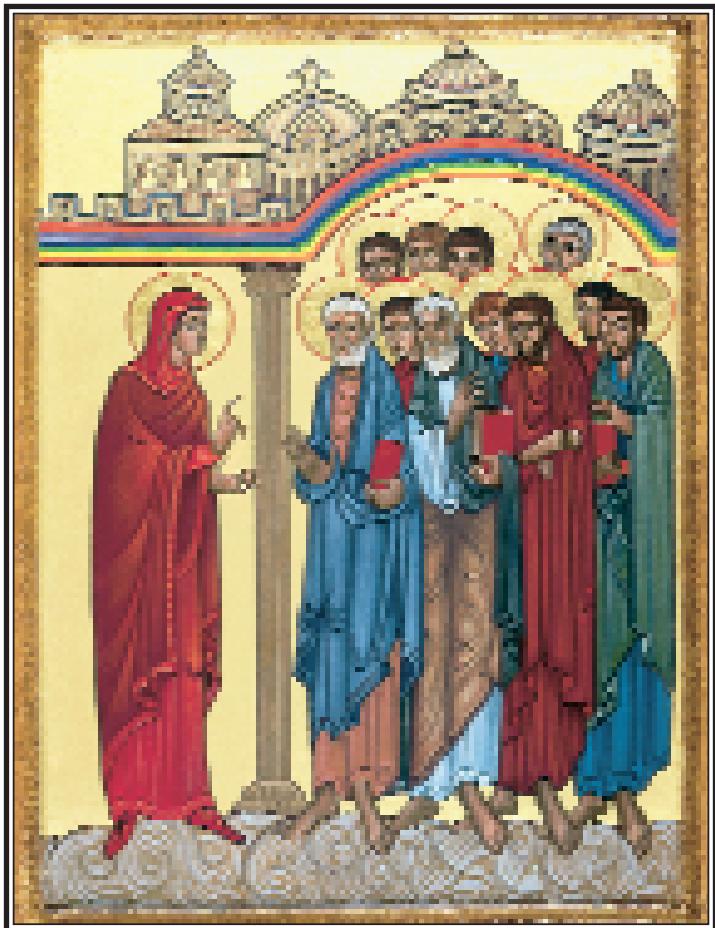


SISTERS IN THE PULPIT

INSIGHTS

The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary



SPRING 2004

MILES • ZINK-SAWYER • BRIDGEMAN DAVIS • DUNN
JOHNSON • ANDERSON • KERSHNER • CARL • SAXON
HALL • RIGBY • JENSEN • COLE

INSIGHTS

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COVER: "Mary Magdalene Announces the Resurrection," by Mary Charles McGough, O.S.B. (acrylic on wood, 3' x 4'). Reprinted with permission.

She was by no means the first woman to proclaim good news in the Bible, but Mary Magdalene did get to preach the original Easter sermon. Sadly, many Christians have failed to honor that part of her reputation. (The Greek Orthodox tradition, which claims Mary Magdalene as the first apostle, is a notable exception.) "She was the first one to whom the message was given," remarks seventy-nine-year-old Sister Mary Charles McGough, a contemporary iconographer who paints in the Byzantine style, "and she was told to tell the boys." When Sister Mary Charles was commissioned to create this work for the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in San Diego there were few ancient prototypes to draw on; this icon is based on a tiny illuminated manuscript, the only such depiction of Mary Magdalene she could find. For Sister Mary Charles, this scene is inspired by the hope of "women finding their true place in the church."

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INTRODUCTION

I grew up in a male-dominated church. Aside from many church school teachers and several memorable directors of Christian education, I cannot recall encountering one woman in leadership in any of the congregations to which I belonged as I grew up—not a woman elder, not a woman deacon, and certainly not a woman pastor.

So it is that I remember vividly the first time I heard a woman preach. I was a first-year student at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, and Dr. Elizabeth Achtemeier preached one day in Watts Chapel. Her sermon, delivered in the late 1970s, was so memorable to me that I can still recall its title: “The Yellow Bicycle.” I can recall, for reasons I can’t explain, her use of the word “problematic,” and how much I liked that word. I can recall the strong social justice theme which the sermon carried, turning around a personal anecdote of a yellow bicycle being stolen from the Achtemeiers’s home. I can recall her economic use of language, her faithful and intellectual honesty, and the compelling authority of her presence in the pulpit.

That was a long time ago. It is less likely, certainly in the mainstream Protestant churches of North America, that one can reach young adulthood in these days without having had much exposure to women preachers.

This edition of *Insights* offers some mileposts that suggest how profoundly we have been nurtured over the last several decades by a greater abundance of women in the pulpit. Carol Miles, assistant professor of homiletics here at Austin Seminary, is joined by Austin Seminary alumnae, noted homileticians, and other practitioners who offer their honest and timely reflections on how far women have come in the practice of preaching—and on the road that still lies before them. This issue promises to be a keeper. May you be edified by it.

Theodore J. Wardlaw
President, Austin Seminary



AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY: PREACHING AS WOMEN'S WORK

CAROL ANTABLIN MILES

*So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

—Genesis 1:27

Women hold up half the sky.

—Chinese proverb

 In the last twenty-five years, the number of women ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has soared. In 1977 the denomination reported a total of 350 active woman ministers. As of 2002, the count had grown to 3,766.¹ Today more women than ever before are enrolling in seminary and pursuing the master of divinity (M.Div.) degree. At mainline Protestant theological schools, as many as fifty percent of M.Div. students are female.²

Carol Miles is assistant professor of homiletics at Austin Seminary. She earned an A.B. in linguistics and an A.B. in psychology from the University of California at Berkeley, an M.A. from the University of Southern California, and an M.Div. and Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary. Her primary research area is Christian preaching of the Old Testament, in particular, the theologically difficult texts of the Old Testament.

While it is true that numbers can be misleading—not all women who attend seminary end up seeking employment in the church, and women who do so tend to leave their positions at higher rates than men³—it is difficult to deny that a genuine shift is taking place in the life of the church.

What impact is the influx of women in ministry having on the practice of preaching? Are there differences in the way men and women approach the task of sermon preparation? How are women in the pulpit being received in local congregations?

These are difficult questions to answer definitively. Some are difficult because the answer will emerge only over time. For example, we cannot yet fully know the impact of women practitioners on the task of preaching. For other questions, however, the difficulty lies primarily in the prospect of speaking of “women preachers” as though they were a uniform group. An A.M.E. Zion pastor in Atlanta, a Church of the Brethren pastor in Fresno, and an Episcopal priest in Boston are all “women preachers,” but their experiences of preaching may be quite different. In fact, with some aspects of the preaching task, women may find more common ground between themselves and the men of their own tradition than between themselves and women of other traditions.

In light of these difficulties, let me offer the following caveat: The insights, claims, and exhortations in these reflections on preaching primarily derive from, and speak to, the experience of women preachers in the PC(USA) and other mainline Protestant denominations. While I will continue to use such problematic terms as “female clergy” and “women in the pulpit,” I do so fully recognizing that the group of pastors they in fact refer to is much more narrowly circumscribed.

WHO CAN SPEAK FOR GOD?

A few years ago an alumna from Austin Seminary told me the following story: She had been serving the same church as solo pastor for five or six years. One Sunday morning a woman from the congregation took her aside to recount an exchange she had with her young daughter. Quite out of the blue, the girl, who had been born and raised in the church, asked her mother, “Mommy, can men be preachers, too?”

On the one hand, I am thoroughly charmed by this little girl’s question. It sends me dreaming about the future of the church and those who may one day be called to serve it. It sets me pondering what effect growing up in a church with a female pastor will have on her over time. What will it contribute to her image of God, her understanding of sin and grace, her sense of connection to a community of faith? How will her theological world view be shaped and structured differently as a result of hearing the gospel proclaimed regularly in a woman’s voice?

On the other hand, I find this little girl’s question sobering. Her innocent flouting of traditional gender roles (“Can *men* be preachers, too?”) suggests the extent to which social conditioning is a factor, at least for children, in creating an expectation that pastors are male. It’s a matter of course: If a child has little or no experience of women in the pulpit, he or she will come to associate the task of preaching with men.

The insidious nature of this process was illuminated for me recently by my own children. I have two young sons whom I have been trying to enlist in a campaign to keep

the house clean and orderly. It has been a losing battle. Once when I asked the boys to look around the family room, pick up all of the things that are theirs, and put them away, one of them protested, “But that’s women’s work!” Where on earth did they get that idea? They learned it from me, of course. Since my boys have had little or no experience of anyone picking anything up but their mother, they have come to associate the task of housework with women.

A further problem with this type of social conditioning is that the assumptions and expectations that are formed in us at a young age are not easy to adjust. Despite the fact that the PC(USA) has been ordaining women for the whole of my lifetime, I had never met—or even laid eyes on—a female pastor until I entered seminary at age twenty-seven. I had never heard a woman preach, and all of my role models for pastoral ministry were men. When I began to sense God’s call in my life as a high school senior, I was reluctant to trust it. (“Can women really *do* this? Can *I* really do this? Is this the voice of God or personal aspiration?”) Even though my call to teach and preach had been affirmed by the community at various points along the way, it took ten more years for me to act on it.

I hear echoes of the same self-doubt and the struggle to make peace with the same handful of biblical texts in the questions and stories of my women students. Some of them exhibit the confidence and sense of entitlement we saw in the little girl who knew without question that preaching is women’s work. Far more, however, have a sense of fear that they are overreaching. Because they feel they may somehow be doing something wrong, these women students are often timid—almost apologetic—in the pulpit.

Of course, this would not be the first time the work of the Holy Spirit has been mistaken for wrongdoing. On the day of Pentecost, when the followers of Jesus were each given a language to speak in order to proclaim the gospel of God, some in the crowd accused them of being drunk. Peter corrected them and explained, “this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.’” (Acts 2:17-18)

In the New Testament, both prophesying and preaching are understood to be gifts of the Holy Spirit. Like the variety of other charisms, these gifts are not distributed according to gender, but are given to both men and women for the common good (cf. I Cor. 12:4-11). We receive these gifts in conjunction with our initiation into the Christian community. They are conferred upon us in the sacrament of baptism. Our Reformed liturgy affirms this in the prayer of thanksgiving over the water:

We praise you that in baptism
you give us your Holy Spirit,
who teaches us and leads us into all truth,
filling us with a variety of gifts,
that we might proclaim the gospel to all nations
and serve you as a royal priesthood.⁴

Spirit-centered denominations with roots in the Holiness and Pentecostal movements have never questioned women's authority in the church. They have ordained women since their founding in the mid-nineteenth century. Most mainline Protestant churches, however, did not decide to ordain women until a hundred years later. What took so long? According to Barbara Brown Zikmund, the PC(USA), the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are "institution-centered" denominations that have always valued church order and taken ordination very seriously. Accordingly,

These four denominations wrestled long and hard with the question of women's ordination, and decisions leading to ordination came in incremental steps.... Interestingly, even when [they] agreed that no biblical or theological reason existed to deny women ordination, they still moved slowly.... Leaders in the institution-centered denominations hesitated to take action without looking at all the institutional consequences.⁵

Once the decision was made, however, Zikmund adds, these churches began to "live out the new order with remarkable vigor."

