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Article

# Picasso for Preaching: The Demand and Possibility of a Cubist Homiletic

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to propose a cubist homiletic based on the Picasso-originated art movement known as cubism. To that end, I explore the twofold question: What is cubist preaching, and why do we need it today? It is a critical inquiry into a theology and methodology of cubist preaching and its contextual rationale. In particular, I adopt cubism's artistic-philosophical routine of transcendental deconstruction and multi-perspectival reconstruction as the key hermeneutical and literary methodology for cubist preaching. This cubist way of preaching ultimately aims for the listener to encounter the Sacred in what I call an ubi-ductive way—a neologism made by conjoining the two terms, ubiquitous and -ductive, beyond what is possible through conventional inductive and deductive preaching.

**Keywords:** cubism; Picasso; preaching; homiletic; deconstruction; multiperspectival; ubi-ductive

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## 1. Prelude to Cubism and Preaching

One of persistent tendencies in current preaching practice, if not a problem, is its strife for rationalistic or literary completeness of the sermon, as Ronald Allen has realized.<sup>1</sup> This is quite evident whether the sermon is delivered in the inductive or deductive way.<sup>2</sup> Each sermon attempts to represent itself as wholly complete with a strict structure, a key message, and an underlying logic. The result is the *well-calculated* or “perfectly controlled” sermon for a desired outcome. More often than not, this rationalistic practice of preaching encloses the sermon within its own world rather than rendering it open-ended or fluid, which I think is more appropriate to convey the ultimate or ultimately unfathomable transcendental wisdom or truth. While acknowledging the strong merits of current preaching practice (see footnote 1 for many different literary patterns of the sermon), this article proposes a cubist homiletic as an alternative pattern or a third way of sermonic communication. It accepts the sermon's wide open-endedness and even “incompleteness” as a finest reflection of the ongoing and surprising revelation of the Divine.

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<sup>1</sup> For Ronald Allen, this rationalistic tendency begins with the problem of the conventional homiletic interpretation of the text, which is the springboard for the sermon construction in most cases. He states that “much traditional exegesis is one dimensional. It focuses on the rational element in the text and attempts to answer questions like ‘What did this text mean in its ancient context?’ Even synchronic exegesis tends to be highly analytical and to discuss the text as if it were an inert object of research.” For Allen, “a major purpose of exegesis” is “to let us enter the world of the text on its own terms.” Allen (2009), *Contemporary Biblical Interpretation*, 108. Later in this chapter, cubist hermeneutic is introduced as one of the ways of entering the world of the text on its own terms, from which cubist preaching arises, a preaching form that allows more open-endedness and meaningful literary incompleteness.

<sup>2</sup> In the modern and postmodern homiletics, these two—inductive and deductive—seem to be the two overarching methodological categories that encompass most of available sermon forms. See the excellent survey of current sermon forms or patterns studied in Ronald Allen ed., *Patterns of Preaching: A Sermon Sampler* (Allen 2006), O. Wesley Allen, *Determining the Form: Structures for Preaching* (Allen 2008), and Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Rose 1997). A major denominator that most, if not all, of sermon forms studied in these sources share is the agreement on the literary structural coherency or completeness of the sermon with one central message.

One may wonder what cubism and preaching could possibly have in common for us to consider a cubist homiletic.<sup>3</sup> The question sounds reasonable enough, for there seems to be no apparent relation between the two different fields of (1) the art of painting;<sup>4</sup> and (2) the Word of God embodied and proclaimed, namely preaching. Contrary to that immediate intuitive response, the two fields actually have much in common, and this commonality can help preaching to renew itself through the cubist perspective.

Their first commonality is in the domain of (constructive) theology. Clearly, cubism itself is neither a stream of theology nor does it explicitly discuss any form of theology in its artistic productions. However, as discussed below, cubism as spiritual art conveys theological riches, which can be a useful dialogical partner in preaching practice.<sup>5</sup>

The second commonality is the communicative nature of both cubism and preaching. Cubism, like preaching, formulates its own message and communicates it, particularly, in the sense of transcendental deconstruction and multi-perspectival communication. This unique cubist way of communication has a strong potential to illuminate how preaching can be more meaningful and effective in its message making and communication.

Another general commonality is the artistic or aesthetic dimension of cubism and preaching. Cubism is an art form, obviously, and preaching, in recent decades, has earned the esteemed epithet *the art of preaching* as its phenomenological manifesto—meant either figuratively or literally.<sup>6</sup>

Exploring the first two commonalities in particular will help achieve the purpose of this article: the proposal of a cubist homiletic. In so doing, I will define such cubist preaching as *the generative act of an aesthetic matrix of ultimate spiritual meanings via the dual, open-ended sermonic process of transcendental deconstruction and multi-perspectival reconstruction*.

I begin with a brief introduction to cubism.

## 2. What Is Cubism?

Cubism is an artistic product of the early twentieth-century's shifting philosophical thoughts and its resulting aesthetic innovations.<sup>7</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, Paris, then one of the

<sup>3</sup> "Guernica," one of the most representative cubist works by Picasso, can be seen at <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/guernica> (accessed 1 on December 2019). Paul Tillich once called the art work "a most Protestant painting." Paul Tillich (1957), "Protestantism and the Contemporary Style in the Visual Arts," *The Christian Scholar*, vol. 40, no. 4 (Dec. 1957), p. 307.

