

The Prophetic and The Priestly: Reclaiming Preaching as Practical Theology

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Early twentieth century homiletical voice, P. T. Forsyth, in his Lyman Beecher Lectures, published as *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (1907), acknowledged that Christian proclamation is addressed both to the church and beyond the church. Sadly, today, Christian preaching in North America is considerably confined to the sanctuary's four walls. Forsyth had it right when he professed, "The Christian preacher is no prophet to the public till he is a voice of the Church to the Church" (Forsyth: 92). Whether one considers the intellectually rousing sermon delivered at the pine desk or the spine-tingling rhetoric hurled from plexi-glass electronic pulpits, Forsyth's sapient claim insists that precedence be given to the church.

Despite the way in which Forsyth's stipulation for church proclamation seems to have been heeded in practice, an incessant erosion of pulpit authority in our times is discernible. The scope of the crisis is not solely associated with the preacher's prioritization of the house of worship. This article ventures further: pulpit authority goes on the blink when preaching is too narrowly determined by matters of personal piety and care of the soul to the blatant disregard of the public sphere.

Long-term and insidious are the health consequences to the church's voice when contemporary preachers and their congregations, in religious practice, collectively consent to invoke the Divine presence in the worship liturgy, only to depart from their religious experience without a patent conception of themselves as the "gathered and guided to be *sent*." My argument is very simple. Christian preaching, an inherently contextualized form of practical theology, at all times absconds its character and charge to the church and the public unless it reclaims its elemental prophetic and priestly voice¹.

¹The kingly or eldering voice, which illustrates the wisdom dimension in the function of preaching, arguably could also be explored, but in the interest of

Practical theology has the crucial task of “paying attention” to contexts. Our contexts matter: specifically, the prophetic and priestly work of affirming and clarifying the church’s mission and ministries in the service of Jesus Christ in the world.² No preaching as a form of practical theology today can avoid confronting the issue of pluralism in the context of the world-shaping historical phenomena of racial, economic and cultural diversity. Any act of public Christian preaching concerned with a gospel that addresses us and the social systems we inhabit never overlooks the role of context. Actually, to accord such importance to context in Christian preaching is to venture that no universal homiletical method aptly fits every faith community’s ecclesial orientation. The intention of this article is not to recommend yet another one-size-fits all homiletical method;³ instead, emphasis is given to a different homiletical matter altogether—the need for contemporary preachers to vigorously re-conceive the prophetic and priestly dimensions of preaching, that in religious practice, often become indiscernible or isolated from each other.

My first task is to provide a fuller explanation of the vital importance context plays in Christian preaching. Second, drawing on the call and commission account of the prophet Jeremiah, I theologially interpret the prophet’s call and authority as paradigmatic for reorienting homiletics. I argue that Christian preachers are imperatively summoned, as Jeremiah in

the scope of my argument, my reflections focus on the prophetic and priestly dimensions with the intent to evaluate their interrelatedness and the nature of their regrettable estrangement in religious practice.

²Drawing on a consensus model, Richard Osmer outlines four tasks of practical theology. First, the *descriptive-empirical task* asks: what is going on in the Christian preaching of this particular context? Second, the *interpretive task* addresses why this particular form of Christian preaching is taking place. Third, *norms of practice* ask: What forms ought Christian preaching to take in this context? And finally, *rules of art*, derived from a careful consideration of the three previous tasks, are the “how to” informed by the “why to” asking the primary question: How might Christian preaching be shaped to more fully embody the normative purposes of the Christian faith? (Cf. Richard R. Osmer, “The Role of Practical Theology in Protestant Religious Education Theory,” unpublished essay, 2000).

³New Homiletic theorists Henry H. Mitchell in *Black Preaching* (1970) and *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (2000) and Eugene Lowry’s *The Homiletical Plot* (1980) and *Doing Time in the Pulpit* (1985) are notable contemporary examples of homiletical theories exhibiting a foundationalist tendency.

his time, to a prophetic and priestly work. Particularly, the summoned preacher is answerable to a work of thinking more radically about ways to address contemporary faith communities and the social order. To be prophetic in our time might mean addressing the church's need to critically de-ideologize its preachments of fruitless obscurantist ventures that intertwine the church's faith commitments too naively with reigning national values and ideologies.