ALL THINGS BEING EQUAL?

In a recent study on women preachers and the creative process, Jana Childers asked twelve women pastors and teachers to record and reflect on their own process of sermon preparation.⁶ For the most part, the methods described would sound familiar to any preacher, male or female. They begin with an initial reading of the Scripture text sometime early in the week, and end with a sermon draft by Friday afternoon (or, for some of us, Saturday evening). In between there is brainstorming, language work, talking with spouses and colleagues, reading commentaries, taking walks, editing, etc.—all standard procedure.

On the surface it appears that, because sermon preparation requires all preachers to perform the same task—make the move from text to sermon—using the same set of tools, gender is irrelevant. But there are details in these descriptions that indicate otherwise. For example, a number of the women reported preparing their sermons at home. In addition to prayer and word studies, they spoke of laundry, food preparation, and feeding animals. Two women mentioned writing with a dog or cat in their lap. Why is this significant? First, it reveals a certain connection to the created order, and the grounding of a sacred process (listening for the word of God for the people of God) in the midst of the mundane. Second, it suggests that women bring their own set of priorities and values to the task, values that have been "nurtured in the private, domes-

tic sphere to which women have been restricted for so long.”⁷

Several other women mentioned working closely with students or colleagues with whom they would share worship leadership in an effort to discern the claim of the text on their lives and the life of the congregation. By making the process more dialogical, these women exhibit a certain relationality and regard for the voice of others that underlies their preaching.

Although it is not always detectable in these reflections, what makes sermon preparation different for women than for men is the set of experiences they bring with them to the task of preaching. One of the key insights of contemporary hermeneutics is that biblical interpretation cannot be done in a way that is wholly objective. Who we are as interpreters—with our own set of predilections and prejudices, questions and indignations—affects what we understand to be the meaning of a biblical text.

There is a children’s story by Arnold Lobel that I always read to my introductory preaching students. It is the story of Very Tall Mouse and Very Short Mouse, who are friends. As they go walking through the world together, they each greet whomever and whatever they happen to see along the way. The way Lobel writes it, it sounds almost like a litany: “‘Hello birds,’ said Very Tall Mouse. ‘Hello bugs,’ said Very Short Mouse. ‘Hello flowers,’ said Very Tall Mouse. ‘Hello roots,’ said Very Short Mouse....” In the course of their journey, Very Tall Mouse greets birds, flowers, raindrops, the roof, and the ceiling; Very Short Mouse greets bugs, roots, puddles, the cellar, and the floor.⁸ We soon detect a pattern.

I use this story to illustrate the way our personal demographics or “social location” (gender, race, class, etc.) conspire to at least partially condition what we “see” in a biblical text. What Very Tall Mouse and Very Short Mouse teach us is that we are inclined to see what is in our own natural field of vision. Let me give another example: If we are tall we see what is stored on top of the refrigerator. If we are short we see what is in the back of the bottom inside shelf. If we want to see what the other sees just by virtue of their genetic make-up, we have to make adjustments (stand on a step-stool, bend down). It is important to acknowledge that things exist and happen—important things, beautiful things, troubling things—that are outside of our natural field of vision. If we fail to recognize that they are there, we can be blind sided later.

My husband and I would often discuss the biblical texts we were preaching on. When we were considering a gospel narrative in which Jesus had an encounter with someone, my husband would frequently view the text from the perspective of either the disciples or Jesus. I, in contrast, always identified with “the other”—the lame man lying by the pool with no one to help him; the little boy who was rendered mute by demons, who cast himself into the fire; the woman Jesus met by the well who liked to talk religion. Can you detect the pattern? Because of our life experiences and the ways we were socialized into the world, my husband more naturally identified with the characters who were self-directing and powerful; I found myself drawn to the vulnerable and the underdog. The value of our conversations was in the way we were able to help each other look beyond our own inclinations and see dynamics and subtleties in the text that we may not have otherwise seen.

On the final page of *Mouse Tales*, Very Tall Mouse and Very Short Mouse rush inside to wait out a rain shower. Standing by the window, Very Tall Mouse lifts up Very Short Mouse so he can see too, and together they say, “Hello Rainbow.”

Years ago when I told a friend that I had decided to pursue Ph.D. studies in homiletics, she affirmed my choice and added, “I remember the first time I heard a woman preach; it felt like we had our knees together under the kitchen table.” I know the feeling she was talking about. I have had it when a woman in the pulpit tells a story about an overly ambitious baking project, or a failed attempt to complete a bicycle race. I have had it when a woman in the pulpit admits her fear about letting her children walk to school for the first time, or that she is not volunteering in the classroom enough. I have had it when a woman in the pulpit describes what she went through to name a second child, or escape her cabin of giddy counselees to spend time alone in a hilltop chapel. I have had it whenever a preacher makes me feel as though she really knows me, understands my life, makes me feel “seen.”

But not only that. With her presence and her words, she is bringing my life—the things I do and think about and am responsible for—into the sanctuary of God, into the worship life of the church. When a preacher lifts up a specifically female experience and places it in conversation with the biblical text it implicitly validates that experience. It communicates that God is present and active in *my* world.

Of course this raises the question, Can’t male preachers do the same thing by referencing women’s experiences or including examples and stories about women? Certainly. Preachers always have to consider the needs and concerns of not just women but a wide variety of congregation members when they are listening for the word of God in a text, and will try to include references and examples and stories in their sermons that represent a range of experiences. Obviously, no preacher can know all of these experiences firsthand, but will use what Fred Craddock calls an “empathetic imagination” to think about where the claim of the text intersects different people’s lives. Still, there is something deeply affecting when a preacher does know something of your own experience firsthand and speaks of it in a sermon. It’s like hearing your name over a loudspeaker.

“MANY ARE CALLED, BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN” ... AS HEAD OF STAFF

I began this essay with the claim that the number of women in ministry had grown exponentially in the last twenty-five years, and that more women than ever are training for pastoral ministry. While the data suggest that, at this rate, female clergy will quickly outnumber their male counterparts, there are other signs to the contrary. According to the Office of Research Services and Comparative Statistics of the PC(USA), in 2002 there were a total of 13,845 active Presbyterian ministers. Of this number, twenty-seven percent were women, roughly half of whom were serving in contexts other than the parish (e.g., as chaplains, pastoral counselors, presbytery executives).

When we look at the data on parish ministry, we find that male clergy outnumber female clergy five-to-one. Moreover, if we exclude all who were serving as associate,

interim, and supply pastors, the ratio of men to women was even higher, six to one. In hard numbers, of the 7,069 Presbyterian congregations with installed pastors in 2002, only 983 were served by a woman pastor, co-pastor, or head of staff.⁹ That means only fourteen percent of PC(USA) churches have a woman in the pulpit regularly.

One final set of statistics is especially telling. Of the 983 churches being served by a female head or co-pastor, 869 of them have 300 members or less. The greatest number of women serve in churches with 51-100 members. There is an inverse relation between size of membership and number of women clergy. The larger the congregation, the less likely they are to have a woman as head of staff. In 2002 there were 486 Presbyterian congregations with a membership of 800 or more; only ten of them were served by a woman.¹⁰

According to these numbers, while there are more women pastors in the PC(USA) now than at any other time, they are routinely being called to small churches. It is not clear whether this is by choice, or represents a significant amount of “settling” on the part of women candidates. A clue may be found in the title of a recent article on the call process in *The Christian Century*: “Young, male, and married: What search committees want.” The article concludes with a quote from the executive director of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) lamenting this bias among lay leaders and expressing his desire to convince them that “good pastors are available in the female gender and in all colors.”

It is even possible to argue that better pastors are available in the female gender. It is unfortunate, but often still the case, that successful people who are not part of the dominant social group have had to be twice as competent in their fields in order to achieve what they have. I am reminded of a famous line about the women who danced on screen with Fred Astaire. Once when Astaire was being praised for his sheer artistry, someone quipped, “Yes, but what about his partners? They had to do everything he did, only they did it backwards and in high heels.”

Clergywomen often have to labor under similarly treacherous conditions. I was worshipping in a downtown church in the Bible Belt recently, and after the service I thanked the female associate pastor who served as liturgist for her excellent reading and thoughtful prayers. She started to brush my compliment off and then stopped and whispered, “You know, you have to be twice as good, because if you aren’t, you hear about it.” In another large downtown church, one of my former students was told during an on-site interview that no woman pastor had never “made it” there.

Unfortunately, much of the time the resistance to female clergy originates with their male colleagues. This can be particularly trying when a male head of staff is unsupportive of a female associate. According to an Alban Institute study on clergy-women in the United Methodist Church, one of the key factors affecting stress level is tension with male colleagues.¹² Such tension can be created when a woman’s ministry is not taken seriously by the senior pastor, her contributions are minimized by the senior pastor, or there is a lack of trust between her and the senior pastor. The study suggests that one of the most destructive dynamics is introduced when the senior minister feels competitive with his female associate.

Many women find themselves trying to perform their pastoral duties while swim-

ming against a tide of opposition (e.g., without support from her senior pastor or under the scrutiny of a vocal minority waiting for her to fail). Most of the time, however, the signs of opposition to her ministry are far more subtle.

For example, in the pulpit of my home church there is a small plaque, visible only to the preacher, that reads, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” These words, quoted from the Gospel of John, are intended to serve as a reminder to the one standing in the pulpit that what the congregation gathered for worship is longing for, ultimately, is an encounter with the living Christ. But for the woman who stands in that place, these words subtly communicate that she does not belong there. They are not addressed to her. “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

Female clergy still encounter vestiges of the days before women’s ordination. They stand in pulpits that are too tall for them to be seen from, and speak into lapel mikes with battery packs that are designed to clip onto a man’s belt. Typically, women have adapted to these situations by standing on a riser and remembering to wear skirts and not dresses (which have no waist band) under their robes. Clergy supply stores have begun manufacturing vestments designed and sized for women, but other adjustments are needed to make the pulpit more hospitable to women.

While some congregations esteem their women pastors, and even prefer their preaching, we are forced to conclude that their presence in the pulpit has been met with limited acceptance. Maxine Walaskay, a pastoral psychologist, explains the ambivalence congregations feel this way:

My hunch is that, even when they like what they hear, they feel ambiguous about what they see. As one of my male seminary professors said twittingly: “It was a very well done sermon though my own theological inclinations on this matter are somewhat different than yours.... When you come right down to it, it’s just that I don’t want a woman to tell me what to do!” He certainly knew what he felt, even if he didn’t believe it.¹³

What I find distressing about this account is the way Walaskay’s seminary professor understands the task of preaching. His blurting out, “I don’t want a woman to tell me what to do!” betrays a widely held assumption that preaching is essentially moralizing from the pulpit. This characterization goes hand in hand with the popular assumption that the Bible is a guide book for living, a set of rules and regulations for the faithful to follow.