<sup>4</sup> Admittedly, cubism represents more than an art movement in painting alone. Architecture, poetry, literature, music, dance, etc. also absorbed and contributed to the cubist movement. Yet cubism did begin with painting, and painting is still considered to have initiated the movement, Picasso and Braque being the earliest cubist painters. Note that this article focuses on analytic cubism, rather than on synthetic cubism, the latter being the further development of the former years, which included collage and *papier collé*. For more discussion on the analytic and synthetic, see Paul Waldo Schwartz, *Cubism* (Schwartz 1971), pp. 9–11.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the spiritual or theological nature of arts in general, Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner contends that "theology cannot be complete until it appropriates these arts as an integral moment of itself and its own life, until arts become an intrinsic moment of theology itself." Karl Rahner, "Theology and the Arts" in *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*, ed. Gesa Elsbeth Theissen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, Theissen 2005, p. 218). We will see later that cubism, as one of the most significant artistic movements of the twentieth century and beyond, is no exception in this integral relationship between arts and theology.

<sup>6</sup> Many homileticians agree with and promote this aesthetic nature of preaching in their influential publications. They include: Jana Childers, *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre* (Childers 1998); Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit, *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life* (Childers and Schmit 2008); Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Lowry 2000); Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Mitchell 1990); Olin P. Moyd, *The Sacred Art: Preaching & Theology in the African American Tradition* (Moyd 1995); Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Tisdale 1997); and Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon* (Troeger 1990). This last commonality is indeed the very ground upon which my article builds. Yet, due to the given universal perception of preaching amongst homileticians at least, I will not devote much attention this third commonality here, but simply assume it.

<sup>7</sup> Since the early twentieth century, Cubism has engendered, or at least contributed to, almost every single modern art movement. Futurism, suprematism, Dadaism, De Stijl, surrealism, modern architecture, etc., all owe their initial development to cubism in spite of the latter's relatively short life span (1907–1925). John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso: Volume 2, The Painter of Modern Life, 1907–1917* (Richardson 1996), p. 9. Art historians and critics do not dispute this statement. See Neil Cox's art movement chart that traces cubism's influence on most of the twentieth-century art movements. Neil Cox, *Cubism* (Cox 2000),

most influential centers in the Western thought, considered Cartesian philosophy and its aesthetics obsolete (or boring). Cartesian philosophy was an attempt to attain objective-rationalistic knowledge of the world by a subject who has successfully detached her- or himself from the surrounding material or affective environment. This detached subject is also the disembodied subject because, in order to attain purely objective and complete knowledge of the observed, the subject (or the *res cogitans*) must overcome one's own body, which is attached to the external world (or the *res extransa*).<sup>8</sup> This bodiless and rationalistic subject tends to observe and analyze the *res extransa* from a distance through objective-scientific and logical methodologies.

Up until the twentieth century—from the pre-Cartesian Renaissance to post-Impressionism— aesthetics of the day, especially the art of painting, had absorbed and applied this Cartesian epistemology in its practice. Thus, most paintings were produced with scientific precision, as if painters were photographing their subjects exactly as they were, their eyes being mere detecting lens or providing a single inspection perspective. Thus, “art was judged by its ability to objectively, accurately, and realistically depict [the observed].”<sup>9</sup> In these artworks, therefore, time and space are fixed. Each artwork represents a scene or object that happens to exist only in a *certain time and space* that is scientifically observable and measurable. Thus, creating an art piece in which the sense of time is overlapped—that is, where past, present, and future, exist simultaneously—is not only undesirable but impossible in a Cartesian framework. Only exact representational art is acceptable.

At the beginning of the twentieth century there appeared a new movement to contest Cartesian aesthetics: phenomenological aesthetics, which insisted that it was not possible to detach the subject from the rest of the world. Its adherents insisted that a subject had to be involved in its environment. As Heidegger states, human subjects can never be merely disinterested spectators of the world. They are always the ones who act and invest in it.<sup>10</sup> Thus, lived holistic experience of the world or the external object claims priority over distanced rationalistic-scientific observance of it. Accordingly, multi-perspectival knowledge is preferred over that of a single fixed perspective because now human eyes are not considered mere analytic lenses examining a neutral world, but lively interpreters of the ever-changing multivalent world. In this sense, time and space is considered to be a free flux, not firmly fixed, in the process of knowledge creation. The present moment in which the subject beholds the object suddenly falls into the past moment, and opens up the possibility of the immediate future. Additionally, the space where the subject is involved in the object goes through constant changes as the

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p. 389. In this sense, cubism still lives through and dictates many art styles of the twenty-first century that are progenies of the modern art innovations recounted above. This indicates that postmodern or modernist people's lives are, by and large, being influenced by cubist thinking imbedded in most contemporary art forms. Thus, it is no wonder that many museums and art galleries around the world still display the works of Picasso and Braque—the originators of Cubism—almost every season as a source of continued artistic inspiration. Edward F. Fry sees 1907–1914 as the period of Cubism's seminal development and 1914–1925 as a further development of cubism, yet without that latter period showing any real innovation or renovation. Edward F. Fry, *Cubism* (Fry 1966), p. 11. Douglas Cooper shares almost the same periodization in his *The Cubist Epoch*. He sees 1906–1908 as the era of “early cubism” when Picasso and Braque were inventing the cubist way of painting and 1909–1914 as the era of “high cubism” when Juan Gris became prominent. Finally, Cooper designates 1914–1921 as the era of “late cubism” or the last phase of cubism. Douglas Cooper, *The Cubist Epoch* (Cooper 1971).

<sup>8</sup> Read the following, especially the last sentence, from René Descartes himself in *Discours de la méthode*, in *Oeuvres De Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Descartes 1996), vol. 6, p. 33: “Next, I examined attentively what I was. I saw that while I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world and no place for me to be in, I could not for all that pretend that I did not exist. I saw on the contrary that from the mere fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed . . . From this I knew I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist” (as translated by Pau Pedragosa in his article (Pedragosa 2014), “Multiple Horizons: Phenomenology, Cubism, Architecture,” *The European Legacy*, 2014, vol. 19, no. 6: 747–64).