By using the paradigm of Jeremiah, I examine the problematic, i.e., the preacher's task to rethink the function of the prophetic and priestly dimensions of preaching, through offering a three-part working definition of prophetic preaching—one consistent with the pragmatic role of this biblical prophet of ancient Israel and with the preaching ministry of Jesus. My definition claims that, from within the Christian tradition, prophetic preaching:

- 1) is divinely inspired, highly contextualized, particular speech that proclaims and explains God's justice in terms of covenant obligation, to the end of evoking an alternative community in light of freedom and justice.
- 2) is never discontinuous with the past but finds resources internal to the tradition to call a specific community to its true identity,
- 3) stands under the community of faith to discover its state of health.⁴

Another way to express this is to claim that priestly preaching essentially strives to re-build communal trust and "bind up the wounded" by speaking to the brokenness and fragmentation of our present reality (Van Gelder, 1996: 29-32). It is not to be confused with pious word play devoted to empty ritual. However much faith communities tend to overemphasize the prophetic witness over the priestly element in religious practice, or vice-versa,

⁴See Gene M. Tucker, "Prophetic Speech" in *Interpreting the Prophets*, ed. James L. Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), and Hughes Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures, VI: The Biblical Period* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998, 16-7), and D. Stephen Long, "Prophetic Preaching" in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

my aim is to challenge the modernist tendency that insists that one dimension must capitulate to the other.

To demonstrate what the reorientation of prophetic preaching I am advocating requires, the third segment of this reflection offers a theoretically reconceived view of preaching by drawing on two contemporary models of interdisciplinary work in practical theology. I survey, concisely, the *Revised Praxis Correlational* and the *Transformational* models. I demonstrate how a reconsideration of their basic tenets mutually correct one another. When dialectically appropriated, these models characterize how both the prophetic and the priestly dynamics enable a constructive way of re-conceiving preaching more holistically. Holistic preaching is biblical, contextual, and catalytic. These interdisciplinary models for practical theology — when dialectically related, synthesized, and appropriated in and for praxis — reveal a great deal about prophetic preaching. I believe that, through the scriptural images of prophet and priest, they intensify our theological understanding of preaching.

The final section of this paper offers more qualification to the issue at hand. I evaluate a modern homiletical proposal in which this prophetic and priestly synthesis is not present. I then contrast it with a pre-modern homiletic that steers closer to a prophetic and priestly synthesis. All homiletical proposals, whether pre-modern or postmodern, are futile strivings unless underscored by the Holy Spirit's power to create, revise, and transform preaching to greater faithfulness, fittingness, and fervent expression. The hope is that questions raised in this analysis will generate renewed interest within the church in the academy's critical role to encourage Christian preachers toward deeper theological reflection. Any homiletical theory with eyes closed to the sobering contextual crisis in the church and in contemporary society unwittingly refuses to recognize the visible erosion and de-centering of the Christian pulpit. If preaching in the twenty-first century is to be done at all earnestly, it has to reclaim a new mind-set.

PREACHING: CONTEXTUALLY SUMMONED

A recovery of a practical theological and homiletical mind-set requires that preaching's prophetic and priestly dimensions operate compatibly in a dynamic and dialectical partnership to guide and transform preaching's existing norms of practice. The prophetic and priestly functions of religious

practice are never actualized in a vacuum. Rather, they are visible in the earthy, mundane, daily experiences that over time become codified into the belief structures and values of a particular people in their specific communities. Thus, twenty-first century Christian preaching will stagger into a new age bankrupt if it overlooks the basic considerations of where people live, who people are, and what things people treasure. These interrelated considerations of context supply one's means for hearing and processing the gospel.

The practical theology subdiscipline of homiletics generally assumes the task of examining the nature and function of preaching. Accordingly, one crucial aspect of its theological and historical task is the duty of distinguishing preaching's nature and function from other forms of rhetorical speech. Though no scholarly consensus exists on a definition for preaching which would satisfy all communities of faith, preaching, broadly conceived, is theologically authorized speech, requiring rhetorical judgments on what is fitting and appropriate in the aural/oral proclamation of God's Word. In view of this, the Word of God itself essentially authorizes concern for the context of the receptor, and context, therefore, is not inconsequential to the preaching task (Kay 2003: 34-5).

St. Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* (*De Doctrina Christiana*), the earliest proto-practical theology textbook on the subject of homiletics, displays marks consistent with the aforementioned definition (Augustine, 1958: 143-4). Importantly, *On Christian Doctrine*, as tightly joined as it is to Cicero's classical rhetoric, refuses to cower from drawing crucial theological distinctions and contextual considerations for Christian preaching.⁵

Our preaching contexts matter when our concern is the gospel. There is no gospel "for us" that is not clothed in human culture and is not at the same time mediated through the socio-cultural concerns of where we live, who we are, and what we value. Matters of context require our attention to matters of change. Speaking on the general law of intellectual life, Hans-Georg Gadamer's maxim, "Things that change force themselves on our attention

⁵ See Nancy Lammers Gross' Ph. D. Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, "A Re-Examination of Recent Homiletical Theories in Light of The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur," 1992, which notes six observable homiletical components that emerge from Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*: (1) the purpose of preaching, (2) the message of preaching, (3) the person of the preacher, (4) the hearer, (5) the context, and (6) pedagogy, pp. 24-5. Each component, I would argue, has a direct or indirect bearing on contextualization.

far more than those that remain the same” (Gadamer 1960: xxiv) fittingly beckons every practical theologian back to the primary task of “paying attention.” Stephen Bevans is right when he claims that to understand the Christian faith contextually “is really a theological imperative” (Bevans 1992:1).