I reject both of these assumptions. Preaching, at its heart, is bearing witness to the gospel in relation to a particular biblical text. The preacher goes to the Scripture on behalf of the congregation, listening for the word of God, and in the sermon reports what she has seen there. Reporting what they have seen of Christ is something that women have always done, and have been instructed to do by Jesus himself in the New Testament. In the Gospel of John we read of the woman at the well who goes into town and testifies to her encounter with Jesus, bidding people to come and see a man who “told me everything I have ever done” (John 4:39). We also read of Mary who in her grief meets Christ outside the empty tomb. He tells her, “Do not hold on to me” but go, and tell the other disciples that I am ascending to my Father, and yours. And “Mary

Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her” (John 20:17-18).

Preaching may include a word of challenge or invitation to the congregation to respond a certain way to the gospel seen and heard, but it is hardly about “telling me what to do.” Walaskay argues that seeing a woman in the pulpit knocks people in the pews off balance. It is a new situation for them and they are working to make sense of it. The negative comments women receive suggest that the individual who spoke is at work reorganizing parts of his or her inner self and past experience in order to come to terms with a new reality—perhaps even the feminine dimension of God.

This is what it means to participate in the new creation, painful though it may be.

Walaskay’s insight here is profound. In the *Institutes*, Calvin argues in a section on preaching that for the Israelite community, “the teaching of the law and the exhortation of the prophets were a living image of God, just as Paul asserts that in his preaching the glory of God shines in the face of Christ.”¹⁵ If preaching is bearing a living image of God into the community of faith at worship, how vital it is, then, that women participate in that task. For the creation account in the first chapter of Genesis affirms that the image of God is both male and female.

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27)

In order for the community to experience something of the fullness of God, both men and women are needed to bear God’s image in the community at worship. For this reason, I believe, women in the pulpit are not simply to be tolerated; rather, women in the pulpit are essential to the health and life of the church. For, as Walaskay observes, this is what it means to participate in the new creation in Christ, painful though it may be.

A NEW VISION

In the last church my husband served, the fellowship hall stood adjacent to the north end of the sanctuary. It was a fairly small rectangular room with two doors that opened up on either side of the dais. Most weeks after worship, while their parents stood chatting in coffee hour, the children of the church would escape through these doors and into the empty sanctuary. In an instant our worship space was transformed by their child’s play. A game of hide and go seek would give way to freeze tag. Boys and girls would chase each other up and down the aisles and into the chancel. Then, without fail, they would all take a turn standing in the pulpit. They would inevitably tap the head of the microphone and, if it had been left on, they would sing, issue directions to their friends, and occasionally burp. Mostly they relished the sound of their own voice in the sanctuary.

My hope for the church is that the next generation of preachers, male and female, will feel the same freedom these children did to stand in the pulpit and let the voice of God resound in them.

NOTES

¹ The data were compiled from Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 138, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) web site: [www.pcusa.org/Research/Table 9](http://www.pcusa.org/Research/Table9.html). Number and Percent of Active PC(USA) Ministers by Call and Gender—1997-2002.

² John Dart, "Is it worth it? The Value of a Theological Education," in *The Christian Century*, 120:4 (February 22, 2003): 35.

³ Zikmund, et al., 7.

⁴ *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 411.

⁵ Zikmund, et al., 12.

⁶ Jana Childers, ed., *Birthing the Sermon; Women Preachers on the Creative Process* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).

⁷ Sally Helgesen, *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership* (New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990), xxi.

⁸ Arnold Lobel, *Mouse Tales* (Harper Trophy, 1978), 25-31.

⁹ It should be noted that the total number of PC(USA) congregations is 11,064, making the percentage of churches served by women pastors, co-pastors, or head of staff even smaller (8.8%). Perhaps more distressing, however, is the number of congregations (3,995) with no installed pastor, male or female. See link: [http://www.pcusa.org/Research/Table 9](http://www.pcusa.org/Research/Table9.html). Number and Percent of Active PC(USA) Ministers by Call and Gender—1997-2002, and Table 15. Number of Congregations, How They Are Served, Giving Information, and Worship Attendance by Church Membership Size—2002.

¹⁰ ibid., Table 15.

¹¹ John Dart, "Young, male, and married: What search committees want," in *The Christian Century*, 121:4 (February 24, 2004): 11.

¹² Marian Coger, *Women in Parish Ministry: Stress and Support* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1985).

¹³ Maxine Walaskay, "Gender and Preaching" in *Christian Ministry* 13, no. 1 (January 1982): 2-11

¹⁴ ibid.

¹⁵ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, book 4, chapter 1, par. 5, 1019.

INTERVIEW

CAROL MILES: HEARING THE GOSPEL IN A DIFFERENT VOICE

What made you decide to go into homiletics?

Well, I didn't set out to go into homiletics at all. In seminary my love was biblical studies and the Old Testament in particular. I had marvelous professors that got me interested in Hebrew and the theology of the Old Testament, and I took all the electives that I could in the Bible department.

In my middler year I had a preaching class with Tom Long, who was a an excellent teacher. I think my interest in the Bible surprised him. When we had assignments in which we could use any text we wanted, I tended to choose these very odd texts from the Old Testament—I even based a sermon on one of the genealogies.

Tom knew I was interested in doing further study in Old Testament. He told me, "You know, Carol, what I see in you is not somebody who wants to write for the guild, but somebody who wants members of churches to love the Bible in the way you do. I think you can do that through the pulpit better than anywhere else." So, I was encouraged to consider Ph.D. studies in homiletics. And now that I am teaching homiletics I'm so glad—I'm one of those people who really loves their work.

So what Tom said to you has become your mission statement?

To help the church love these texts in the way that I do?

Yes.

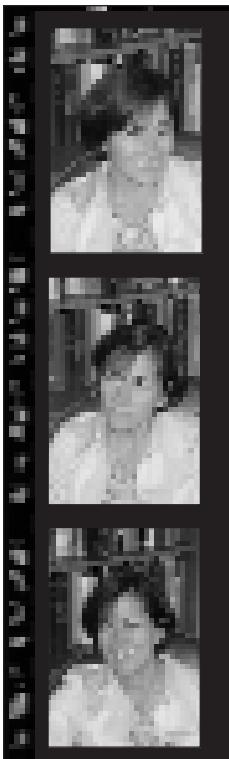
You can see my bias for biblical preaching! Yes, but it's more than that. I really do feel that we in the church have something unique to say about the nature of God and of who we are and what our role in creation is. I really want to see people proclaiming it in churches so that we might be witnesses to God in the world. So we might *be* the church.

It's a matter of the church being true to its message—true to itself.

That's right.

Do your students catch the same passion?

Some of them do—I hope my passion is contagious. Students who study preaching here with me certainly get a lot of Bible, too. And I try to give them an appreciation for how fascinating these texts can be, and how rich they are.



MARTHA DIDN'T FEEL ENTITLED. THERE'S NOTHING THAT BREEDS RESENTMENT MORE THAN PEOPLE WHO DON'T FEEL ENTITLED WATCHING OTHERS WHO DO FEEL ENTITLED. AND, FOR JESUS TO SAY SUCH A THING TO MARTHA WAS VERY FREEING. THAT'S A FEMINIST MOVE. BECAUSE ESSENTIALLY JESUS IS SAYING NOT ONLY CAN YOU, YOU *SHOULD*, COME AND JOIN IN. YOU SHOULD BE FOUND IN A POSITION WHERE ONLY MEN WOULD BE FOUND."

How do you make the move from the exegesis of the passage to a sermon based on that passage?

That is the hardest thing to teach. It's very tricky because it's not necessarily clear from the exegesis what the text means for us. If we ask the historical questions and use the critical apparatus to understand the history that produced the text, we still must face the question of what claim the text makes on us. Is the historical meaning the same thing as the text's claim on us? It may or may not be.

For years, people made the distinction between what the text "meant" and what the text "means." I prefer the language Paul Ricoeur uses—we're interested in what the text "says." I try to help my students ask, "What is this text saying about God? What is this text saying about us?" And then, given that, "What is the specific claim for my church? What is the word of God for us?"

So, moving from exegesis to proclamation—preaching—involves asking those questions in a responsible way?

Yes, in a responsible way. So often the interpretive work of the preacher is slipshod or we forget the ethical implications of our preaching—but that's another whole huge conversation.

Now when women preach, they must deal with a text that comes from a world that was patriarchal and not particularly aware of its patriarchy. In the move from exegesis to proclamation, how do you handle that?

Specifically, if you're a woman preacher or just for any preacher?

Both.

You pay attention to that. I remember the scales falling from my eyes when it was pointed out to me that a text that I learned by heart when I was a little girl, the Ten Commandments, is addressed to a male group. These Ten Commandments weren't really "for me," they were for land-holding, male Israelites. My goodness, I just had never thought of that. Or the kinds of things that Jesus said to his twelve disciples about the last being first and the first being last, or the saying that anyone who would want to be lord should be the servant of all—those sayings weren't addressed to women. The original audience was a group of men.

To not pay attention to that has been very detrimental to women in churches. We've taken that word and interpreted it as, "Okay, I'd better stay in my place," or "Gee, I do most of the serving anyway. I guess I'm doing what the gospel says. I just need to keep it up." You don't hear texts very often that say you were created in the image of God or you were created to be a partner corresponding to the man.

Even though I don't do interpretation out of any identifiable feminist paradigm, paying attention to whom the texts were addressed is crucial. And lifting it up for the congregation is necessary because I don't think congregations give it that much thought. Who was Jesus really talking to? We just think, "Okay, this is the Bible and it's talking to me."

Another thing, I think, is being willing to acknowledge the patriarchy of the Bible but not wanting to throw it out because of that. To see how we can still hear the word of God for us in spite of the patriarchy.

So the patriarchy is a fact, but not a norm.

Exactly. I try to help my students see that very thing. Some of them come from traditions where it is a norm: "God chose to reveal God's self in this time and place, so it must be what God values." And I often find that part of my role is helping students to see it a little bit differently—to not feel threatened by the problems in the text but to be able to trust that there is the Word in the words.

Also, I want to encourage students who might have a background in women's studies or who have embraced feminist paradigms to be able to see that there still is something in here for us. I think there is an incredibly freeing message.

For example, today I heard two students preach sermons on the story of Mary and Martha. Those students handled the text appropriately, trying to talk about the way we don't want to be distracted in our serving and we need to learn from Mary. But, to me, that is a story about entitlement. It's about Jesus encouraging a woman who doesn't feel entitled to sit and listen at the feet of a teacher, a rabbi, something that only men would have done in those days.