<sup>9</sup> Mines, *Cubism*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit, Gesamtausgabe 2*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm von Herrmann (Heidegger 1976), p. 153.

time flows.<sup>11</sup> One cannot have complete knowledge of the observed. As Edmund Husserl points out, one must instead continue gathering partialities of the pursued knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Cubist artists found comfort and a strong philosophical alliance in phenomenology. They wanted to observe and analyze the object from multiple perspectives to attain holistic knowledge or a holistic picture of it. For them, Cartesian painting was too flat and strictly fixed in terms of time and space. They considered it impossible to attain true knowledge from only one perspective.<sup>13</sup> They regarded Cartesian single-perspective painting as more abstract than the multi-perspectival cubist painting because, as the designation implies, the former depicts only one perspectival view of the object while the latter provides a much more holistic multi-dimensional view of it, one that more aptly reflects human experience and observation. For cubists, time and space are in constant flux. They are not linear or fixed but can be freely overlapped, moved backward, or even bent and skewed in artwork as well as in real life experiences.

Last but not least, phenomenology helped cubists contend that there is always more to something than what a person can observe or paint on the canvas. This transcendent or even spiritual acknowledgment was inevitable. Cubists believe that human knowledge is always partial; time and space is always in flux and the self-observing self is in its own state of constant change.

If this is so, then what (or who) is orchestrating all this constant change in the world? What does the end of this process look like? And how is it even possible? If complete knowledge exists, what would it look like? These philosophical or spiritual inquiries that cubism conveys and elicits cannot help but invite critical theological responses.

Cézanne initially practiced this artistic tactic in a limited representational sense.<sup>14</sup> Yet it was Picasso and Braque who revolutionized and extended Cézanne's pre-cubist method in a non-representational sense. Aesthetically speaking, four or five intersecting artistic principles characterize the cubism they practiced: (1) geometrical deconstruction and incomplete reconstruction, (2) simultaneity, (3) multiple perspectives, (4) transparency, and (5) non-representation (yet not total abstraction). Briefly defined then, cubist painting is the product of the dual, open-ended aesthetic process of optimal deconstruction and multi-perspectival reconstruction of the observed. Typically, deconstruction and reconstruction of the object and the space around it is done by the use of many geometrical cylinders, spheres, cones, cubes, and lines. The aesthetic result of this cubist innovation is the simultaneous presentation of multiple facets of the subject from multiple perspectives (e.g., *Les Femmes d'Alger* and *The Guitarist* by Picasso). Now, the art viewer can see the object not only inside-out and outside-in, but from above and below as well as left and right—all at the same time. In other words, in cubist arts, the viewer can see all possible facets of the observed simultaneously.

However, such simultaneity is an optical illusion because physiologically human eyes cannot observe all aspects of the object at the same time. One can only see one facet at a time. Thus, cubism presupposes the overlapping of multiple times "at the same time." That is, multiple facets observed at different times appear in the same space as if they are available to see simultaneously. This is why many viewers find cubism confusing and think it is abstract, surrealistic, or symbolic, but certainly not

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, imagine a busy street being painted onto a canvas over a certain period of time. When the painter comes back next day or even just after lunch to finish the painting, because of the changed light the street's color and its occupants have changed. Given that reality, how is it possible to have an objective and unchanging view of the street as Cartesian methodology insists?

<sup>12</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und apriorischen Philosophie*, Band I, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Husserliana 3/1, ed. Karl Schuhmann (Husserl 1976), pp. 86–89.

<sup>13</sup> There is a well-known story regarding Picasso's view of reality. One day, Picasso was on a train when a fellow passenger who had known Picasso's cubist works approached him and asked why he depicted the reality only through complex distortion, not exactly as it was. Picasso then asked him what exact reality would look like. The man pulled a photograph of his wife from this wallet, showed it to Picasso, and confidently declared that the picture was what the reality was like. After taking a look at it and turning it around in his hand, Picasso finally said, "She is too small. And flat." As narrated and quoted in Mike Huggins and Mike O'Mahony, *The Visual in Sport* (Huggins and O'Mahony 2012), pp. 80–81.

<sup>14</sup> Cooper, *The Cubist Epoch*, pp. 20–27.

realistic. However, cubists contend that phenomenologically cubism is actually more realistic and more “representational” thanks to its non-representational display. Cubism attempts to show all possible facets, thus coming closer to an entirety of the observed.<sup>15</sup> Cubists realized that this is how human eyes actually perceive the external world with “free and mobile perspective.”<sup>16</sup> That is, human eyes, as lively interpretive organs, observe the same object within a period of time from multiple angles and eventually help the brain create the object’s multi-faceted image in the human mind.<sup>17</sup> Thus, “Picasso and Braque believed their reassembled versions [of the observed] more accurately reflected what the mind (rather than the eyes) perceived [as the observed] existed in space and over time,” which made cubism “known as an intellectual, rather than emotional or realistic, approach to art.”<sup>18</sup>

Cubism is not actually interested in capturing all dimensions or the entirety of the subject. Rather, by opening up the possibility of overlapping time and space, it admits the possibility of transcendence penetrating the observed, which is not readily observable or detectable by human physicality.<sup>19</sup> Thus, any argument that complete knowledge or perfect observation is possible (whether represented in art or elsewhere) is simply nonsense. Cubism emphasizes the relational and holistic observation of the subject and its unfathomable complexity, which cubists believe makes the cubist observation superior to its single perspectival Cartesian counterpart. Ultimately, the object’s innate complexity ends up with *friendly otherness* to the object deconstructed and reconstructed in its cubist artwork. The artwork is *friendly* because it is the product of the artist’s active involvement and investment in the reality shared by the viewer, yet at the same time it is felt as *other* because it conveys the aesthetic sense of *the transcendent or the unknown*. This is why cubism continues to be relevant in today’s world, thanks to both its mundane and transcendent qualities—precisely the qualities common to religious experience.