A PROPHETIC AND PRIESTLY PARADIGM

BUILDING UP, TEARING DOWN

Practical theology is a prophetic ministry of and for the church — and of and for society — when it interprets and acts, in the service of Jesus Christ, within human community toward the goal which Jacob Fret describes as the actualization and maintenance of the God and human relationship (Heitink 1999: 120, 130-1). Prophetic witness is never imported; it is mediated, sent to, and worked out in community, not in isolation. In the book of Jeremiah, for example, the metaphors of prophet and priest are synthesized. On the one hand in (6:1-6), just prior to Jeremiah’s “temple sermon” (7:1-15), Jeremiah, believing the temple and its ritual practice were tools of social control,⁶ exercises a prophetic function when he pronounces God’s indictment upon “the shepherds who have scattered the sheep” (i.e. the religious and monarchial leadership) for their evil doings. On the other hand the prophet exercises a priestly function as well, because he is nonetheless “called to be a child of the tradition, one who has taken it seriously in the shaping of his or her own field of perception and system of language.”⁷ From his priestly pedigree⁸ we may infer that his lineage afforded him a unique closeness to the tradition, especially temple worship⁹. Even if this closeness had only a rudimentary significance in the scope of the prophet’s work, his cultural

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmanns Publishing, 1998), 78.

⁷ Bruggemann 1998:12.

⁸ Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, of the priest of Anathoth (likely descendants of Abiathar, a priest in David’s court banished for aligning himself with David’s rival Adonijah [see Ch.1]).

⁹ Outside the temple motif, Jeremiah functions as a priest sent by God to declare a word of hope and comfort to God’s people taken into Babylonian exile (see 29:11-14).

grooming shaped his worldview and thus, plausibly, provided him with the platform needed to preach his temple sermon.

The Hebrew prophet Jeremiah is paradigmatic in that he receives an appointment from God to a work of “building up, and tearing down” (Jeremiah 1: 10). Jeremiah and other biblical prophets were often called into community—a community that often stood against their work. Elijah hid in a cave fleeing Jezebel’s wrath; Jonah rebelled against his assignment to Tarshish; and even Jeremiah lamented his struggle to Jerusalem. But without question, each prophet underwent transformation by virtue of his prophetic responsibility to the ongoing task of forming and reforming the communities into which he was sent. Jeremiah’s life of service alongside the community in which he was called, for example, was inseparable from his own spiritual process. And while not all prophecy was met with enthusiasm, for example, Daniel’s interpretations for King Belshazzar (Daniel 5: 5—6: 1-10) or Nathan’s parable to David (2 Samuel 12: 1-15), the Spoken Word is not conceived in, or directed to, or spoken in, a vacuum. Consequently, a practical theology that makes no attempt to work in the interest of forming and reforming communities, nor to struggle to emancipate the socially and economically crippled, and the spiritually oppressed voices on the margins, is, despite its good intentions, always impractical.

FOSTERING COMMUNAL TRUST

Practical theology, at the same time, is a priestly work of and for the church and society. The nurturing and nourishing dynamics of the church’s life must always be critically examined. Some churches die from cultivating attitudes and behaviors of apathetic resignation, i.e., by neglecting the task of “building up and tearing down”—fostering the necessary bonds of priestly and prophetic witness. Other communities meagerly subsist, starved of any teleological aim, non-attentive to the wounded who desperately need soul care. The African American church, my own religious and cultural home, exemplifies why the priestly dimension is vital. Countless African American congregations experience a whirlwind of ecclesiological and organizational re-structuring, essentially caught in a crisis of transition. Many traditional and historic congregations founded and organized in urban or rural locales contend with the growing phenomenon of physical displacements, class division, and demographic shifts in neighborhoods. It is not uncommon to observe America’s burgeoning black middle class ritually commute into their urban churches for Sunday worship only to return straight away to their

suburban quarters and corporate vocations oblivious of the larger black under class in urban neighborhoods. As a consequence, this recent phenomenon tosses to the wind an infrastructure or tangible apparatus for building communal trust. Churches that exist exclusively as historical landmarks and spiritual fallout shelters, rather than as representatives of an active presence of God's gathered and missionally sent, lose the ability to claim any strong connection to the communities into which they are called to serve, to their peril.