And for Mary to be there was sort of outrageous.

So, that infers she somehow felt entitled. Martha *didn't* feel entitled. There's nothing that breeds resentment more than people who don't feel entitled watching others who do feel entitled. And, for Jesus to say such a thing to Martha was very freeing. That's a feminist move. Because essentially Jesus is saying not only can you, you *should*, come and join in. You should be found in a position where only men would be found. Jesus not only gave permission for Mary to join the circle, but he said, "This is the better part."

So Jesus' words to Martha weren't a rebuke as much as they were an invitation?

Well, I see it that way. Most of the time it's been interpreted as a rebuke, but what I hear in that is a word to those who don't feel entitled.

It's not that Jesus doesn't say things that also would be typical for a Jewish rabbi in those days. There's clearly that, too. Those texts are hard, too, because we have to figure out how they will address us even though we are in such a different time and place. We have to learn to model that in the pulpit—distancing the text from us by looking at it critically so that we might bring it near again in that "second naivete": "This text still has something to say to me!"

The Ricoeurean move.

The Ricoeurean move. I think that's what we want to model in the pulpit. That's what I try to model when I do interpretative work with these texts for my students. I think lay people need to see those kinds of moves being made in the pulpit so they become more sophisticated readers of the Bible themselves.

So in a sermon you don't necessarily want to cover your tracks. You're saying that the sermon needs to show where the struggle is, show where the difficulty of the text is?

When I hear preaching that does acknowledge the difficulties, it makes me feel like somebody is taking me seriously. For a pastor to say, "This is tough," or "This bothers me about this text," or, "I don't know how you felt when you heard this text read but I know the first thing that leaps out at me is this hard word." When I hear a pastor doing that it makes me feel regarded. I also feel there's an honesty there and an integrity. I don't feel like what is being said to me on Sunday morning is part of some ideology. There are difficult texts and we have to face them head-on.

And sermons that don't deal with the difficulties or that make the hard seem easy are condescending and manipulative?

They can be. Kathryn Roberts and I are wanting to work on a book on preaching the theologically troubling texts from the Old Testament. If you look at the literature out there on preaching on the hard sayings of the Old Testament or other books that are like that, almost everybody tries to remove the problem. Either the problem is with us or the problem is with the text, but whatever we do we want to just accept it or explain

it away. My feeling is that we let the text be a problem and we preach out of that. That's one of the things I think Kathryn does so well when she preaches on these odd texts. That's why I want her sermons to be part of the book.

Let me ask you a general question. It's 2004. What does the church need to hear?

When Jesus came preaching the good news of the kingdom of God I think he was harkening back to the word that came to the exiles, primarily the work of the prophet of Isaiah. Things looked grim for them, but the good news was, "Look! God is here." God had not abandoned them, as they feared.

There is hope.

There is hope. When it says, "Get you up to a high mountain, O Jerusalem," or "O Zion, messenger of good tidings, herald of good news," the one that's on a high vantage point can see what the people down below can't see. What that person sees is that God has defeated God's enemies and is coming to be with us and to restore us, even though we don't see it. Prepare the ground and make it ready. 

REFLECTIONS

Beverly Zink-Sawyer is associate professor of preaching and worship at Union-PSCE. A graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary (M.Div.) and Vanderbilt University (Ph.D.), Zink-Sawyer served churches in Pennsylvania and Tennessee for twelve years. She is the editor of Series Three of the Abingdon Women's Preaching Annual and the author of From Preachers to Suffragists: Woman's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen (Westminster John Knox Press).

BEVERLY ZINK-SAWYER

September 15, 2003, marked a significant anniversary in the life of the church and in the lives of many of its members. On that date 150 years ago, the first American woman was ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Antoinette Brown, a graduate of Oberlin College and its School of Theology, had been serving as pastor of a small Congregational church in upstate New York for several months. She had proven herself to be a very capable pastor, preacher, and leader of the congregation, and as an expression of its regard for her work, the congregation voted to ordain her. That monumental event in Christian history occurred just five years after American women had gathered for the first time to organize for the pursuit of equal rights. Included in the "Resolutions" adopted at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, the first woman's rights convention, was this unanimous declaration: "*Resolved*, That the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce."¹

Antoinette Brown's ordination represented the first step toward the "overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit" and "an equal participation with men" in the clerical profession. The female ordinations that followed Brown's over the next century, although few in number, gave women unprecedented access to pulpits and greater respect as preachers. But the inception of women's preaching occurred centuries earlier on the day of Christ's Resurrection, when, as noted by all four gospel writers, the women who encountered the empty tomb were commissioned to "go, tell" the others the good news of the Resurrection. For the next eighteen centuries, women "preached" in many and various ways. They proclaimed the gospel in house churches, on street corners, from political platforms, and occasionally from pulpits. They wrote theological treatises and spiritual autobiographies as well as poetry, music, and devotional literature. They preached in schools, hospitals, convents, and mission chapels, finding a way to proclaim the gospel when the institutional church declared there was no way.

Despite the rich legacy of women preachers throughout the first eighteen centuries of the church and the opening of ordained ministry to women in 1853, women preachers and pastors remained an anomaly in most Christian traditions until the past few decades, making moot a question concerning the existence of "women's preaching."

There were too few women preachers to be studied, and those few had nothing but male role models to emulate.

As women climbed the steps of pulpits in increasing numbers during the closing decades of the twentieth century, however, they prompted a question concerning what, if any, uniqueness women bring to preaching. Do women exhibit an identifiable style or approach to preaching that is different from the preaching of men? Both anecdotal and scientific evidence suggests that, for reasons probably attributable to both nature and nurture, certain homiletical characteristics may be more prevalent among women than men. Secular studies by psychologists, sociologists, and linguists such as Carol Gilligan, Deborah Tannen, and Mary Belenky have identified gendered patterns of speech and language usage. Homiletics such as Edwina Hunter, Carol Norén, Christine Smith, Leonora Tisdale, and Catherine Ziel have applied those secular theories to preaching and have discovered many of the same characteristics to be operative among women preachers. Women preachers, it has been suggested, tend to be more creative in their approach to preaching and use story and self-disclosure more frequently in their sermons than men. They rely heavily on feminist and other contemporary hermeneutical approaches in exegeting biblical texts. Even the content of women's sermons reveals greater emphasis on themes of justice and equality. Women also speak more honestly of the struggle inherent in the process of creating sermons and their personal and spiritual investment in that process. And women have been noted to have a more collaborative understanding of the nature of preaching both in and out of the pulpit.

Some preachers and teachers of preachers have questioned the idea of attributing differences in preaching styles to gender. Others have supported it. But there is common consensus that such generalizations are becoming increasingly difficult to make. Perhaps that difficulty is a sign of good news, indicating by the prevalence of women preachers that the "monopoly of the pulpit" has at last been overthrown. At this point in time, few mainline Protestant seminaries do *not* have a woman teaching preaching in a full-time or part-time capacity, and several Roman Catholic theological schools have women homiletics on their faculties. My own institution has had a female faculty member teaching preaching for more than two decades, resulting in a generation of graduates who have experienced whatever uniqueness women bring to homiletics. On the other side of the classroom, women now comprise half or more of the student body at many theological schools and represent a great variety of ages, experiences, and traditions, ensuring that future preachers are shaped by complementary and varied styles. In addition, as the discipline of women's studies has matured through the past quarter century, we have become aware of the danger of speaking of women in any monolithic sense. While there may be female experiences and characteristics common among groups of women, those experiences and characteristics are determined less by gender than by theological, racial-ethnic, socio-economic, geographic, and other factors. Thus, women preach out of their social contexts—as womanist, *mujerista*, and Asian feminist theologians have demonstrated—as well as their religious traditions. The bottom line is that preachers have always been shaped by a complex mix of fac-

tors, including tendencies intrinsic to their own personalities and social location, role models of preachers they have known, the influence of homiletics professors and theories, the exigencies of the contexts in which they preach, and, above all, the movement of the Holy Spirit.

The changes evident at the seminary level are, of course, reflected in churches as well. Statistics and observation confirm the significant number of women preaching in various ministerial capacities. When I left pastoral ministry more than a decade ago to work in theological education, I began doing pulpit supply at various churches. Through the early and mid-1990s, someone invariably greeted me after services I led with the comment, “I’ve never heard a woman preacher before!” Ten years later, I cannot remember the last time I heard that comment when serving as a visiting preacher. While most of the churches I visit are part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) which has welcomed and encouraged women’s leadership for many decades, these churches also represent a diversity of congregations within the denomination, convincing me that women preachers have become known across the church. Nor is it just mainline Protestant churches that have become familiar with the homiletical gifts of women. A number of women now serve the Roman Catholic Church as liturgists and preachers. In addition, women preachers are well known in some communities of conservative Christians, as evidenced by the international success of evangelist Anne Graham Lotz, daughter of Billy Graham and, according to many, heir to his preaching gift.

But the question remains: Do women, who are now present in pulpits in unprecedented numbers, preach differently from men? I like the answer given by Edwina Hunter, one of the first women to teach preaching at a theological seminary in the United States. In an essay in response to that question, she answered, “*If there are no gender differences in preaching, then there should be!*”² Hunter makes her claim as part of a larger contention that all preachers should preach “relationally and incarnationally”: “We embody the Word. We let the gospel live through us and in us. Our bodies come alive and we tell the story we preach with our whole beings, from the tops of our heads through the soles of our feet.”³ In Jesus Christ we are reminded in a dramatic way that God’s love for creation took on human flesh and pitched a tent among us. Scripture presents a myriad of believers bearing witness to the Incarnation by means of their own voices, beings, experiences, and yes, genders. In an analogous way, contemporary witnesses to God’s grace in Jesus Christ must be just as varied and representative of all the people of God in order to ensure the fullness of the gospel.

One hundred fifty years after the ordination of Antoinette Brown, it seems safe to say that the male “monopoly of the pulpit” has been overthrown. That should *not* imply, however, that all battles for the ecclesiastical equality of women have been won. There are still a number of Christian traditions that prohibit any public proclamation by women or restrict their liturgical participation in certain ways. And even in traditions in which women have served as preachers and pastors for decades, there are still pockets of resistance to their ministries and limitations on the positions they can obtain. Nevertheless, we can celebrate the preaching ministries of women over the centuries who, by the grace of God and often at great cost, have been vehicles for the good

news of the gospel. At the same time, let us pray for the day when, as the Reverend Luther Lee proclaimed in his sermon for Antoinette Brown's ordination, echoing the words of the Apostle Paul, "there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."³



NOTES

¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. I, 1848-1861 (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1881), 73.

² Edwina Hunter, "Finally Said: Women Must Preach Differently Than Men" in Martha J. Simmons, ed., *Preaching on the Brink: The Future of Homiletics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 146.