### 3. A Theology of Cubism

*The iconography of religious art had nothing to do with cubism, of course, and the narrative element was quite opposed to cubist precepts, yet in its devotion to harmonics and revelations beyond personality, cubism might be thought of as a religious art without religious doctrine.*<sup>20</sup>

A discussion about a theology of cubism ought to begin with cubism’s perception of reality, for theology itself is a discourse on mundane reality in relation to transcendental reality and vice versa. In the first place, cubism gives more attention to “the reality of insight” than to “the reality of sight.”<sup>21</sup> The rational reality of sight is too flat and too fixed. Thus it cannot capture a complete picture of the reality observed. In contrast, the reality of insight made possible by the cubist approach is much more holistic and fluid. It opens up the possibility of the unknown or the transcendent, beyond and within the reality observed. Mecislas Goldberg once said, “[Cubism] becomes like the whirling of a luminous point, a vertigo of lines; the body turns into an ellipse, cylinder or circle. Some have seen in this method an attempt to pile on effects, but to us it is a rare, persuasive and real manifestation of certain

<sup>15</sup> Maurice Raynal once said, looking at Juan Gris’ *Man in a Café*, “We never, in fact, see an object in all its dimensions at once. Therefore what has to be done is to fill in the gap[s] in our seeing. Conception gives us the means. Conception makes us aware of the objects that we should not be able to see . . . and so, if the painter succeeds in rendering the object in all its dimensions, he [sic] achieves a work of method which is of a higher order than one painted according to the visual dimension only.” Quoted in David Cottington, *Cubism* (Cottington 1998), p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> Imagine a person observing Rodin’s *The Thinker* for five minutes by moving around it and creating a multi-dimensional image of it in mind.

<sup>18</sup> Mines, *Cubism*, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> This is why many cubist adherents—painters as well as poets, novelists, mathematicians, and the like—were drawn into the fourth dimension argument, which was more than simply aesthetical and instead religious. For more discussions on this subject, see Linda Dalrymple Henderson (2009), “The Image and Imagination of the Fourth Dimension in Twentieth-Century Art and Culture,” *Configurations*, vol. 17, no. 1–2, 2009 (winter): 142–47 and Schwartz, *Cubism*, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Schwartz, *Cubism*, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Austin, *Explorations in Art, Theology, and Imagination* (Austin 2005), p. 156.

immaterial qualities of things.”<sup>22</sup> By “immaterial qualities of things,” he is referring to the imagined reality of the unknown and transcendent in cubist art. Yet cubism is neither an abstract art nor is it abstractionism that tends to create arts completely unknowable—thus, utterly transcendent—to the viewer. Cubism is still rooted in concrete reality, and is still “visibly” imbued with the sense of the transcendent. This is why cubism “works” for Christians, why they can understand it.

Any good Christian theology or spirituality is a product of in-betweenness. That is, theology is created through the tension between the concrete (sinful or unidealistic) reality/present and the hopeful-transformed (that is, eschatological or idealistic) reality/future. Cubism conveys this crucial sense of in-betweenness and the resultant transcendence that Guillaume Apollinaire calls “the grandeur of metaphysical forms.”<sup>23</sup> He continues, “This is why [cubism], even if it does not directly stem from specific religious beliefs, nonetheless possesses some of the characteristics of great, that is to say religious art.”<sup>24</sup> This real-life transcendence should be the starting point of any theology of cubism.

For cubism, the very first step in the creation of in-betweenness or transcendence is deconstruction—a cubist form of negative theology accompanied by a sense of “theology on the move.” Cubism deconstructs the observed subject in order to strip off the seemingly fixed, conventional, flat, or false perception of it. This does not imply that cubism destroys things violently or whimsically. Rather, its deconstruction is a productive process, one that helps persons see the object outside-in and inside-out, from the front and the back, the left and the right, as well as from above and below. In this respect, deconstruction itself is a process of discovery of fresh or hidden insights about the world and even the Divine mystery in the universe.

Deconstruction can also entail a process of liberation from the shackling conventionality of the surrounding system and self-closed individualistic consciousness. Such liberation leads to an opening up of the self to the boundless possibilities of life, the dynamic action and activism of liberation. Thus, Derrida is right when he observes that “deconstruction [is] a way to keep the event of tradition going, to keep it on the move, so that it can be continually translated into new events, continually exposed to a certain revolution in a self-perpetuating auto-revolution.”<sup>25</sup> In this sense, cubism’s construction or negative theology is what Mark C. Taylor would call “nonnegative negative theology.”<sup>26</sup> The negativity of deconstruction is diminished by the inherent positivity carried deep inside of negativity itself, bringing that positivity from shade to light. This is like in mathematics where a plus (+) is generated when a minus (-) is multiplied by another minus (-). It is no wonder then that many Cubists enjoyed mathematical geometry and mathematical symbolism.

By its chaos, uncertainty, fragmentation, ugliness, violence, and by conveying a feeling of death, deconstruction shows what is absent—and thus what should be present. In this sense, deconstruction is largely eschatological. When cubism shifts from deconstruction to reconstruction (or reassembly), it does not depict a complete or finished reconstruction but an incomplete or unfinished one. It is as if reconstruction is still “on the move” or on a journey; that is, deconstruction “affirm[s] what is to come.”<sup>27</sup> This is always a good theology. The New Heaven and New Earth remains unfinished in human history, even though the foretaste of it is always available and sweetens the human imagination. Cubism achieves this (feeling of) incompleteness by depicting multiple perspectives and dimensions.