Moreover, many intimate and traditional African American churches are evolving into megachurches — a sprouting trend. Many black megachurches, I find, too easily accommodate their charter and mission to the reigning “business model” ideologies. They are less likely to be places that provide a sense of family and community, i.e., close-knit and supportive relationships for members. On the contrary, these houses of worship are primarily thought of as providers of religious goods and services to its constituents (Becker, 1999: 13). The ecclesiological questions in these transforming congregations are no longer exclusively based upon physical and spiritual survival as much as upon an emphasis on clarifying the vision and terms of corporate missional objectives. In what is clearly seen as a crisis of transition, the African American church stands at the precipice of dilemma and hope, asking: “Where do we grow from here?”, “What can we hold onto?”, and “What do we as black Christians theologically believe and adhere to?” Accordingly, this outlook creates fertile ground for priestly preaching. Generally, this crisis of transition has caused many black preachers and their congregants to develop bifurcated identities: on the one hand, wanting to hold on to the folkways and mores of local traditions, and on the other hand, wanting to re-think and re-negotiate congregational identity in ways that are technologically progressive, community-focused, but in many cases, nontraditional (Trulear, 1997: 120). Bifurcated identities necessitate congregational strategies that reclaim and revise traditions and modes of religious practice.

Marvin McMickle's recent homiletical proposal addresses the issue of bifurcated identities. While centrally concerned with formulating practical ways to preach to African American churches, McMickle assesses demographic changes that point to an important and new ecclesiastical occurrence—the rising presence of professional class blacks occupying church pews. Importantly, McMickle challenges many of the outmoded congregational strategies for doing ministry in black churches, and, though a provocative tone characterizes his preaching insights on the subject of racism,

McMickle fails to provide an adequate remedy. He seemingly gives exclusive attention to the “priestly” dimension, one of Peter J. Paris’s four ideal leadership types (1991), as an apt model to help middle-class blacks cope and respond to the challenge of racism. “If the church is to have a relevant ministry as it moves into the twenty-first century,” contends McMickle, “we must begin speaking less about race and more about class” (2000: 5). Citing Paris, McMickle’s preacher assumes the role of priest because “Priests have helped the people to endure realities they cannot readily change and to make constructive use of every possible opportunity for self-development under the conditions of bondage” (McMickle 2000: 25).

A valid recovery of the priestly function is desirable, indeed; however, McMickle’s homiletic ostensibly neglects the complementary role of the prophetic. Any polarizing resolution that privileges the priestly over the prophetic, predictably, fails to account for the ways in which Christian praxis, at every level, must hold the priestly and prophetic roles as indispensable one to the other. Actually, as a ground for survival and social transformation, Paris better conceives the implications and nature of the priestly and prophetic dialectic when he writes:

The black Christian tradition has exercised both priestly and prophetic functions: the former aiding and abetting the race in its capacity to endure the effects of racism, the latter utilizing all available means to effect religious and moral reform in the society at large.¹⁰

Only a reciprocally enriching prophetic and priestly conception of a practical theology for homiletics can bolster the health of the church’s proclamation. A recent publication in black homiletical theory, Cleophus J. LaRue’s *The Heart of Black Preaching*, breaks significant ground in its analysis of the various realms in which the black sermon is given birth. LaRue’s description of the “domains of experience”¹¹ provides a broader and keener awareness of the prophetic and priestly dynamic.

¹⁰ Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, 11.

¹¹ LaRue lists five broad “domains of experience” that appear in black preaching that constitute a paradigm. They are: personal piety, care of the soul, social justice, corporate concerns, and maintenance of the institutional church. (Cf. Cleophus J. LaRue’s *The Heart of Black Preaching*, Westminster JohnKnox Press, 2000, 21).

On the whole, in reference to preaching's priestly work, a practical theology that makes no attempt to work in the direction of helping congregations negotiate faithful possibilities for creatively synthesizing their historical and ritual identities — while consciously reforming and affirming their charter in modern times — is always impractical.

TOWARD A PROPHETIC AND PRIESTLY SYNTHESIS

The prophetic and priestly dimensions of religious practice must function in correlation to offer an adequate biblical and theological bridge of meaning and action in the service of Jesus Christ today. No homiletic is sufficient without this theological bridge.

Practical theology, inherently interdisciplinary, draws upon theology as well as the human sciences. Interdisciplinary reflection is not unique to practical theology but traverses many of the theological disciplines. Furthermore, as it has once been claimed, “all roads lead to Rome,” a similar age-old adage rings true, “All theological roads lead to preaching.” The issue of interdisciplinary thinking is always relevant to the discussion of preaching. How the considered judgments about which fields *qua* fields are most germane to practical theology as these fields relate to and inform contextual considerations in the practice of preaching directly impacts the descriptive and hermeneutical agenda of homiletics. I turn our attention now to a brief consideration of two contemporary models of interdisciplinary thinking: the *Revised Praxis Correlational* and the *Transformational*.

