

Dilemmas in Preaching Doctrine: Declericalizing Proclamation¹

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The specifically theological responsibility inherent in preaching today feels urgent, bewildering, challenging, and immensely exciting all at once! Western society in the twilight of modernity has been characterized as a state of “progressive dechristianization.” This is a stage in which “churches primarily accommodate to the prevailing culture rather than shape it.”²

Increasing pluralism makes Christianity appear more vividly as but one religion among many. Churches are more inclined to look inward rather than outward and are, as a result, more easily disregarded in society generally. Religion overall is losing social significance because of increasing secularization. Beneath the surface of our culture “root paradigms,” those broad assumptions about humankind and the universe, are not “gospel friendly.”³

All of this poses a major dilemma. The gospel needs to be expressed in ways meaningful to people who live within a given culture. But many of our society’s assumptions and values are contrary to this very gospel.⁴ Do we withdraw into our own cultural-linguistic community shaped by faith commitments? Or will we also engage in a mission to culture as such?⁵ What constitutes a theologically responsible approach to preaching that can face such issues?

Cultural Transformation: the Augustinian Innovation

Before exploring these questions it may be helpful to be reminded that our situation is not unique. Take, for example, the crisis facing the Roman Empire at the time of Augustine. Charles Cochrane, in his classic work on Augustine, speaks of the perplexities of the Mediterranean world of the fourth century (C.E.). After a thousand years of sustained endeavour the (Greco-Roman) Empire was “suffering from chronic debility, and nothing which political activity could achieve seemed capable of restoring it to its vigour.” It was decaying internally and suffering military disasters repeatedly. Underneath these externalities lay the deficient rationality of Classicism. As a result of his conversion, Augustine gradually worked out an alternative “Trinitarian” way of reasoning. His radical theological turning, his *metanoia*, gave him the light necessary to perceive the inadequacies of the reigning cultural rationality. But he was also “enabled to recognize the element of Truth which it contained.”⁶

Augustine’s distinction between *scientia* (knowledge) and *sapientia* (wisdom or insight) led Christians to feel that they were “a foreign element...in a community of unbelievers,” because *sapientia* requires faith. But this did not lead to isolation. In fact, out of the guiding maxim of his life, *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding), Augustine developed a mature, theologically rooted, public philosophy.⁷

Michael Polanyi names this a postcritical philosophy. Augustine “taught that all knowledge was a gift of grace, for which we must strive under the guidance of antecedent belief.” This new fusion of faith and knowledge held sway for a thousand years. The bifurcation of rationality in modern thought, beginning especially with

Descartes' subject/object split, led eventually to the ascendancy of what is "scientifically demonstrable" and a concomitant decline of faith.⁸

Augustine's philosophy was lived out in monastic communities as "a visible sign and preliminary realization of a world ruled solely by the love of God in the midst of a world ruled by the love of self." But the Augustinian vision of these communities called "the public world of government, of education, of buying and selling, of ruling and serving" to be shaped accordingly.⁹

This brief historical recollection should be particularly encouraging to preachers. A theological perspective, it suggests, may stand over against reigning rationalities as a strange language in a strange land. Yet far from being powerless or meaningless, doctrinal engagement has the potential to restore brokenness and invite newness. How preachers discern what is faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ is surely bound up with an understanding of doctrine. The reception of their preaching is similarly entwined with fundamental notions of theology as doctrine.

The Nature of Doctrine: an Ecclesial Approach

In ordinary religious conversation "theology" and "doctrine" are usually interchangeable. But this obscures the essential contribution of the church in the development of doctrine. In his examination of the genesis of doctrine Alister McGrath understands Christian theology as doctrine when it expresses the tradition and faith of a Christian community. "Theology" may designate the cognitive formulations of theologians, but "doctrine" has to *be received* by communities of faith. In being received by them doctrine defines their discourse; it has a representative character and attempts to describe or prescribe their beliefs.¹⁰ Dialectically, receiving can entail giving, that is, contributing to the shaping of specific formulations.

This ecclesial approach to doctrine implies a covenantal commitment on the part of Christians to their community and an acceptance that "the corporate mind of the community exercises a restraint over the individual's perception of truth." Doctrine *actively* transmits collective wisdom.¹¹

Western society's individualistic inclinations make this stance seem radical, even inappropriate. The effect of individualism on the church is the diminution of a covenantal sense of belonging. In our worship, then, we participate with a certain detachment. Preachers are more inclined to offer merely personal opinions and listeners decide what they like or don't like. This is hardly the Body of Christ described in I Corinthians 12 where all are members *together*, called by one Spirit, inspired by one God. Each is gifted but within a communal bond. We stand personally with our own consciences before God, but we stand within the Church (though often critical of it!).