Ultimately, the deconstructed subject is reconstructed by the same deconstructive cubist materials (i.e., geometrical figures), which creates the multi-perspectival view of the reconstructed. The genius of multi-perspectivalness is its attempt to penetrate the mysterious depth of the observed—all its

<sup>22</sup> Mecislas Golberg, *La Morale des Lignes (The Moral Philosophy of Lines)* (Golberg 1908), p. 32. Translated and quoted in Fry, *Cubism*, p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire, “The Cubist Painters,” in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics.*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp with contributions by Peter Selz and Joshua C. Taylor (Apollinaire 2016), p. 224.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (Caputo 1997), p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *The Picture in Question: Mark Tansey and the Ends of Representation* (Taylor 1999), p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (Caputo 1997), p. 41.

possibilities, seen and unseen—and its representation of otherness encountered in the holistic-cubic depiction of the observed. In this sense, cubism achieves both transparency and transcendence at the same time, which is both truthful and ironic. In theological language, this means that cubism achieves both the immanence and transcendence of the Divine entangled in the fabric of the universe.

By encountering the interlocked dual-dynamic of immanence and transcendence, the viewer of cubist work is led into the active interpretive process of meaning making. Each viewer will eventually take a different meaning from the same cubist art because (1) there is plenty of room for interpretation due to the incompleteness and multi-perspectivalness; and (2) by choosing such incompleteness, the artist chooses not to divulge the complete meaning of the reconstructed. There can and should be multiple meanings of the reconstructed for different viewers approaching from multiple directions. Thus, the thoughtful viewer is no longer a passive by-stander or simple grantee in front of the art, but a courageous navigator of the (divine) mystery or transcendental meanings of the reconstructed and a thoughtful contributor to the possible *completion of incompleteness* of it. Figuratively speaking, the viewer completes the incomplete story by their own incomplete retelling of it.

There are thus several notable theological characteristics of cubism: (1) it presents the eschatological reality of insight as a more truthful holistic perception of reality; (2) it offers a non-negative negative—or liberating—deconstruction of the observed; (3) it presents a multi-perspectival reconstruction that creates room for the divine mystery; and (4) it enlists the viewer's role as a dynamic creator of new transcendental meanings of incomplete stories. Most noteworthy is the multi-perspectival incompleteness of the reconstructed that encourages the viewer's ongoing engagement with it. Since the artwork itself is incomplete, it cannot have a single complete or fixed message. However, the incomplete multi-perspectival artwork opens up a space of hidden truths or a transcendental aesthetical matrix of diversified meanings into which each viewer walks with fascination and encounters a secretive revelation of life or the Divine. This wide-openness of the human encounter with the divine mystery is easily justifiable. For once the divine mystery is “mastered” by a complete understanding of it, it is no longer a mystery but a god boxed and fixed in the mind of the *res cogitans*. Cubist theology ingeniously overcomes this.

#### 4. Cubist Preaching: Three Theological-Homiletic Fundamentals

If preaching is fundamentally a theological activity, as Richard Lischer states,<sup>28</sup> then every sound theology has the potential to contribute to homiletical theoretical endeavors. Cubist theology is not only a good candidate for this cause, but appears to be a great fit for the twenty-first century with its theological depth and epistemological relevancy. This section explores three ways in which the cubist aesthetic, epistemology, and theology translates into homiletical construction, eventually toward what I call a cubist homiletic.

##### 4.1. Multiperspectival Dual-Constructive Hermeneutic

Cubism seems to be one of the finest biblical hermeneutical apparatuses available today for two reasons. To begin with, the Scripture itself can be considered a cubist composition of many pieces of God's revelation. Scripture never gives us a full picture of God; but when people force it to, the Scripture becomes a rule book or an idol. The Scripture helps us to see many facets or dimensions of God, but never all of them. In the Scripture, there is always room for transparency and transcendence. Second, postmodern literary critics have discovered that a text, whether religious or secular, does not exert a single meaning from it. Rather, a text, as a product of multiple intertextuality and social interactions (e.g., the book of Genesis as a creative product of multiple intertextuality of

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Lischer 2001), pp. 1–15. Lischer writes, “Preaching is the final expression of theology. It has been toward preaching that theology has been tending. After the exegete has told us what the text once meant . . . the preacher to borrow Ebeling's phrase, executes the text by helping it to speak to a particular time, situation, and people. The majority of Christians encounter theology only in this, its final form, preaching. Ibid., 14.

various Ancient Near Eastern political and religious mythologies), carries within and in depth of itself multiple stories, viewpoints, and meanings.<sup>29</sup> “We know now,” thus Roland Barthes says, “that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.”<sup>30</sup> Cubism seems to best capture this ontological ethos of multivalent human knowing and have a capacity to provide an artistic tool of hermeneutical navigation over the complex text.

In general, preaching begins with textual interpretation and a resulting key message. Cubist preaching is no exception, yet it undertakes this task in a novel fashion. In a nutshell, it will deconstruct and then reconstruct—thus, dual-constructive—the text through a multi-perspectival, holistic, and transcendental interpretive process. First, deconstructive interpretation in a multi-perspectival sense means the dissolution of the text or its assumed meaning in its fullest sense. This radical dissolution is possible and done by adopting multiple points-of-view—hence, multi-perspectival—vis-à-vis the text.<sup>31</sup> A point of view is a particular epistemological self-conscious engagement with the text. Therefore, when an exegete gets involved with the text, or enter the textual world to borrow Allen’s language,<sup>32</sup> through multiple points-of-view, her engagement with the text becomes multidimensional or multi-faceted in terms of (1) finding the text’s (hidden) social, cultural, and literary construction and (2) encountering various meanings of the same text.