³ Ibid., 152.

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VALERIE BRIDGEMAN DAVIS

It has been twenty-seven years since I accepted the call to preach—a stirring so strong and direct that it could almost be called audible. It was not an audible call. But in 1977, eighteen years old, and a mystic of sorts, I delved deeply into the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, silence, meditation, and fasting. It was during a three-day fast (nothing but water), that I believed with all of my fiber that God was calling me into the preaching ministry. The Scripture that caught my heart was Jeremiah 1: “Say not that I am only a child, for I called you from your mother’s womb and have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” You are appointed a prophet to the nations. What heady and scary words. But as I prayed, I was sure the call was from God. I resisted. Having grown up in a National Baptist Convention congregation, I did not believe that God called women to preach. In addition, I did not think as a senior in high school that I was a woman. I was a child. “Say not I am a child,” the Scripture admonished me. I waited for a couple of months before I talked with anyone. It turns out that when I did talk with my preacher-father, he had already asked several people to “pray for my daughter; God is calling her to preach.”

I had a radical conversion as a sixteen year old. I was living a double life: good church-going girl on the weekends, wild want-to-be-accepted popular cheerleader and athlete at school and elsewhere. In the meantime, my father had returned to the area as a minister in the Church of God Reformation Movement. I started to attend the very small Church of God congregation where he pastored. The holiness movement, the staunchest and starchiest of the evangelical churches, captivated my heart at a time when I was sorely searching for firm footing. So I had a typical evangelical conversion: radical, life-altering, and abrupt. I became the dress-wearing, no makeup picture of the holiness churchwoman. And I lost my edge as the “popular girl.”

It is that background that found me fasting as a teenager, sneaking into the woods to talk with God out loud, and wondering whether my life would ever, could ever, count for anything. As is natural in the tradition I embraced (as much to connect with my father as it was with my God, I've since decided), I asked for a “sign” if indeed God was calling me. The sign came about a month later, when I was asked to share my testimony and exhort the youth during a quarterly youth rally of the area Churches of God congregations. I stood and began to speak, and sounded every bit like a fire-and-

brimstone passionate woman evangelist of the Reformation. The “saints” loved it and the youth responded with conversions and tears. I shook from the experience, and a preacher was born.

At the time the Church of God did not require education—just a call and an anointing. I had both call and anointing as evidenced by people’s response when I preached. I cringe now in memory of the arrogant little girl that I was, presuming to speak on behalf of God. Early in my ministry, being “a lady” was of utmost concern to the people around me. I was “schooled,” mostly by men preachers, on what I could and could not do as a woman. Don’t hold onto a man’s hand after you’ve shaken it. Don’t dress “provocatively,” that is, in a way that your shape shows (“You’re a pretty girl, so you need to downplay your beauty,” one preacher told me). Don’t point your finger when you’re preaching because men get offended by a woman telling them what to do; don’t speak at church gatherings until someone asks you for your opinion. Don’t give your opinion freely. I would have to admit now that I pretty much ignored or resisted the above-mentioned advice.

The one piece of advice I received that I tried to live by all these years is this: Don’t defend your right to preach. If God has called you, Tyrone Cushman told me, it would become evident. And the people who don’t believe God calls women can’t be convinced with an argument anyway, he said. Dr. Cushman has proven to be a prophet in his own right, as I have run into people absolutely hostile toward me simply because I was a woman who preached. I broke rank with this cardinal rule only once. While filling in as a guest host on a radio show in Austin, my last year of seminary, a man called and laid into me. He lambasted me for deceiving people and picking “a few isolated Scriptures in the Bible” to violate the command that women should be silent in the church. I listened to him, stunned that he would say some of the things he was saying. I forgot that I had the fifteen-second delay button and a right to use it on the radio. But when he finished I responded by saying: “People are lost, dying, and going to hell [I am still an evangelical], and we’re still fighting over who can tell them about Jesus.” That’s it. That was all I said except, “God bless you” as he hung up the phone.

So the question is, what difference has being a woman made to being a preacher? I imagine my male colleagues never had anyone tell them to “calm down; you’re getting too emotional,” as if it were a character flaw to show emotion, or as if it were natural to the call of God to be unemotional. I imagine my male colleagues never had anyone ask them, when having a bad day, whether it was “that time of the month.” But I also imagine that my male colleagues have not heard some of the private confessions of mothers who in a moment of truth admit that they wish they never had children, or who needed to speak of childbirth and gave that look of “you understand.” Over the years, I have leaned comfortably into my calling. Seminary, pastoring a church plant alongside my husband, and doctoral work, as well as raising boys, gave me perspective. I’ve never had a chip on my shoulder about being a woman *and* a preacher. I settled the question when I accepted the call, so I’ve never, and I do mean never, doubted that God called me to the office of preaching and teaching. This assurance has given me ease even when people around me have been uneasy. It hasn’t been a struggle even dealing with the Scriptures that have been used to deny me the right to preach. Though a “woman

of the Book,” I am utmost a woman of God, willing to resist the cultural confines of the text.

If I were to give advice to young women accepting the call today, it would be the same prophetic piece of advice that I received from Dr. Cushman, who is now the Chief Overseer of the National Association of the Church of God Reformation Movement. Don’t defend your right. Just be who you’re called to be, fully, in your own human incarnation, a woman of God, with feet of clay.



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ILENE BRENNER DUNN

She was wide-eyed, slack-jawed shocked—almost dropped the glass she was washing in the church kitchen—as she and Becky were cleaning up after the potluck. The kitchen, the dishtowels donated over the years, the hiccuping hum of the old refrigerator: it felt like everything comfortable and familiar had plummeted, too surprised to scream, hurled over time’s edge to crash land, quick-frozen. But then—just as suddenly—where ice had reigned indomitable, there was fire, its flames catapulting her to outrage. She could feel the outrage burning hot to flush her face, hot tears stinging her eyes like volcanic steam streaming beyond suppressing, her breathing shortened to gasps of dismay and disgust. When at last she could speak, her words were a roar at Becky, at her very best friend: “You’re wrong! It can’t be true. Maybe you’re joking, but it isn’t funny. Are you joking?”

Becky shook her head. “No.” And Becky looked so calm; it was maddening, how serene Becky appeared.

“How can you be cool as a cucumber about this...this...disaster?”

Becky shrugged, hers the shrug of one resigned to a noxious, yet inevitable, event, a *fait accompli*. “I’m not cool as a cucumber,” she said. “I feel like throwing up. But it is true. Mike told me.”

She stared at her friend, the awful truth descending like a legion of marauders stomping into her orderly world. Becky wouldn’t lie to her, and Mike wouldn’t lie to Becky. But the truth was cataclysmic, a truth synonymous with apocalypse, and it was going to befall them next Sunday. That one woman would bring it down on their heads.

“Becky,” she whispered, “I can’t believe this is happening.” Becky said nothing, and hearing Becky’s loud silence, she clamped her own mouth shut. But she could see that woman, not really see her, of course, since she’d never laid eyes on the woman or, for that matter, on any female preacher. Yet she knew *what* the woman would be, certainly not a woman like Becky and herself, but disgustingly different. Only an aberrant creature, a woman who didn’t like being a woman, would do something so unwomanly.

The woman would be one of “them,” one of the uncouth with their unshaved underarms who embarrass the status of proper women. She would be one of those alien and alienating malcontents who hate being women and who hate men but who oddly

enough want to be men, one of those women who burn their bras and wear hair on their legs as spidery trousers.

Of this she was certain: that woman would be one of those women's libbers, whose only language was the harangue of raw epithets. She would have nothing to say that decent Christians would want to hear, nothing that decent Christians should be forced to listen to. Whatever got into Mike, actually inviting her to speak in their church, in his pulpit? The woman must have bullied him into it, the way "they" do.

She straightened her shoulders, took a deep breath, willing calm to come. And a modicum of calm did arrive the way it does when you make a decision and, though you don't like the decision, you're sure the decision is right. Looking straight into Becky's eyes she said, "Well, I don't know about you, but I won't be in church next Sunday." And she wasn't.

Ah, *mea culpa*. It wasn't someone else who thought those thoughts, spoke those words, made that decision. It was I, myself, years ago. Thirty years ago, mine was the face flushed with the rage of righteous certainty; today, looking back, my face is red with embarrassment. But I give myself a little slack, can assuage my guilt somewhat, remembering that back then I was still as one hypnotized, in a trance. I was still very much a product of a secular culture and of a church culture which entranced women with the promise of pampering and protection; if we stayed in our place within "divinely" ordained traditional roles, our living would be securely padded.

True, even back then there were women who denied the drone of the hypnotist, women who were awake and could see the padding for what it was: ignorance passed on to the ignorant. But I wasn't among the open-eyed. My mama had been padded, as had her mama, and I was ever so content to be likewise padded. I was comfortably ensconced and determined that I and my daughters would remain so.

Was it the comfort I didn't want to imperil? Was I afraid to dip even one toe in the waters of a life very different from Mama's and from her mama's, afraid of being labeled "different" myself? Or was my fight against awakening merely evidence of the stubborn streak which Mama insisted was part of my personality from the day I was born? I think it was all of that. I was stuck, comfortably, stubbornly, fearfully stuck in theo-cultural quicksand, that is, in a milieu which employed simplistic theological ideation augmented with biblical proof-texting, but which was really driven gut-level by a deeply engrained cultural taboo: women must not trespass men's space nor usurp the roles which, everybody knew, had been ordained by God for men only.

On that yesterday I was certain that the pulpit was a man's space; preaching, a man's role. Today I look back with chagrin, hearing the noisy clanging gong of my certainty. But today I also laugh the good laughter, the forgiving, healing laughter birthed in God's own good and ever so loving sense of humor. I, who yesterday would not deign to be in the same room with one of "them," am today her sister in the pulpit.

How great is God's sense of humor! How great is God's patience. And how great is God's propensity for transforming foolishness into fruitfulness. The ironic truth: my sojourn in that quicksand nourished an ability to be patient with others; my own past allows me to be patient with someone's present stuckness. But not every time; it would

be dishonest not to confess the other times, when I lost the sanity of my head and the sanity of my heart and tried to jerk someone out of the mire, rather than exercising patience. Too many times my style of awakening somebody has not been gentle patience but the abrasive blare of an ill-set alarm clock ringing wrongly in the wee hours.

Thank God that the kind of patient awakening most people, including me, need does not depend on my spasmodic ability. Thank God that God's love and divinely jolly laughter and ever-abiding patience are the wellspring from which transformation flows, liberating the stuck, birthing new life. And thank God for all the aborning that's happened in recent years.

Today I and so many other women can love being women and, at the same time, can love being preachers. We are free to preach joyfully the good news of Jesus Christ, and we're free to preach the only way we can, as children of God who are women.