Matthew Lamb, a major proponent of the *revised praxis* correlational model (in contrast to early Tillichian-styled *simple* correlationalists) attempts to move away from correlations at the level of theory alone. In his project he advocates fostering a mutually influential conversation between new social liberation movements and the Christian community — a conversation focused upon the *praxis* of each partner. Praxis is viewed as the struggle against some form of oppression. Here, interdisciplinary reflection is engaged when critical social theorists ask legitimate questions of theologies and ideologies. Lamb's seminal text, *Solidarity with Victims* (1982), is grounded in the conviction that “the cries of the victims are the voice of God (*Vox victimarum vox Dei*)”. Lamb's chief claim is, “the scandal of the Cross is the scandal of God identified with all the victims of history in the

passion of Christ. That identification was not a passive acceptance of suffering but an overpowering transformation whereby the forces of death and evil were overcome through the resurrection” (Lamb 1982: 1). In Lamb’s political theology it is agapic praxis (self-transcending love that breaks the hold of bias on the human mind and heart) that finds correlation with noetic (intellectual) praxis.

Accordingly, Lamb offers two fundamental claims. His first claim is that solidarity with the victims of history cannot be genuine if it: 1) trivializes their histories of suffering by muting their cries and their claim on our consciences, or 2) seeks to distance itself from these histories of sufferings by switching places and victimizing the victors, thereby, ironically, making the violent bias of the victors its own. His second claim is that options for praxis which are open to genuine solidarity with the concrete histories of the suffering are, in fact, numerous, because of the pervasiveness of bias. The religious option is constituted in the conviction that to struggle for the realization of justice in history affirms that humankind is not simply on its own. Fundamentally, humans cannot justify themselves.

Lamb maintains that the cost of discipleship is to be prophetic toward the goal of orthopraxis (right action). Religious practices under dominating authorities, Lamb observes, can too easily fall into sacralism. When God is identified in this way, “priests will protect—but for a price” (1982:11). That is why there is an inimical relationship between sacralism and the sacralist bias. God becomes identified with the mighty and the powerful, not the victims. His anthropocentric turn to the victim fashions a political theology that “develops both a *hermeneutics of recovery* regarding the transcending values incarnated in overcoming the many histories of suffering, and a *hermeneutics of suspicion* regarding the dehumanizing disvalues alienating and distorting history” (1982:11).

While much of what Lamb claims supports a critical recovery of the prophetic in religious practice, two weaknesses in this liberationist model come into view. First, Lamb too narrowly conceives of God’s voice as merely the cries of victims. Is this the only image of God to be derived from Scripture? The self-critical component of the necessity for the transformation of the individual is severely marginalized by Lamb’s stronger emphasis on the critical analysis of systems and structures for an emancipatory end. Second, because Lamb does not seek a broad enough institutional base for his “new way of doing theology,” its practical and constructive agenda are imbalanced, despite his program’s strengths. Rather than enlisting local church commu-

nities and pastors as participant respondents to the question of what is at stake in religious practice, Lamb's revised praxis approach stops short. He only seeks collaboration with labor unions, secular racial and ethnic organizations, feminists, scientists, and academic theologians. And in his choice of academic theologians, he completely overlooks the serious liberation theological force in the works of James Cone.

However carefully one draws on the strength of Lamb's prophetic claims for developing a practical theological framework, a subsequent question must be asked of Lamb's practical theology: "What comes after liberation?" In the past, the traditional liberationists' responses to matters of spiritual oppression and humanity's redemption from corporeal sin against the Creator have been imperceptible or unsatisfactory. For this reason, James E. Loder's transformational model of interdisciplinary work, when held in dialectic tension with Lamb's insights, can give an intrinsic supplement to the prophetic claims of Lamb's model.

Loder's transformational scheme presupposes that theology and its non-theological partners stand, conceptually, in an asymmetrical bipolar relational unity. Loder claims that this unity is analogous to unity of the divine and human persons in Christ, as this relationship was articulated by the Council of Chalcedon, and later re-interpreted by Barth and his interpreters. According to a Barthian interpretation, three key aspects of the divine-human relationality of the Christ are indissoluble differentiation, inseparable unity, and indestructible order. Following Chalcedon, Loder argues for an interdisciplinary relationship between theology and the human sciences constituted in such a Christological pattern demonstrating the same three key aspects. In the second person in the Trinity the divine and human natures coexist constantly without the reduction of one to the other, with the divine having logical and ontological priority over the human. Loder calls this priority "marginal control".

Accordingly, in the transformational model, the human sciences, though "marginally controlled" by theology, are taken seriously. Loder presumes that the field of practical theology has a theological center, in which the generative problematic lies not in the field's practices but at its core, that is, in the question itself of "why" the relationship between these two phenomena (theology and the human sciences) is, indeed, such a problem (1999: 359). In his attempt to reorient the field, Loder's "interdisciplinary and self-involving" methodology strives to establish a relationship between theology and the human sciences in which the divine and human realities are two quali-

tatively distinct realities working in an inclusive theory of divine-human action. Any reliance on assumptions — from nontheological fields — that are inconsistent with Christian theology and Christian revelation must be negated, so that the positive contributions of these fields to religious practice can be appropriated. Thus, the logic of transformation is a process of double negation.