Here is an example of how this multi-perspectival engagement with the text is performed. The self-conscious preacher may imagine herself as if she stood *in the text*, *outside of the text*, *above the text*, and *beneath the text* all at the same time. That is, the preacher may engage the text in four different yet interrelated perspectival ways simultaneously. I would call these *numinous*, *prosaic*, *theo-symbolic*, and *anamnestic* ways in order. *Numinous engagement* of the text entails “becoming lost” in the mythic world of the text in unspeakable awe—famously known as *mysterium tremendum* by Rudolf Otto.<sup>33</sup> The interpreter encounters the most fundamental pathos or existential thrust of the text simply yet profoundly by being exposed to the “raw” biblical-textual reality.<sup>34</sup> This passionate experience of the text is largely deconstructive in that the experience is far deeper than any presumed meaning of the text; thus the presumed meaning is deconstructed by such a numinous engagement with it.

*Prosaic engagement* is a polar opposite of numinous engagement for it emphasizes human reasoning as a primary agency for textual encounter. In this engagement, the interpreter conducts an anatomic, observational analysis of the text, which further helps deconstruct the text through the engagement’s demythologizing ethos and its resulting challenge of textual authenticity.

*Theo-symbolic deconstructive engagement* is a kind of poetic-metaphoric engagement. This textual encounter is mostly about the interpreter exploring the text’s centrifugal relation to the larger theological world in a symbolic or poetic-metaphoric sense. Why is this termed symbolic or poetic-metaphoric?

<sup>29</sup> John S. McClure calls various these textual viewpoints and meanings “permutations” (or “other origins or goals” of permutations) in his Levinasian deconstructive understanding of the Scripture. While his approach to and application of deconstruction has a more ethical emphasis (i.e., seeing and hearing “others” in the text), my approach is more literary that is a multi-perspectival endeavor to expose and explore multilayered meanings and transcendence of the text. John S. McClure, *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (McClure 2001), p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (Barthes 2007), p. 146.

<sup>31</sup> I am merely adopting his language and its functional nature. Buttrick does not argue for multiple points of views executed over the text. Rather, he prefers that one point of view be used for each “move.” David G. Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Buttrick 2008), pp. 55–68.

<sup>32</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>33</sup> For Otto, *mysterium tremendum* refers to the “determinate affective state” of the 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 (Otto 1958), pp. 12–40. 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, pp. 11–12, 65–71.

<sup>34</sup> One example of the preacher’s *mysterium* experience is provided in my other article, “Homiletic Aesthetics: A Paradigmatic Proposal for a Holistic Experience of Preaching,” *Theology Today* 73, no. 4: 364–77.

Because any text, originally limited in its own composition time and space, can only relate to others from different times and spaces (e.g., by asking, How is the Old Testament relevant to the New Testament?) in symbolic, poetic, or metaphoric ways. The interpreter's primary task here is to capture the metaphoric theological thrust of the given text, which makes possible both the text's internal coherence and external relationality.<sup>35</sup> This task should be ongoing or unending, as in general any symbol, poem, or metaphor denies or deconstructs any fixed interpretation of itself. The interpreter is ever in the process of getting close to something incomprehensible.

Lastly, in an *anamnesic* encounter of the text or *standing beneath the text* the interpreter looks up to the text as dear memory through the interpretive window of the ecclesial tradition. The text thus ultimately dictates the tradition and the tradition-cherishing interpreter. This is reverse deconstruction. The text as the Spirit-breathing subject, not as the mere deadened object, deconstructs both human tradition and the interpreter's ideologies, perceptions, hopes, etc., shaping and transforming them through the text's timeless revelatory power.

All these four engagements of the text combined together will make a fine multi-perspectival encounter of the Divine's transparent and transcendent presence in and around the text. However, this is only one example of cubist hermeneutic. There could be many other ways that we can think of for the cubist engagement of the text. Whatever cubist method of textual engagement is chosen, the goal is the same; namely encountering and experiencing the text as much multi-perspectivally, holistically, transparently, and transcendentally as possible.<sup>36</sup> Eventually, this cubist mode of engaging with the text should lead to the disruptive, yet holistic, and transcendental hermeneutical re-assembly of the text's meaning(s) at the next stage of sermon composition.

#### 4.2. Beyond Inductive or Deductive: Toward Ubi-Ductive

In cubist preaching, a thesis-based composition of the sermon is put aside. Since the emergence of the New Homiletic movement in 1970s, two homiletic methods of sermon composition have dominated the North American pulpit: the inductive and the deductive. By and large, both methods support the idea that the sermon is written around one central thesis arising from biblical exegesis.<sup>37</sup>

This central thesis approach does not seem to fit cubist preaching—for two immediately obvious reasons. First, the key thesis approach contradicts the aforementioned *multiperspectival dual-constructive hermeneutic*, through which the main content of the sermon arises. In other words, the multiperspectival, holistic, and transcendental encounter of the text denies the text's reduction to one single thesis. The cubist exegetical encounter could produce many different angles or even multiple theses of the given text.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> In their study of metaphor *par excellence*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson shows how metaphors in people's ordinary lives as well as in language and text. Basically, they realize that without metaphors human communication would be very limited in its meaning making and conveyance. More importantly, metaphors in communication creates large space for different interpretations of the same situation and the same text. This situation may sound quite devastating as if "genuine" communication is impossible. At the same time, however, metaphoric language allows us wide-open room for creative and radical—which I would call "multi-perspectival theo-symbolic" in the context of preaching—perceptions and interpretations of the text. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff and Johnson 2017), pp. 1–14.