The struggle to receive doctrine, whether articulated through preaching or some other means, can be painfully difficult. In fact, "reception hermeneutics" draws attention precisely to this issue in the case of new formulations. To the extent that doctrine challenges the horizon of a congregation's expectations, a horizon shaped more than it often realizes by the culture of modernity, to that extent it may be perceived negatively. This tension is not new. The clash of Jesus with his contemporaries may not at this distance seem so radical, but reading texts about his encounters "against the grain of their present day acceptance" can help us grasp their "originally provocative and transcendent character."¹²

When doctrinal theology is located within the liturgical life of the church, a

dialectical interplay exists between the preacher as “steward of the mysteries of God” (I Cor. 4:1) and the congregation as believing followers of Christ. In this interaction the contribution of the congregation seems less recognized, less appreciated. To explicate this double conjunction of preacher and congregation, doctrine and preaching we may be assisted by exploring four widely held dimensions of doctrine. As outlined by McGrath, doctrine functions as: social demarcator, interpretive narrative, interpretation of experience, and truth claim.¹³

1. *Doctrine as social demarcation.* Churches are social entities; communities within society which are defined by their faith. When, as in the first century, Christian communities were already (sociologically) distinct within the Roman Empire, they did not appear to need precise doctrinal formulations. They knew who they were in a hostile environment. They did, however, have to define themselves in relation to contemporary Judaism since they had declined to adopt central Jewish symbols such as food laws, sabbath observance, and circumcision. Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus “represents a theoretical justification for the separateness of Gentile Christian communities from Judaism.”¹⁴ In the post-Constantinian period doctrine lost its function as social demarcator until the continental Reformation of the sixteenth century when the newly emerging church movements distinguished themselves from Catholic society and/or from each other.

The social function of doctrine need not lead us to question a given doctrine’s truth claims. How a theological tenet functions in a specific time and place is a separate issue from whether or not it can or should be regarded in some sense as “true” or authoritative. Drawing attention to this social factor helps us understand the circumstances that precipitated a formulation and urges us to pay attention to doctrine at a specific historical moment and location. The articulation of doctrine, therefore, is believed by a community to be more or less important depending on whether or not there is also a felt need to be distinguished from the surrounding culture.

Preaching is a traditioning process in which the communication of doctrine is vital to the very survival of the congregation as a collectivity. Fred Craddock has stressed the distinction between audience and congregation.¹⁵ An audience is primarily an aggregate of individuals, largely unrelated to each other and the preacher. A congregation is a covenanted community listened to by their pastor. Learning from the people (their language, their faith, their circumstances) the preacher socializes them toward covenant. Their being in covenant with God qualifies their perspective vis-a-vis the larger scope of God’s concerns beyond their circle. Their tripartite bond is equally theological and personal, and also binds them to the world for which Christ died.

This theological socializing function of preaching is particularly crucial when newcomers, unfamiliar with the congregation’s tradition, demonstrate an interest in being associated. Their ability to be assimilated into the community, as church, is as dependent on doctrine as it is on welcoming friendship. While the latter seems more obvious in the experience of many, genuine acts of welcome are themselves expressions of *ecclesia*, the doctrinal implications of which can serve to deepen the feeling of being included.

2. *Doctrine as interpretive narrative.* Churches, like families, are shaped through the telling and retelling of stories. This provides both a sense of historical rootedness (even though many of these recountings have been embellished over the generations!) and a moulding of outlook and attitude.¹⁶ Our lives are imbedded in concentric traditions. This is reflected in the New Testament language of being in (incorporated

into) Christ. The church, as it seeks to incarnate Christ in its life, reads its sense of discipleship out of the Gospel accounts that narrate the way of Jesus. Further understandings emerge through various rereadings of the tradition as handed on from century to century.

The congregation participates in this narrativity liturgically today when, for example, the *anamnesis*, the memory of the tradition as encapsulated especially in I Corinthians 11:23-26, is incorporated into the eucharist. This narrative transmission gives the worshipping community its sense of identity and rootedness in the crucified and risen Jesus.