However, the full light of freedom's day has not yet dawned. There are still women, and men, today who remain hypnotically inculcated by ignorance cloaked in tradition's gown. There are today women who have convinced themselves, or who have been convincingly cajoled, or who have been convincingly threatened into believing that the steel-stayed corset embroidered with Bible verses is their only right and proper garb. The alb, the pulpit, and preaching remain taboo.

How I long for that day when all of God's children—male and female, of all the colors and shapes and beauty of God's creation—will have the freedom to respond to God's call, the freedom in which one may wear an apron in the church's kitchen and an alb in the church's pulpit. Alas, that day is not yet. But, as some might say, "We've come a long way, baby."

With a lot of help from God, we have traversed many miles, including no few miles we had to travel inside ourselves, toward stopping ourselves from being content in the quicksand. There is cause aplenty for thanksgiving and celebration.

Still there is a question. After all the miles traveled, after all we've learned—oft times the hard way—and after all the questions the world has hurled at us, demanding answers, there's still a question we women preachers occasionally must ourselves ask. It's a question we ourselves can't answer; neither seminary lessons nor experiential tutoring nor existential soul-searching can quell our quest. We must depend on the church to answer the question we ask right before stepping into an unfamiliar pulpit: where should I put my purse while I'm preaching? ••

PASTORS' PANEL

We asked church leaders to reflect on the relationship between gender and preaching. Here is what they told us:

What advice would you give to female seminarians about to enter into ministry?

ELAINE JOHNSON (MDIV'00), ASSOCIATE PASTOR, FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
TULSA, OKLAHOMA

I'd like to forewarn female seminarians that gender prejudice still exists in the church. Before seminary I had served as an elder and worked on a church staff, but I still was not prepared for the exclusionary picture of "who a pastor is" that so many people harbor. My advice to female seminarians is this: when you're hit with that bias, respond warmly, without anxiety, and humorously if possible, and then.... Get over it! Keep your finger on the pulse that is God's call and claim on your life.

Finally, acknowledging that women are so interpersonally oriented, I'd like to warn future pastors of the female variety of the dangers of "overthinking." Whatever our vocation, we're all evaluated, but as a pastor, your work, your family, and even your hairstyle are fodder for scrutiny and feedback. Don't overthink the comments! The best advice I ever received, especially when it comes to evaluative comments on your work, is not to take the negative criticism too seriously, or the compliments either!

Overthinking can be especially problematic for a pastor, because the church offers many interpersonal settings for encounters which can be over-thought: committee meetings, study groups, coffees, hospital bedsides, and parking lots. It is seldom productive to go over conversations again and again to think how you might better have responded. I am blessed with a wonderful pastoral colleague who can tell me when I'm overthinking and then help me laugh and move on. I would urge new pastors to look for someone who can help them do the same.

EMILY J. ANDERSON, SENIOR PASTOR, NEW PROVIDENCE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
MARYVILLE, TENNESSEE

When I was ten years old, I went to see my pastor to tell him that I thought I wanted to be a minister when I grew up, too. In his best pastoral care mode, he leaned across the table and suggested to me that I might want to find a profession for which women were better suited.

Those sorts of disappointments are going to come. Be prepared for them. And then listen for God's call, which is always about new doors and new possibilities and new beginnings.

SHANNON JOHNSON KERSHNER, SENIOR PASTOR, WOODHAVEN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, IRVING, TEXAS

Trust that the God who called you into this wonderfully messy world of pastoral ministry will not abandon you to the elements. Remind yourself every single day of this reality: Your own experience and knowledge of God that you discover in the biblical text, in the life of your people, and in your own moments of deep joy and deep pain, hold just as much authority as all the commentators, theologians, and preachers of your past. Trust and value your own interpretive voice, just as you trust and value the voices of others. And remember, according to the Gospel of Luke, when the women disciples told the rest of the group about the Resurrection, “the words seemed to be an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” And look at who was right after all!

What women have influenced your preaching?

WILLIAM J. CARL III, SENIOR PASTOR, FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, DALLAS

I can't remember the first woman I heard preach, but it was probably Catherine Gun-salus Gonzalez, my church history professor at Louisville Seminary in 1970. The strength, simple beauty, and power that came through her well-chosen phrases were deeply moving. The next one would have been Elizabeth Achtemeier, whom I first heard at Pittsburgh Seminary in 1975 when I was teaching there and she was a visiting preacher. Betty and I both ended up teaching homiletics at Union Theological Seminary, now Union-PSCE. She taught me a lot about preaching the gospel with vigor and enthusiasm and how to listen for God's still, small voice in the faint whispers of Old Testament metaphors, while at the same time bringing to life all those quirky prophets who thundered their way down your street and mine. Barbara Brown Taylor has taught me that if God can “make a human being out of a pile of dirt” and “can make a barren old couple into the proud parents of a chosen people” imagine what God can do with our deserts of dusty prose! God makes our tired sentences crackle and our tone-deaf phrases sing.

Holy Spirit breathes through these women and so many others like the smell of freshly baked bread. Female students I have taught at Oxford, Boston University, Princeton, Union, Dubuque, Austin, Columbia, Pittsburgh, Louisville, McCormick, and many other academic institutions have shown me how to see texts from new and different angles and how to get inside stories in ways that my male mentors and students never quite comprehend. It's very odd that I've spent most of my teaching life giving women “permission” to stand in the pulpit and proclaim the gospel, when (a) they have every right to be there and (b) they have so much to teach all of us as mentors and models themselves.

What is one particular challenge you face as woman preacher?

JACKIE SAXON (MDIV'00), ASSOCIATE PASTOR, UNIVERSITY BAPTIST CHURCH, AUSTIN

Right now, the biggest challenge I am facing is learning how to “thrive” and not just “survive.” I have found in just a few short years that ministry can be very draining. One needs to have a healthy support system outside the church. A support system or systems that support mind, body, *and* spirit. Having friends who you can really relax and be yourself with, going to the gym on a regular basis and finding time to be alone, silent, prayerful, and meditative. In order to thrive, it’s a three-pronged approach. Too much of one and not enough of the others doesn’t work well. I believe it is very important if one plans to be in this for the long haul. Because it’s a jungle out here.

EMILY J. ANDERSON

No question that most church-goers think “male” when they hear “pastor” or “priest.” Eighteen years ago, a Presbyterian Panel survey reported that when a church is searching for a pastor, the preference of majority of congregational members is always the same: a married white male between forty and forty-nine years of age. In terms of expectations, not much has changed since that time.

My experience was fairly common—a two-and-a-half- year search for a call to pastor a medium to large-sized congregation. I had nearly given up hope. Meanwhile, members of the search committee of the New Providence Presbyterian Church in Maryville, Tennessee, found themselves in a similar situation. After twenty-seven months of searching, the Pastor Nominating Committee had exhausted all possibilities of finding the candidate members thought they wanted (i.e., “a man from the South educated at Princeton”). But after re-grouping and re-examining their criteria, they began to think outside the box, looking for a person with the gifts and skills they desired, rather than the qualifying characteristics they had initially assumed. It was at that point that my name was referred to them, and both the search committee and I very quickly ascertained that this was indeed the right call, to the surprise and delight of us all. The New Providence committee’s decision was like one described by another woman pastor, the chair of whose committee said, “We can call the person the church expects us to call, or we can call the person we think God wants us to call.”

So when women move into the role of pastor/head of staff, we challenge a lot of latent assumptions. We embody a different reality. We look different, we sound different, we act differently. We throw expectations off balance. By our very presence, we make congregations rethink what a pastor ought to be; ultimately, I believe that allows them to rethink what it means to be the church.

SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books specifically about women's preaching:

Jana Childers, ed., *Birthing the Sermon: Women Preachers on the Creative Process* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001)

Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998)

David Albert Farmer and Edwina Hunter, *And Blessed Is She: Sermons by Women* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990)

Edwina Hunter, "Finally Said: Women Must Preach Differently Than Men" in Martha J. Simmons, ed., *Preaching on the Brink: The Future of Homiletics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996)

Carol M. Norén, *The Woman in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991)

Christine M. Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989)

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, "Women's Ways of Communicating: A New Blessing for Preaching" in Jane Dempsey Douglass and James F. Kay, eds., *Women, Gender, and Christian Community* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997)

Books about women in American religion with some attention to women's preaching:

Susan Hill Lindley, "You Have Stept Out of Your Place" in *A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996)

Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds., *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women's Religious Writing* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995)

Carl J. Schneider and Dorothy Schneider, *In Their Own Right: The History of American Clergywomen* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997)

Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists: Woman's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003)

REQUIRED READING

Books recommended by Austin Seminary faculty

THE READING AND PREACHING OF THE SCRIPTURES IN THE WORSHIP OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH VOLUME FOUR, THE AGE OF THE REFORMATION,

Hughes Oliphant Old. Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002, 556 pages, \$45. Reviewed by Stanley R. Hall, associate professor of liturgics, Austin Seminary



The Age of the Reformation is the fourth of a projected seven-volume series, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, by Hughes O. Old, senior historian of Christian worship among North American Presbyterians. The series is a history both of Christian preaching as an act of worship, and of preaching in the context of the worship of the church. This series joins the significant body of Old's work, which includes studies of Reformed worship, reforms of Baptism in the sixteenth century (and of the Lord's Supper, in a forthcoming book), and of daily prayer.

Cultural historians, church historians, and other scholars will find this series valuable. But in a real sense the audience is the preachers whose work is that regular reading and preaching of the Scriptures in the worship of the Christian church. Old has taught in theological seminaries and held lectureships for the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, but his voice is that of the minister-scholar, for whom Christian worship has always been both the context and purpose of scholarship.

This book finds its place at the center of an ambitious project. Preceding volumes address Old and New Testaments and Christian preaching to Origen (Volume One); the patristic period, from Cyril of Jerusalem to Gregory the Great (Volume Two); the medieval church from Byzantine

preaching, the church of the West, Rome and the Orders, to the fifteenth century and preaching in the Renaissance era (Volume Three). Preaching during an age of reformations, and not Protestant preaching alone, occupies the present volume. The scope includes Catholic and Protestant preachers and trends in preaching from Martin Luther to Fenelon. The discussion has its ear tuned to the forms and characteristics of reform, and the various agendas of the reforms of preaching through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the dominant traditions in England and western Europe.

The method of the study is descriptive, setting each tradition and representative preacher in the appropriate setting liturgically, theologically, and politically. Generous use of quotation of original sources is employed, primarily to catch the flavor of the preacher's language. But this is more an introduction to original texts and sources (extensively cited) than a collection of sermons. One particular strength of this volume is the treatment of the preaching of Protestant Orthodoxy in the seventeenth century, showing the close connection between doctrinal objectivity and attention to piety and the subjectivity of sanctification, conversion, and holiness. The author's sensitivity to the reforming voices within baroque Catholicism as well as the silenced voice of Huguenot Calvinism is a strength of the study. The short chapter on orthodox Reformed preaching in the Netherlands suggests an intriguing similarity to Presbyterian preaching on the American frontier, in the use of the Song of Songs in relation to the Lord's Supper in certain refractions of Reformed piety. One missing voice is that of anti-paedobaptism, or the Anabaptists, particularly in relationship to the Reformed through the formative period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It may be that, as is noted by the author in other contexts, the voices of preachers we would want to hear are not always the ones recorded in forms available to historical study.