In “Normativity and Context in Practical Theology: The Interdisciplinary Issue” (1999), Loder compendiously outlines five core dimensions of practical theology: historical, systematic, ecclesial, operational, and contextual. The *historical* dimension traces practical theology from its biblical and early church roots through Schleiermacher and onward. The second, *systematic* dimension, is given methodological priority in Loder’s program. With the person of Jesus Christ as described in the Chalcedonian formulation as his starting point, one systematic task is “to point to the mystery of God’s nature and action, organizing the human action disciplines in constructive relationship with theological disciplines” (1999:361-2). In contrast to Lamb’s revised praxis model, Loder claims that the baseline of a viable practical theological approach must be theological, not experiential, for if it is experience-based, “the relationality may implicitly legitimate incoherence since it overtly rejects universals and affirms justice and narratives as universally applicable.” (1999:363).

The third, *ecclesial*, dimension is where the locus of practical theology becomes most visible through its manifestation in a realm of accountability “to the people of God and to the Spirit of God by whom the life of the church is created and sustained” (1999:361). The *operational* dimension is fourth. Here, at the confluence of the historical, systematic, and ecclesial dimensions of such religious practices as preaching, educational instruction, and counseling are operationalized into ministry forms. By operationalization, Loder means “these practices are not the core of the discipline, but they are essential to the field of practical theology and often bring the central problematic of the field to its sharpest focus” (1999:361). Finally, the *contextual* dimension is noted. “Social and cultural trends and movements inevitably permeate all dimensions of the field of practical theology and have direct bearing on how the field is construed and how the disciplines may undergo change historically, yet without departing from the central problematic.” (1999:361) Notwithstanding this detail, little else regarding the role of context is stated. In the appendix to his essay Loder ostensibly strives to explain how transformation is not solely about the transformation of the indi-

vidual. He points out that transformation is, instead, operative for *all* of human action (e.g., biology, psychology, religion). Nevertheless, if one is pursuing a holistic practical theology, Loder's contextual and operational dimensions are in need of a material expansion.

Norms of practice are contextually conditioned. The ways in which practices such as preaching are actualized in the present always imply the historically and linguistically mediated stories which highlight the crucial importance of context. In light of this claim, Gadamer's hermeneutical theory, a project with phenomenological concerns about what happens to us when we say we understand, reminds the contemporary preacher-practical theologian that understanding (*Verstehen*), especially the understanding of sacred texts, is always a connection *between* the horizons, of our assumptions, culture, and tradition *toward* the horizon of the text.

The transformational model is not without its limitations for doing theology contextually. Structurally, the Loderian model is too university-based, which corresponds rather closely to Lamb's noetic praxis. This means that Loder's structuralist framework relies too heavily on knowledge gained at an academic university rather than drawing from the formulations of indigenous theology in particular ecclesial communities. Granted, for Loder, proximate norms and goals are manifested in *koinonia*. But according to Loder's program of relating theology and science to guide practical theological practice, practitioners, it appears, would need to possess a strong knowledge of theological themes and scientific terminology. Ironically, the theological conundrum here becomes one of access. What practical ways can this model be shared and implemented with rural and urban communities of faith who are often disconnected from cutting-edge academic resources? How could they effectively construct for themselves a *bona fide* theology consistent with Loder's transformational scheme?

Despite these limitations, the transformational model, nevertheless, offers the preacher-practical theologian a theologically robust model for conceptualizing the pattern of humanity's once-for-all and ongoing redemption. Regrettably, what remains underdeveloped, I think, is a discussion of how his proposed methodology could be refashioned to embody more fully the normative purposes of the Christian life in particular contexts of experience. On the one hand, a firm regulative framework is established in Loder's transformational model — a framework which is crucial for priestly work. Yet on the other hand, a fuller illustration of the practical aspect, one which not only conceptualizes Jesus Christ as the normative center of Christian

faith and witness, but concurrently envisages him as inculturated, shared, and demonstrated in community and in the world, seems to be needed. Such an emphasis would buttress Loder's Christological claims toward a clearer conceptualization of the prophetic.

PROPHETIC AND PRIESTLY SYNTHESIS: IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

A critical appropriation of the rudiments of both the liberationist and transformational interdisciplinary models points the preacher as a practical theologian toward a more authentic way of preaching and doing theology contextually. It values the reflexive and introspective character of theory and the concrete realities of praxis in contemporary religious practice. Hence, an approach to homiletics that synthesizes the prophetic and priestly is fertile ground for meaningfully addressing the state of the health of the church's proclamation in our times. A biblically authorized confluence of the images of prophet and priest distinguishes the worth among the liberationists whose tendentious cry for justice and moral commitments demand more of preaching than Christ-centered sermons; it was Jesus who stood with scroll in hand in a Nazareth synagogue ordaining the prophetic work (Luke 4: 16-20).