<sup>36</sup> Here I intentionally do not use the phrase "understanding the text" as that phrase more often than not prioritizes logical-rationalistic or scientific-naturalistic reasoning. I prefer "encountering the text," and find it to be more holistic, for it suggests the text encountered by all human epistemological faculties of mind, spirit, and body.

<sup>37</sup> For example, see Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot* (Lowry 2000), Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Craddock 2000), Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3rd ed. (Long 2016), and Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, rev. ed. (Wilson 2008). It is true that inductive or deductive preachers may practice the multiperspectival hermeneutic during their textual interpretation process. Yet, in their final presentation of the sermon, typically they retreat to the one-thesis or one-focus, if not one-dimensional, method of preaching; that is, "one central message for one sermon."

<sup>38</sup> Biblical scholars like Gary D. Martin indirectly support the multi-angle cubist approach to textual interpretation by pointing out the multiple origins of many parts of the Scripture. For him, as individual texts went through various stages of composition—that is, multiple sources added to and deleted from same texts—it is unjust to claim only one interpretation of those texts. Multiple interpretations of those texts are possible, and thus multiple or different meanings may arise from same text. See Gary D. Martin, *Multiple Originals: New Approaches to Hebrew Bible Textual Criticism* (Martin 2011).

Furthermore, the single thesis approach relies on Cartesian epistemology, which freezes the living subject of the holy text and, inevitably, renders it a fixed (and dead) object. This object (i.e., the text) is forever detached from the rationalistic subject (i.e., the exegete) who seeks a single definite idea or thesis from it. The text is no longer a lively conversation partner whose boundless wisdom and insights spark the exegete's ongoing imagination. Instead, it becomes the cradle of *a cold thesis*. By contrast, the cubist approach revives the text's own status as a living interlocutor whose innate multi-faceted, transcendental wisdom speaks for itself—if only we will listen.

Second, cubist preaching circumvents the presumed time-linear literary consciousness of the mind upon which both inductive and deductive methods rely. In these methods, the sermon flows in time and follows the basic literary structure of introduction, body, and conclusion. In deductive preaching, a key thesis is given immediately in the sermon's introduction, which the rest of the sermon then attempts to explain or prove. In inductive preaching, as Fred B. Craddock contends, the preacher "travels [in time]" with the listener throughout the sermon toward the ultimate "Aha" moment—the hidden desired outcome that the preacher has for the listener—at the end.<sup>39</sup> An inevitable theological result of both of these methods is this: The revelatory nature of the sacred text is constrained or even controlled by literary logic and the limit of linear time. It is as if sermonic meaning-making is impossible without the reliance on logic and time.<sup>40</sup>

However, *kairos*, rather than *chronos*, seems to be the fundamental nature of God's revelatory scriptures, or God's existence itself, from which any and all sermon messages arise. Thus, when constrained in time and logic, the sermon message contradicts the very nature of the holy text. In cubist preaching, however, time stops or, rather, overlaps. Transparency as well as transcendence take the place of the closed literary logic. Thus, cubist preaching does not necessarily flow in time; rather it *happens* within (many) revelatory moments, and stirs the ever-floating consciousness of the human mind at any given second.

With this in mind we can now further define cubist preaching as *the generative act of an aesthetic matrix of ultimate spiritual meanings via the dual, open-ended sermonic process of transcendental deconstruction and multi-perspectival reconstruction*. Cubist preaching does not attempt to prove a central thesis, but rather formulates an aesthetic matrix of theses or meanings of the text into which the listener is invited. Be aware that this matrix is not a composite of abstract deconstructive ideas or statements. Concrete, reconstructive encounters of compelling theses and meanings of the text (should) happen there. In this matrix, the preacher and the listener participate together in the mutual multi-perspectival meaning-making process, at the end of which each listener receives or creates a customized textual revelation. As this hermeneutical matrix participation is non-linear but rather spatial and multidimensional, any labeling of it as inductive or deductive would not do justice to this cubist methodology. A new concept, one that I call "ubi-ductive," may serve better.

Ubi-ductive is a neologism made by conjoining the two terms, *ubiquitous* and *-ductive*. It indicates that the textual meaning can happen anywhere and everywhere, not necessarily at the beginning (deductive) nor at the end (inductive) of the sermon.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, multiple meanings of the same

<sup>39</sup> Craddock admits that even his inductive sermon is not totally open-ended (which is supposed to be). His sermon already has—that is, before the message is delivered—a certain desired result that should happen in the listener's mind. Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority* (Craddock 2001), pp. 79–85. In a similar vein, Long uses the terms "focus" and "function" to refer to the promotion of only one message for a single sermon. Long, *The Witness*, pp. 113–35.

<sup>40</sup> See detailed arguments of Lowry's "loop," McClure's "sequence," Buttrick's "move," and Michelle's "move." In all those examples, the sermon is time- and logic-constrained. David G. Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Buttrick 2008), Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon As Narrative Art Form* (Lowry 2000), John S. McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* (McClure 2003), and Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Mitchell 1990).

<sup>41</sup> Just to mention two more problematic features of deductive and inductive preaching among many: deductive preaching more often than not tends to abstraction by its emphasis on one single message from one text, while inductive preaching relies heavily on human experience thus losing sight of the transcendental nature of the encounter with the Divine. For more detailed discussions on this, see Chaps. 2 and 3 of Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Rose 1997).

text can be presented, rather than a central meaning or thesis. Therefore, the conventional sermon shape of introduction and conclusion is incompatible with cubist preaching. Cubist sermons can be heard as a continuation of the main body of the sermon that is engineered to create a multi-perspectival matrix of meanings. By its very nature the cubist sermon grants the listener a generic feeling of being *lost in time* through its theo-symbolic and anamnestic nature.