Old's discussion of preaching relies on criteria he has developed in earlier volumes as well as in his study of Reformed worship. The initial volume (*The Biblical Period*) provides categories which are in play to read the work of preachers in the study as a whole. His taxonomy identifies five major genres of sermon: expository, evangelistic, catechetical, festal, and prophetic. These types, analogous to formal genres of psalmody used by biblical scholarship, are different ways that preaching is worship and ways that preaching employs Scripture. Several minor types of sermons are identified, derivative instances of the principal genres. Old also speaks of preaching as doxological, another way to speak of the sermon as Christian worship involving hearers as well as speakers. The sermon is understood both as itself an act of worship, and as integral to worship.

On both historical and theological grounds, Old favors expository preaching and "the Protestant plain style." "Expository preaching" first refers to preaching that is informed attentive to and organized by the biblical text and its explanation as God's Word to its auditors; the second phrase refers to rhetorical and stylistic strategies. Old is definite as to his perspective, as an American Protestant and a Presbyterian preacher (and, throughout the series, he delights in pointing out the medieval origins of such popular homiletic equipment as outlines, illustrations, and elaborate introductions).

For the preacher, particularly but not only preachers in the Reformed tradition, this survey of Protestant preaching in the formative era may come as encouragement to approach the ministry of the sermon in fresh, old ways. For homiletics, Old continues to provide historically rigorous and theologically specific comment on the history of Christian preaching. He makes a strong case for a relatively neglected part of liturgical history, not only as object of scholarship, but above all as recognition of the constant theme of reform at the center of the preaching of the gospel.

Hughes Old's series on the reading and preaching of the Scriptures will assist and irritate scholars in a range of disciplines. It

will also challenge and aid preachers.

Consider an insight from the example of John Oecolampadius of Basel (1482-1531), whose sermons, says Old, consistently "show confidence in the ability of the text to interest the congregation." It is an idea to consider.

REGARDING KARL BARTH, Trevor Hart.

Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999, 196 pages, \$20. *Reviewed by Cynthia L. Rigby, W. C. Brown Associate Professor of Theology, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.*



When Karl Barth was ten years old he carefully copied all of the childhood plays he had written into a notebook. On the first page, he dedicated it to his grandmother. At the end, he drew a projected self-portrait of himself as a grown man, about to be crowned with a wreath of ivy and flowers (symbolizing, presumably, receipt of the Poet Laureate). Barth titled the book "The Complete Works of Karl Barth." While Barth seemed aware that he would one day become an accomplished scholar, he was oblivious to the fact that the breadth and scope of his writings would soon preclude their inclusion in a single volume.

Trevor Hart's concise and highly readable book, while not attempting to be comprehensive, offers an outstanding overview of the central themes and problems in Barth's work. Comprised of eight chapters that originated as individual lectures, Hart succeeds both in representing the logic of Barth's theological positions and in engaging Barth in critical conversation with contemporary theological voices.

The first half of the book establishes Barth's Christ-centered approach to understanding revelation, salvation, and ethics. Hart here defends Barth against those who accuse him of docetism (the heresy which understands Jesus to be divine, but not

really human). He does this by explaining how attunement to the union between Christ's full humanity and full divinity, as affirmed at Chalcedon in 451, allows Barth to affirm Jesus Christ's full humanity without compromising on the total otherness of God in the event of revelation (ch. 1). Scandalously, the unknowable God is known to us in the threefold form of the Word: "the flesh of Christ, the text of Scripture, [and] the words of the preacher" (ch. 2). In the Word made flesh, justification is an ontological as well as a forensic reality (in contrast to the Roman Catholic understanding, as represented by Hans Küng; ch. 3). Our actions, therefore, are "bounded and determined" by our identification with him (ch. 4).

The book here shifts from a christological focus to a trinitarian one. One of the weak points in Barth's theology, Hart argues, is that he fails convincingly to present the relational character of God, given his insistence that the triune God does not have three distinct self-consciousnesses. Barth's resistance to calling the three hypostases "persons" (for fear that modern thinkers will then think that the three function autonomously) leads him to err toward compromising on the perichoretic relationship of the three. Nonetheless, Hart insists, Jürgen Moltmann does not offer a convincing alternative with his emphasis on the "social Trinity" (ch. 5). This is because Moltmann, in contrast to Barth, emphasizes the threeness of God at the expense of the divine unity. Following Lesslie Newbigin, Hart argues that God's triune nature serves as basis for a "committed pluralism" (Newbigin) that is neither overly confident nor agnostic in its attempts to articulate the reality of God (ch. 6).

With christological and trinitarian loci in place, Hart turns in the final chapters to the faultiness of natural revelation, offering the best recounting of what was at stake in the Barth-Brunner debate that I have ever read (ch. 7). In this chapter, Hart not only rehashes Barth's argument in *Nein!*, but surveys distorted theological statements made by the German Christian Church that confuse Hitler with Christ and lead to the

eventual writing of the *Barmen Declaration*. Finally, Hart reminds us (by way of critiquing Sallie McFague) that to take seriously the hypostatic union as God's vehicle of revelation is not to suggest that human beings have any capacity to know God, in and of themselves (ch. 8).

Hart's book will be of interest both to Barth scholars who recognize the importance of the selected themes and to newcomers who desire to gain an understanding of Barth's distinctive contribution. It will serve as an excellent resource for students who are dismayed by the prospect of reading Barth's "complete works," but who desire to grasp something of Barth's framing concerns and his influence in contemporary theological discussions. Pastors who have done some reading in Barth will find Hart's book extremely helpful for clearly and concisely reviewing some of the major theological concerns of the 20th century. More importantly, they will find in Hart's pages a persuasive argument for why it matters—theoretically and historically—to keep Christ at the center of our theological reflections.

THINKING OF CHRIST: PROCLAMATION, EXPLANATION, MEANING, TATHA WILEY, ED. New York: Continuum, 2003, 270 pages, \$24.95. Reviewed by David H. Jensen, assistant professor of Reformed theology, Austin Seminary.

As I write this review, the din surrounding Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" continues to increase. Whether one applauds the film for its purported faithfulness to Gospel texts or laments it as a tragic instance of Christian anti-Semitism, the movie—at the very least—has ignited questions on the person of Jesus Christ within the church and beyond. Amid the cacophony appears Tatha Wiley's wise and provocative volume, gathering



eleven prominent Roman Catholic theologians of our time. Reading it adds clarity to the issues of Gibson's movie and poses challenges for the church's confession of Christ as Lord in light of historic abuses.

The book's movement follows the threefold pattern of recovering classical Christology, naming its blind spots, and reconstructing doctrine for a North American context. Wiley's splendid introduction suggests "there have always been many Christologies" (7). Her essay focuses chiefly on the contemporary challenges of articulating these many faces of Jesus and the salvation he brings. No one voice in the tradition has the final say, especially when we recognize that even our "most cherished religious convictions and most well-conceived theologies about Jesus the Christ may harbor sinful self-interest" (16). The multiplicity of witness, in other words, does not leave each person staring at a Jesus who looks like him/herself, but summons each person to a wider community of the faithful. One of the tests of Christology in our age, then, is the degree to which it holds the believer accountable to others. Wiley concludes her essay with a strong endorsement of ascending Christology, beginning with the historical events of "Jesus' life, ministry, and effects on those around him" (18), and suggests that valuing history yields fruit as the church addresses issues of cultural diversity, religious pluralism, and sexism.

Two subsequent essays document the grace of this wonderful book. John Pawlikowski, a theologian who has made Christian-Jewish understanding his life's work, writes a powerful piece that surveys the *adversus Judaeos* polemic embedded in Christian theology. The tendency to see the Jews, Pharisees, and Torah as a foil to the free response of true believers in Christ surfaces in patristic theology as much as modern Christian thought. When the church claims itself as displacing the Jewish people and its gospel as replacing Torah, it both errs theologically and abets Christian anti-Judaism. Supercessionism, he argues, is both historically inaccurate—it neither reflects Pauline covenant theology nor the earliest strands of Gentile Christian self-

understanding—and theologically problematic by suggesting that God abandons the covenant people. After documenting abuses of "replacement theology," Pawlikowski sketches a constructive alternative, grounded in a reclamation of Jesus the Jew. When the church attends to the Jew Jesus, we come face-to-face with a religious "other" and are compelled to think about ourselves in relation to Jews. Reconstructing Christ yields not a glance in the mirror, but an encounter with Judaism. Such encounter invariably leads to questions of religious pluralism. Instead of claiming the event of Jesus Christ as one manifestation of revelation among others, however, Pawlikowski offers a vision of Christ's universality where "the process of human salvation revealed in the Christ-event goes beyond its articulation within the church" (119). Jesus Christ does not replace God's covenant with Israel, but extends that covenant to others. The consequences for Christian-Jewish understanding—especially in light of Gibson's movie—are palpable.

Taking up a related cluster of issues—

This fall, Austin Seminary will begin publishing the journal, ***Horizons in Biblical Theology: An International Dialogue*** (edited by Pittsburgh Theological Seminary since its founding in 1978). Andrew Dearman, Austin Seminary professor of Old Testament, will serve as editor-in-chief.

For rates and subscription information, please contact Professor Dearman:
adearman@austinseminary.edu or 512-404-4856

poverty, suffering, and the cross—M. Shawn Copeland offers a compelling interpretation of discipleship in light of the cross. The essay begins with the author's own encounter with a black woman picking through a garbage dumpster. The discomfort and anguish of this event continues as Copeland returns to her computer where she is “struggling to complete an essay on discipleship and the cross of Christ,” and recognizes that “the woman in the parking lot is no one other than Christ” (178). The arresting detail of this vignette flows forth in a rich tapestry of theological reflection grounded in discipleship. To confess Christ is to be caught up in his life for the world. Copeland neither romanticizes the claim of “seeing Christ in others” nor presents the woman as a passive figure of oppression. Rather, this glimpse of suffering informs a renewed meditation on the cross of Christ. In Copeland’s analysis, the crucified Jesus “is the sign of the cost of identification with the poor, outcast, abject, and despised women and men in the struggle for life” (185). There are no depths of suffering where he is *not* present for the sake

of life itself. Through a brief historical study of the practice of crucifixion, Copeland offers a rather stark depiction of Jesus’ own claim that disciples take up their cross and follow him: “Given the humiliation associated with crucifixion, these words could scarcely have been inviting” (185). Yet the depths of Jesus’ identification with suffering in the cross does not mean that his followers are left wallowing there. The cross reveals the extent of God’s involvement with us, God’s desire in Christ for others. Echoing this involvement, Copeland claims the disciple is for others, inflamed “with desire for the very God who with unimaginable love has looked upon us and fallen in love with us” (187). The cross thus consoles and empowers the afflicted, while providing a locus of resistance to enslaving structures that breed meaningless suffering.