Today's preacher-prophet is consecrated to religious practice in the lineage of the biblical prophets and Jesus Christ; to the task of "telling again" the religious community to "pay attention"; to struggle against concrete forms of oppression; to critically theorize and hold theology accountable to its questions about justice, dominance, and freedom; to remind the academic elite of the ever-widening theory-constructing gap between the intellectually privileged and those on the margins; to rehearse in the minds of religious communities that Christian conversion demands a withdrawal from the sacralist bias that comes with orthodoxy without orthopraxy. And, even if prophetic preaching were to accomplish this aim, a true synthesis would then be only partly realized. Not until a critical correlation is made with the transformational model of interdisciplinarity can preaching be, in reality, practical theology.

While a constructive synthesis works through these particular frameworks, holding in tension points of incongruence, the broad contours of what each interdisciplinary model proposes, at least conceptually, beckons the contemporary preacher as practical theologian back to the primary task

of attentiveness. Transformationalists recognize that *theoria* and *praxeis* are brought into conformity with Jesus Christ. Indeed, the key for Loder is the revelation of Jesus Christ and His mission and the work of His Spirit that must be allowed to overhaul, replace and define again the philosophical foundations of theory and practice. Only then can the scientific and social historical expression of this relationality be transformed.

HOMILETICS: PITFALLS AND POSSIBILITIES

The modern homiletical approach of neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth on the whole, disregards the role of context in the task of practical theology. The transformational-liberationist synthesis I am proposing is not at work in his homiletics. For Barth, theology is *Nach-Denken*, a process of *thinking afterwards* about what is contained in God's self-revelation. Therefore, in Barth's homiletical view, the preacher is not really in conversation with Scripture; rather, the preacher is a mere pulpit puppeteer while the academic theologian is accorded a greater textual intimacy in the duty of dogmatic reflection. Consequently, in Barth's homiletical strategy, the Scriptures are not amenable to an authentic interrogation of the questions the preacher has for the text. Instead, Barth contends that the movement from text to sermon is always uni-directional. God speaks through scripture and the preacher is simply one who is commandeered by God. Everything is up to God; there is never a turn to the hearer. This implies passive reception. Therefore, for the task of preaching, interdisciplinary conversation with the human sciences is largely unwarranted.

The locus of preaching's authority — and the requisite accountability of the preacher — does not derive from the congregation, but from the Word of God, which God alone speaks. The job description of the preacher, according to Barth, relegates the preacher to the single status of a performer of theology. Barth miscalculates the theory—praxis interchange, and as a consequence, his homiletic is rendered conspicuously inadequate for practical theology. It is theologically problematic to hold that the business of serious reflection on the mission and doctrine of the church and the Bible is the duty of "theologians." Disappointingly, Barth leaves all theory-formulation to professional academicians. On this point, it must be conceded that Barth probably held a different expectation of the professional theologian's relationship to the church than we do today. Being a church practitioner par-

participating in the life of the church was a *sine qua non* for being a theologian in Barth's day. Regrettably, these two roles are not necessarily conjoined in the postmodern milieu.

Barth's 1931-32 lectures on preaching in Bonn, Germany, advanced his theological understanding of the phenomena of what happens when preaching takes place. These lectures were published as *Homiletics* in 1991. It is here that we encounter Barth's two-part definition of preaching:

Preaching is the Word of God which he himself speaks, claiming for the purpose the exposition of a biblical text in free human words that are relevant to contemporaries by those who are called to do this in the church that is obedient to its commission. Preaching is an attempt enjoined upon the church to serve God's own Word, through one who is called thereto, by expounding a biblical text in human words and making relevant to contemporaries in intimation of what they hear of God himself (Barth 1991: 44).

Barth provides the modern world with a fervid Christological formulation for preaching, defining it as the Word of God in which God alone speaks. In his *Göttingen Dogmatics*, what must be emphasized in preaching, he contends, is that the "kerygma" is proclaimed. The kerygma, he believes is the essential core of preaching (Barth, 1991a: 24). Furthermore, preaching consists of (1) revelation or the Word of God, (2) the church as the context for preaching, (3) preaching as divine command, (4) an understanding of a special ministry for the preacher, (5) the recognition that preaching is always only an attempt, (6) the realization that preaching always relates to Scripture, (7) an understanding of preaching as individual speech, (8) a recognition that preaching is an exposition of the biblical text, and (9) the acknowledgment that the Holy Spirit is preaching's starting point, center, and conclusion.