Every cubist sermon as a whole is incomplete because of its dual-constructive nature and wide-open potential for the listener's own meaning-taking. This incompleteness of preaching is just fine, or better, even. The preacher cannot (and should not try to) calculate or control the listener's meaning-making nor, fundamentally, her revelatory encounter with the Sacred. So, the cubist sermon is always incomplete. God is free from any control or calculation and so is the listener. This revelatory incompleteness adds to the ubi-ductive character of cubist preaching.

#### 4.3. Communication in Cubist Preaching

It is not only meaning-making that is participatory in cubist preaching: so too is communication itself. The preacher no longer delivers something definite to the passive listener. For that something—i.e., the presumed central message—is ever in flux and ever multivalent. There should not be *the message* or *one message* that the preacher communicates unilaterally. Thus, the preacher functions as the creative communicative agent who, like an artist presenting various perspectives on something, invites the listener into the cubist matrix of textual meanings (for instance, textual meanings found by *numinous*, *prosaic*, *theo-symbolic*, and *anamnestic* encounters as discussed above). In this respect, such conventional designations of the preacher as herald (prophet), pastor, storyteller/poet, and witness may not work in cubist preaching.<sup>42</sup> Instead, the cubist preacher should be recognized as *the communicative agent* who functions as the mediator between the text and the listener. The preacher is not a simple agent between the two subjects, but the creative (or cubist) agent who is both in charge of matrix generation and also participates in the matrix *along with the listener*. That is, alongside the listener, the preacher—through mutual participation—not only propounds but also encounters fresh meanings of the text.

The agent-preacher's language or message will always be indirect, invitational, and allusive yet highly impactful for the participating listener—both intellectually and emotionally.<sup>43</sup> Once the preacher's invitation to the listener to enter into the textual matrix is successful, the listener, like the preacher, will have an opportunity to encounter the sublime *mysterium* of the Divine in the same matrix space. In this sense, the designation of "listener" is somehow misleading. What actually happens phenomenologically is that the listener *participates* in the textual matrix. Participation is the desired end result. Therefore, I propose *the participant* as an alternative designation of *the listener* in cubist preaching.

In summary, communication in cubist preaching is participatory and multilateral. All three key players of preaching—text, preacher, and participant—are in flux.<sup>44</sup> The ever-changing textual matrix

<sup>42</sup> Long expounds upon the four most generic "images" of the preacher people tend to have in mind. The herald is the one who delivers the sacred Word from God (directly) to the listening body, while the pastor is the one who formulates the contextual or situational message best fitting for the particular congregation. The storyteller/poet is the one who through literary qualities of the message helps people widen their imagination of the Divine. Finally, the witness, by oscillating between the roles of the herald and the pastor, is the one whose first-hand encounter and interpretation of God's word plays a major role in the production of sermon message. While all these images of the preacher still have much merit and should be taken into consideration, there seem to be some areas in cubist preaching that these images cannot fill. Long, *The Witness*, pp. 19–57.

<sup>43</sup> Cognitive psychologists have shown that "subliminal contents, analogous to the Picasso imagery, can often be discerned by the viewer, *unconsciously [that is, indirectly or allusively]*. By *unconsciously*, it is meant that the subliminal or latent contents are not available to the viewer's introspective, phenomenal awareness, but nevertheless exert an ongoing, tangible, and measurable effect on both intellectual and emotional responsiveness." Tom Ettinger (1996), "Picasso, Cubism and the Eye of the Beholder: Psychoanalysis and Cognitive Psychology," *American Imago* 53, no. 1: 55.

<sup>44</sup> As the most distinguished characteristic of the postmodern era, Jean-François points out "incredulity towards metanarratives." Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Lyotard 2010), p. xxiv. In other words, Lyotard knows that no longer a unified, complete, and universal story or truth claim would get people's attention and consensus; all the story or the truth claim is partial at its best. This notion of the metanarrative's absence can be easily applied to the textual interpretation. No longer is there the absolute authoritative hermeneutical principle, under which each textual interpretation is framed (toward only a certain result) and conducted.

created by all three involved encourages both the preacher and the participant to open themselves fully to ever-unfolding meanings of the text and, eventually, the revelation of the Divine Eternal. Neither the text, nor the preacher, nor the participant can or should constrain the eternal and universal nature of God. One way to avoid that pitfall in preaching is to be ever-participatory and ever-multilateral. Cubist preaching rightly aims for that.

## 5. Conclusions

Cubist preaching is a critical response to the given (cubist) era's demand for fresh religious artistic communication. Cubist preaching and its hermeneutic may fundamentally serve as the best platform for preaching the Scripture. For the Scripture itself seems to be a cubist composite of many fragments of God's revelation. The Scripture never gives us a complete picture of God; rather, it helps us to see many facets or dimensions of God. That is, in the Scripture we do not have a flat, two-dimensional realistic photograph of God, but a puzzling, mysterious, and multifaceted pictorial story of God. This is truly a cubist God.

Thus, cubist preaching finds its own legitimate place in the field of homiletics and in the practice of preaching. Indeed, we are already late in proposing a cubist homiletic. After all, cubism appeared in the early twentieth century, and has shaped people's philosophical, aesthetic, and religious epistemology ever since. Yet, we are not too late. While cubism and a cubist approach to preaching still sounds unfamiliar in the church and the pulpit, I expect it to increase. As it does, this article will be one attempt to prepare us for that upcoming demand.

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Now, ways of the textual interpretation are wide-open, and so are their possible results. A step further, the receiver of the textual interpretation by someone else is free to put a hold on that interpretation and to do her own interpretation of the interpretation. Conversely, the text, as a live subject (no longer as a mere object), is freed to interpret the interpreter and the receiver of the interpretation. This whole situation puts all the text, the interpreter (the preacher), and the receiver/interpreter (the participant) in great hermeneutical flux.

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