Though some pieces are more technical than others, the eleven essays that comprise *Thinking of Christ* are equally compelling. Amid the contention over what it means to confess Jesus as the Christ, this book is a welcome addition indeed. 

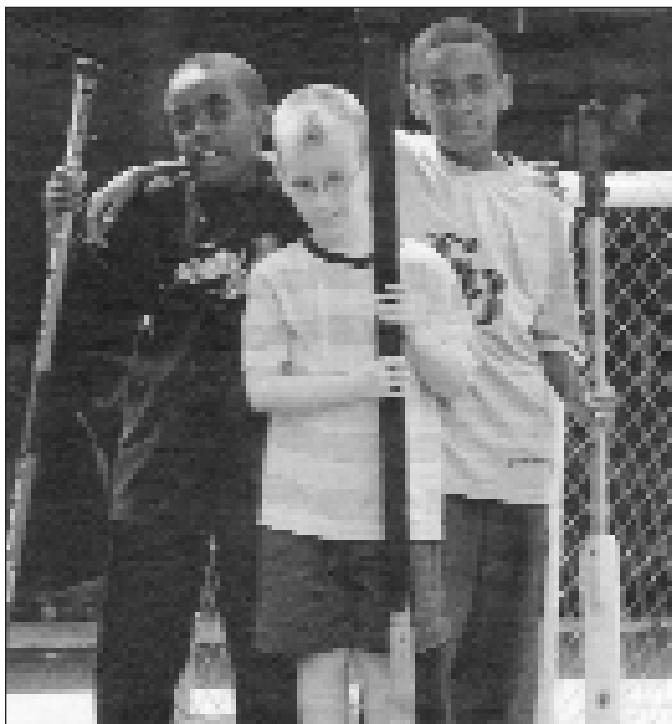
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www.austinseminary.edu/news/pubs.html



HOW BIASED ARE THE PIOUS?¹

ALLAN HUGH COLE JR.

I begin most mornings the same way, drinking a cup of coffee and reading the newspaper. This is how I get my eyes open and my brain working. Going through this routine a few months ago, prior to moving to Austin, I had a particularly eye-opening experience. Turning to "Part 2" of the *Long Island Newsday*, whom did I see but Richard and Ryan Blount and Jonathan Grant, three young souls who belonged to the congregation I was serving as pastor. Each was standing tall and, I must say, very handsomely in a full-page color picture. The caption above it read "Raising Culturally Aware Kids."

Allan Cole is assistant professor of pastoral care at Austin Seminary. He received the M.Div. and Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary and the M.S. in social work from Columbia University.

My initial reaction was one of surprise. After all, it is not every day that we see people so familiar to us in the paper, especially on a full page and in color. But as I read the feature article, which told a bit about these three special boys and their lifelong friendship, my surprise gave way first to admiration, and then, to a sense of challenge.

The article led with a caption concerning cultural awareness. Yet more than simple awareness, it was about people being tolerant of, and even having affection for, persons who are different from themselves. The difference of interest in this article was that Richard and Ryan are black and Jonathan is white. But whether the difference is one of race, ethnicity, religion, culture, class, or something else, the author of the piece observed correctly that this “awareness” is something at which the youngest among us tend to be most accomplished. In fact, we know that while children may notice differences among themselves and other people from a young age, rarely do they view those differences unfavorably or as a reason to dislike others. Both research studies and shared experience confirms that *xenophobia*, the technical term for being afraid of and thus biased against those who are different, is something we learn as we grow up and “mature.” We begin to lose trust, to be afraid, and to be prejudiced as we learn those kinds of feelings and behaviors from others, who are almost always older if not wiser. In light of this tendency, Jesus’ comment that unless we change and become like children we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 18:3) is particularly poignant.

THE *MOST COMMITTED* CHURCHGOERS DEMONSTRATED
LEVELS OF PREJUDICE SIMILAR TO NON-CHURCHGOERS, AND
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WERE INDEED MORE PREJUDICED THAN THOSE WHO DID
NOT ATTEND CHURCH OR CLAIM TO BE RELIGIOUS.

Among the first to investigate the relationship between religiosity and prejudice among white persons, at least in a manner utilizing empirical data, was Gordon W. Allport, professor of psychology at Harvard from 1930 until his death in 1967.² He found that people claiming to be religious and who attended church regularly demonstrated a higher tendency for prejudice toward those of different races, religions, and world views than did non-churchgoers.³ He added an important qualification to his finding, namely, that those *most committed* to their religious faith and attending church most often (e.g., weekly) were typically less prejudiced than those claiming to be religious but attending church less frequently. Even so, the *most committed* churchgoers demonstrated levels of prejudice similar to non-churchgoers, and those attending church often (if not every week) were indeed more prejudiced than those who did not attend church or claim to be religious.

Why do many persons drawn to church membership also tend to be prejudiced? The factors include fear and a lack of understanding of the unfamiliar, including persons, lifestyles, ways of thinking, and perspectives on the divine. Churches may offer

assurance, comfort, and a sense of community among similar people, thus diminishing their fear and lack of understanding. A related factor may be the need for unambiguous answers and clear, demarcated life structures concerning persons, lifestyles, ways of thinking, and perspectives on the divine. Once again, Allport's insights are illuminating: "Prejudiced people seem to be afraid to say 'I don't know.' To do so would cast them adrift from their cognitive anchor.... Prejudiced people demand clear-cut structure in their world, even if it is a narrow and inadequate structure. Where there is no order, they impose it. When new solutions are called for they cling to tried and tested habits. Wherever possible they latch onto what is familiar, safe, simple, definite."⁴ Prejudiced people resist living with ambiguity. They seek clearly defined life structures, relationships, and world views that they believe will offer them assurance and thus safety. If and when the church is itself afraid to say, "I don't know," thereby requiring its own unambiguity, it becomes attractive to persons who desperately need a "cognitive anchor."

Since Allport's finding, numerous studies have tested his claim and, by and large, have confirmed its soundness.⁵ "Authoritarian" and "dogmatic" religiosity correlate with prejudice, while "quest-centered" and "experiential" religiosity correlate with inclusiveness and openness. This led Allport to conclude that "the role of religion is paradoxical. It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice."⁶

Nevertheless, there remains a clear positive correlation between religion and prejudice. As pastoral theologian James Dittes describes it, "there *is* more racial prejudice in the church than outside it," and "as we continue to analyze prejudice, one of the things we find, more likely than not, is membership in a Christian church."⁷ Similarly, as the psychologist of religion David Wulff observes, "Using a variety of measures of piety—religious affiliation, church attendance, doctrinal orthodoxy, rated importance of religion, and so on—researchers have consistently found positive correlations with ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, dogmatism, social distance, rigidity, intolerance of ambiguity, and specific forms of prejudice, especially against Jews and blacks."⁸ Indeed, the role of religion is paradoxical.

Learning of these findings, I felt a strong desire to dismiss them. I wanted to believe that the church resists biased attitudes and behaviors, offering a voice and witness that counter what we find in the broader cultures we inhabit. Moreover, I felt the urge to reconcile my own place in the mix with the self-assurance that I must be among the "most religious" that Allport cites, that is, among those less prejudiced than the preponderance of church folk. I suspect, however, that I am more prejudiced than I wish to recognize, and more prejudiced than Christ would have me be.

Regardless of where we place ourselves on the "prejudice continuum," we who profess the church's centrality in our lives cannot deny a glaring set of statistics that confirm what Allport, and many after him, have found. The worship hour remains the most segregated hour of the week in America, just as Martin Luther King Jr. said in 1962. Michael Emerson, a sociologist at Rice University, defines a multiracial congregation as one where no racial group makes up more than eighty percent of the members. Using that standard, only eight percent of American congregations are significantly racially integrated: two-to-three percent of mainline Protestant congregations, eight percent of other Protestant congregations, and twenty percent of Roman Catholic

congregations.¹⁰ While prejudice may not be the only reason there are relatively few multiracial congregations in this country, I wonder if this statistic, which I suspect is congruent with the experiences of many who read this journal, coupled with the empirical studies mentioned, supports those studies' shared conclusion.

I give a great deal of credit to the Blount and Grant families. Loving other people, particularly those who are different from us, must be instilled and reinforced in our children at a young age, particularly when the powerful cultures in which we live tell us in subtle and not so subtle ways that difference is "bad," "scary," and not to be trusted. In concrete ways, Richard, Ryan, and Jonathan are simply modeling what their parents taught, both in words and actions, even while society and, perhaps, the church, are saying something else.

We live in an age when professional athletes, celebrities, and business tycoons are the most frequent recipients of our collective admiration. These are the people many of us want to emulate. I think, for example, of the Gatorade commercial of a few years ago in which Michael Jordan is watched by a group of youngsters with a jingle playing in the background saying: "I wanna be like Mike!" As my eyes opened that morning while reading the *Newsday* article, admiring three role models for the church, I discovered just how much I want us all to be like Richard, Ryan, and Jonathan! ☼

NOTES

¹ This title is a play on James E. Dittes' book, *Bias and the Pious: The Relationship Between Prejudice and Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1973).

² The term religiosity refers here to the embrace of religious faith and the practice of one's religion.

³ G. W. Allport and J. M. Ross, "Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 5 (1967): 432-443.

⁴ G. W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1954): 402, 403.

⁵ See, for example, Dittes, *Bias and the Pious*; Richard L. Gorsuch and Daniel Aleshire, "Christian Faith and Prejudice: A Review and Interpretation of Research," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13 (1974): 281-307; H. Paul Chalfant and Charles W. Peek, "Religious Affiliation, Religiosity and Racial Prejudice: A New Look at Old Relationships," *Review of Religious Research* 25, no. 4 (1983): 155-161; Bob Altemeyer and Bruce Hunsberger, "Authoritarianism, Religious Fundamentalism, Quest, and Prejudice," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 2, no. 2 (1992): 113-133; Bernard Spilka, Ralph W. Wood Jr. and Richard L. Gorsuch, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1985).

⁶ Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 444.

⁷ Dittes, *Bias and the Pious*, 50, emphasis mine.

⁸ David Wulff, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views* (New York: Wiley, 1991), 219-220.

⁹ Martin Luther King Jr., "An Address Before the National Press Club," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: Harper Collins), 101.

¹⁰ These statistics are provided by The Multiracial Congregations Project, led by Michael Emerson and based at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT. See http://hirr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_congregations_research_multiracial.html.



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