Despite these strong elements, there are at least four conspicuous weaknesses that render Barth's homiletic approach inadequate for nurturing the priestly and prophetic dimensions of preaching. First, Barth fails to give sufficient attention to the shared community's ownership of the theology proclaimed. Staunchly visible is Barth's apparent commitment to hierarchical and class designations within the social configuration of the institutional church. The preacher is accorded the special status of herald, although the personal and charismatic authority of the preacher, which are partly legitimated and affirmed by the context and its receptors, is seemingly inconse-

quential for Barth. Consequently, there is no perspicuity in his homiletic regarding how orthodoxy and orthopraxy indwell, inform, revise, and dialogue with each other. Second, his homiletical program gives too much agency to the preacher, not based on what the preacher proclaims, but rather concerning that with which the preacher is entrusted. To preach, in Barth's view, is not to reflect on or bring to the light of Scripture the missional practices of the church, social justice issues, or even to foster a concern for piety, all matters of contextualization. Rather, declares Barth, preaching is the announcement of what God has done—*Deus dixit!* Barth uses this Latin term, which means, *God has spoken*, to indicate “a special, once-for-all, contingent event” (Barth 1991a: 59) Preaching is *in toto*, therefore, reflection back on this decisive event.

Third, despite his strong Christological formulation for preaching, his homiletical program emanates from a theology that lacks apocalyptic force. Although he is a dialectical theologian, Barth rejects the ability of the preacher and the church to address, engage, and translate the modern concerns of secular society. His homiletical strategy seemingly views human communities as “universal” in their question sets and their cultural composition, and for this reason, he fails to distinguish and anticipate the ecclesial diversity in Christian communities outside his *sitz im Leben*. Despite these marks of deficiency, I would agree that much of Barth's theological response in opposition to the “all-too-accommodating” course of theological liberalism of his time was not only imperative, but in significant respects pragmatically sound and necessary for the preservation of dogmatic reflection.

On the contrary, St. Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* provides a significant counter to Barth's homiletic. Above all, Augustine claims in Book III. 19 that preaching is contextual; preaching demands careful attention to what is proper to places, times, and persons. Viewing eloquence as value-neutral, Augustine suggests that his readers find truth wherever it may be discovered. This search was better known as making the most of “Egyptian gold” or putting secular things to use in the service of sacred purposes.

From Augustine's homiletical wisdom, there are at least five identifiable contextual rules of art for the preacher-practical theologian. The first is to recognize that if one cannot speak or preach eloquently, then that one should strive no less to speak wisely. Though the people benefit less, they still benefit. Second, the preacher is first a petitioner (praying for him/herself and others) before he or she is a speaker. Third, preaching is a three-fold task, which requires the preacher: (1) conciliate the oppressed, (2) arouse the remiss,

and (3) teach the ignorant of the subject and what to expect. Fourth, preachers do well to aim for clarity over eloquence. If this means that vernacular speech brings clarity, by all means it should be used. Finally, Christian preaching is popular rhetoric; a preacher should be able to address the ignorant as well as the educated.

Ignoring what Augustine's considers the essentials of homiletical skill, Barth's commissioned and called preacher is not only advised to shun imagination and the tools for eloquence as nonessentials, but is encouraged to do so because preaching must not get lost in the layers of extra material and forget its core—the kerygma. Neither missionary, panegyric, nor prophetic preaching forms are explicitly considered by Augustine or Barth. Consistent with Augustine, however, is Barth's focus on liturgical preaching. Both strongly emphasize the institutional church as the place for preaching. For Barth, preaching in the fullest sense is preaching that is accompanied and illuminated by the sacraments (1991a: 58-59).

CONCLUSION: A VOICE RECLAIMED IS A VOICE OF HOPE

Preaching in the twenty-first century is no small task. It demands a resolute commitment from the preacher to nurture and nourish both the prophetic and priestly dimensions of religious practice. Only a homiletic understood as a practical theology, and which reclaims for preaching a catalytic role for transforming human action in the service of Jesus Christ, can hope to be profitable in a fragmented postmodern and increasingly pluralistic world. I have argued that the primary concern of practical theology is the actualization and maintenance of the God—human relationship, and has as its core concern the health of the church's proclamation. In view of this, practical theology must affirm the vital role of nurturing both the priestly and prophetic dimensions of religious practice; for it is only in light of both of these that Christian preaching can begin to uphold and clarify the church's mission within the world in the service of Jesus Christ to the glory of God. Surely, any self-described practical theology that is disassociated from this crucial claim either veers away from its lifeblood of Christian hope and settles for the maintenance of social preservation, or too quickly forecloses on the encounter with God, who awakens in us new gifts, courtesy of the Holy Spirit's power to verify and refine existing norms of practice—norms that become obscured by traditionalism and apathetic resignation.

Cast in the hopeful light of priestly and prophetic reunion, Christian preaching need not file for bankruptcy. The Good News proclaimed is the genuine hope that holds together faith's horizon. This hope interprets human action by means of the whole counsel of Scripture and the idiosyncratic channels of rich and varied traditions. But to secure this hope, preachers and homileticians must reclaim that precious commodity that preaching has too easily forfeited—its voice, for the sake of the church's health. When preaching recovers its authentic voice, the clarion and prophetic utterances of liberationists will find their theological soul mate in the priestly work of transformationalists whose unified witness call to mind the Spirit's power to summon individuals into personal introspection and consecration before their invariable reentrance into the world.

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