths, meta-physical goodness, and entertaining topics. In the passage above, however, God does not train the would-be-preacher in the way we do. God invites the trainee into the holistic-aesthetic experience of the Word vividly demonstrated by celestial beauty, splendor, and awe. Further, God’s trainee participates in that aesthetic beauty by seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and even tasting it. In that way, the future preacher of YHWH both wholeheartedly and physically embodies the awe, power, and beauty of the Word for the upcoming preaching activity that is to happen soon for the sake of the doomed world and the people in it. Let preaching students so experience, enjoy, and participate in the same holistic-aesthetic event of the Word of God that their whole persons are imbued with the saving Word of God wrapped in the transcendent beauty and its transformative energy. Let their whole beings become soaked in the *mysterium tremendum* of the Lord.

How do we do this in a practical sense in the preaching classroom? Briefly, I suggest two things. First, do away with all the preaching textbooks and exegetical study tools (and exegetical practice as well) for the first four weeks of the class period. The textbooks and exegesis tools often offer the basic homiletical scheme of “what” and “how.” Yet, “what” or “how” should not be the first learning experience in class. So, let go of them.²² Then second, devise and introduce to students a

22. An important caveat: Setting aside conventional or “formal” exegetical tools certainly does not mean that the conventional approach to the text is no longer of any use or significance in sermon preparation. That approach has a right and authority in itself. That is why, as I suggest at the end of the section, after four weeks or so of aesthetic-holistic encountering of the text the conventional exegetical process should follow. Also, I strongly advocate, as many seminaries do, that the preaching class has prerequisites at least in two areas, primarily an introduction to biblical studies and an introduction to theological studies, or New Testament 101 and Theology 101. Through these courses, students first obtain the grounding knowledge of biblical criticism and theological reasoning that they are expected to bring to the preaching classroom, specifically to their numinous-artistic embodiment of the Word. That biblical and theological foundation will prevent the students from beginning with an artistic exegesis of the text stemming from a misguided “anything goes” interpretive attitude or so-called anarchical subjectivism, something that critics of reader-response criticism critique about the similar reader/performer-initiated interpretative methodology. See Stephen R. Haynes and Steven L. McKenzie, *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 230–52, and Eryl W. Davies, *Biblical Criticism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), 11–35.

set of creative, artistic, and performative hermeneutical approaches to the biblical text, by the utilization of which all the holistic-aesthetic experience of the text or beyond-textual *mysterium tremendum* is possible.²³ The sole pedagogical purpose of this aesthetic-performative activity is to have the students not study the text simply rationalistically, but encounter it—enjoy, feel, see, hear, touch, speak, and taste the Word which is something profoundly mysterious beyond the text. The set of creative activities can include activities such as the following:

- Let students compose a song on the given text.
- Let students draw a picture from their imagination of the text.
- Let students do graffiti on the street walls based on the text.
- Let students film a short movie clip based on the text.
- Let students have a conversation about the text with people on the street.
- Let students create a magic show based on the text.
- Let students choreograph a dance on the text.
- Let students compose a poem on the text.
- Let students find a song and conduct a choir on the text.
- Let students literally perform or practice what the text literally states.
- Let students make a costume (e.g., a shoe, a weapon, a tool, etc.) for the biblical scene.
- Let students perform a short play based on the text.
- Let students perform stand-up comedy on the text.
- Let students draw a four-window comic about the text.
- Let students bake bread or prepare a meal based on the text.
- Let students retell the same story from a very different narrative or character's perspective.

How powerful, creative, holistic, aesthetic, awe-filled, and enjoyable would the classroom be with all these artistic activities performed and experienced by a variety of students, each of whom would bring a different talent and hermeneutical background? Given the freedom to do so, the students themselves will bring their own unimagined, unexpected, yet profoundly creative and aesthetic demonstration of the text to class.

I hope that the other ten weeks or so of the preaching period would be also structured and filled with a strong emphasis on the holistic aesthetic experience of the text and the resulting preaching performance. Such an emphasis does not negate at all the significance and seriousness of careful exegetical study on the text for preaching. I suggest that conventional exegetical study on the text begin immediately after the *mysterium* encounter with the text. No doubt the holistic

23. Notice that I use the term “hermeneutical,” not “interpretive.” For the students are not pursuing a merely rational explanation of the text, as the term “interpretive” often denotes, but are performing or executing their various *perspectives* on the text, the process of which is genuinely more hermeneutical.

experience of the text will enhance the later formal exegetical task with fresh and creative insights.

The numen-participatory experience

As discussed, the Word of the Lord comes to the preacher in great awe, mystery, and wonder, expressed in a holistic-aesthetic demonstration. Then, there are the preachers themselves participating in the mysterious Word event of the Lord or the unfathomable *numen*. The participation is twofold, rendering a person awe-struck and enabling active involvement in what God plans to do in executing the Word in the real life of human history. As exemplified in the passage, Isaiah's immediate response to the magnificent Voice of God is, "Woe to me. I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips," which presents Isaiah humbled by the *numen* of God. This is his initial chastened participation in the glory of God. Yet, upon the cleansing of his lips or all his sins by the symbolic action, he is ready to actively and willingly participate in the work of God, as his words show: "Here am I; send me!"

One thing that really catches our attention in this call narrative of the preacher is that the called preacher comes to participate in all three aspects of the logos, ethos, and pathos of the divine Word revealed. In other words, she not only receives the Word of God or the detailed instruction for upcoming proclamation (logos), but also herself feels and embodies the holy nature (ethos) and "emotions of God" (pathos).²⁴ In the intrinsic triune nature, God is the God of love, care, justice, and forgiveness. Likewise, the preacher in the passage also pledges to become a prophetic figure of love, care, grace, justice, and forgiveness and live that way. The God whom Isaiah experiences is also the God with emotions of anger (over injustice), jealousy (over idolatry), sadness (over human calamities), and happiness (over the flourishing of humanity). Likewise, the preacher is to demonstrate anger, jealousy, sadness, or happiness, depending on each occasion. In sum, the summoned preacher participates in all possible aspects of God's nature and emotions to faithfully deliver what God wants him or her to speak.

24. This is a tricky theological term that has stayed on the debate table throughout church history, even from ancient times. Does God really have emotions or feel something? Or more academically speaking, is God impassible or impassioned? Different theological trends and various theologians have answered the questions showing either their pros or cons to the divine impassibility, while some others try to stand between the two. Acknowledging the ongoing debate on the topic, I still opt for the "emotions of God" mainly because in the biblical scenes we are considering the prophets seem (eventually) to participate in the pathos of God or concerns and emotions of God over human affairs. The prophets do not just decide to carry out the ministry plan of God based on their intellectual or cognitive understanding of it. Rather, they do so because they "read" and partake of the will, intention, and pathos of God. For detailed discussion on this subject of divine impassibility, see Joseph M. Hallman, *The Descent of God: Divine Suffering in History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); James Keating and Thomas Joseph White (eds.), *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009); and Jeff B. Pool, *God's Wounds: Hermeneutic of the Christian Symbol of Divine Suffering* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009).

Ultimately, therefore, I recommend that our preaching education also be structured as a time and place where the students are kindly yet solemnly challenged to participate in the continued nature of God, namely, of care, love, forgiveness, and justice. Also, they are to be invited to join in a variety of emotions of God as shown dramatically in Scripture. Oftentimes, especially in mainline seminaries, we teach students to study hard the logos of God alone, dismissing, if not discarding, the other two. Yet, as the *Listening to Listeners* project reveals, most fine preaching will have all three “settings” of logos, ethos, and pathos in it for the better communication of the sermon and spiritual growth of the listeners.²⁵ Thus, it seems to be our obligation to create pedagogical space where our preaching students joyfully learn to feel, embody, and actually perform not only the central message of the text (the logos), but also the ethos and pathos of the impassioned God communicated through the text. By this threefold learning process, the student preacher will learn the meaning of keeping a good ethical stance (the ethos) as the preacher and of the preacher’s ever-burning compassion for suffering humanity (the pathos). This must be a genuine type of holistic homiletical education for the whole person of the preacher, which is a bona fide spiritual formation of the preacher, namely, the “who.” Undoubtedly the Christian church today, as it has always done, eagerly looks for this genuine “who,” persons who can absorb, proclaim, and perform the living Word, holiness, and heart of God on the street as well as from the pulpit.

Conclusion

The entire argument above seeks the recovery of the *mysterium tremendum* in the preaching classroom, and aims for the same recovery in the spiritual formation of the preaching student. For decades, preaching education has failed to perform the appropriate spiritual formation of the preacher, and to provide a holistic, multi-sensory, and aesthetic experience of Scripture, in the midst of its heavy focus on the “how” and text-driven “what” of preaching. Thus, I find now is the time for an urgent return to the more fundamental matters of the “who” and “why” of preaching, before it is too late. This is indeed a call for return or recovery because homiletical history shows that an emphasis on these matters has always existed, though it has become severely weakened in times like today.

Two more cautionary words before I conclude: First, I do not intend to imply that preaching education on how and what are secondary, inferior, and thus subordinate to the matters of why and who. They are equally important. My only intention is to point out the severe loss of the latter and seek for their recovery in preaching pedagogy. Second, I have only suggested a paradigmatic shift, not a complete blueprint for a new preaching curriculum. Thus, at the end some might

25. McClure et al., *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2004), 141–47. For more detailed discussion on the same subject, see the sequel, Ronald J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship, Content, Feeling* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2004).

feel puzzled about what a real preaching classroom would look like if it were based on this recovered paradigm. I am happy to cause such questioning because I believe that puzzlement, confusion, and chaos will birth creativity and new discovery. Thus, I close in the positive anticipation of that new creativity and discovery in the homiletical education for the sake of today's preaching students.

Author biography

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