Through preaching the church is invited back to its foundation documents, the scriptures. These are primarily narrative and even when they are in another genre such as Paul's letters, a narrative substructure can sometimes be discerned.¹⁷ All narratives cry out to be interpreted. They are polyvalent and, therefore, ambiguous. Some read a narrative one way, others may see it very differently. So the community of faith seeks guidance because their self-identity, including their communal sense of identity, depends on the way these foundational narratives are understood and accepted. Ricoeur, in fact, encourages this to begin by interpreting the interplay of narrative and non-narrative genres.¹⁸

"Doctrine," says McGrath, "provides the conceptual framework by which the biblical narrative is interpreted. It is not an arbitrary framework, however, but one which is suggested by that narrative, and intimated (however provisionally) by scripture itself." This is a matter of discernment not imposition. "The narrative is primary and the interpretive framework secondary."¹⁹

Narrative ambiguity in the Fourth Gospel is a case in point. Jesus says in John 14:11, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father [is] in me." A few verses later he speaks about the Father giving a Counsellor, the Spirit of truth (v.16). In John 16:7 Jesus claims to be the one who sends the Counsellor. All of these interrelations, along with other passages, are later read by the church through the doctrine of the Trinity (already formulaic in the Pauline benediction of II Corinthians 13:14). This is not an imposition on the text but a reflection emanating from the text.

Further reflection on the Gospel narratives within their canonical context have led to a deeper appreciation of the dynamic interrelations between Father, Son and Spirit. This social understanding of the Trinity has enabled the community of faith, in turn, to reflect afresh on its doctrinal heritage. The monarchical and hierarchical notions of the Trinity have given way to interrelatedness, to *diaconia* and *koinonia*. As a result, the church has been encouraged to appreciate its own life as a community marked by the distribution of *charismata* in which there is mutuality of respect and the giving and receiving of gifts.²⁰

Doctrine and scripture, interpretive framework and narrative need each other, enrich each other. This is not a closed circle, however, but a hermeneutical spiral. Doctrinal reflection can inspire new readings of a text. The biblical narrative has the potential to explode the boundaries of doctrine and also break beyond the circumference of the congregation (indeed, even beyond the bounds of the denomination).

Narrative preaching, especially when theologically pondered, communicates this interplay, this mutual opening of horizons of text and doctrine, of tradition and church. When the text's invitation to imagine is received and the church's doctrinal heritage becomes a partner in the reflective struggle to discern the text's import, transformation is immanent. Narrativity shapes the sermon's own form to assist the congregation's imaginative engagement in the world of the text.²¹ But there are limits to story as

Richard Lischer has reminded us. Our complex lives cannot be adequately reflected within narrative structures and stories by themselves do not always provoke necessary moral and political behaviour.²² Stories need to be explored as well as experienced. The reflective component, even in primarily narrative sermons, assists the congregation to appreciate that its doctrinal heritage continues to live, continues to clarify the journey of faith.²³

3. *Doctrine as interpretation of experience.* Preaching seeks to address people within their concrete individual and collective experiences. Sermons are seldom listened to for their own sakes! The congregation brings its struggles (sometimes its joys) and often its questions and asks, Is there a word from the Lord? Their wonderments and enigmas may be hard to put into words; sometimes they defy articulation. They can be groans too deep even to be formulated in thought.

Precisely here we are confronted with a paradox. "It is the sheer elusiveness of human experience, its obstinate refusal to be imprisoned within a verbal matrix, which underlies the need for poetry, symbolism and doctrine alike." While words feel, and frequently are, inadequate, we have to admit to "a fundamental resonance between words and experience."²⁴ Particularly in the church's primary language of poetry and rhetoric words do give voice to experience and are especially important in breaking the tyranny of silence. But does this also include doctrine which has traditionally seemed to be too cognitive to be able to make a contribution when consciousness of the ambiguity and mystery of experience is controlling?²⁵

It was Schleiermacher who contended that Christian doctrine was needed precisely because the community of faith required a vehicle to help them move from the poetic and rhetorical to what he called the "descriptive-didactic."²⁶ The poetic form can never capture a given experience but it can convey emotion and feeling verbally. Experience, however, calls for more than empathy; it seeks meaning. When T.S. Eliot says, "We had the experience, but missed the meaning," he is bound to add, "And approach to meaning, restores the experience."²⁷ This couplet sums up why the congregation, with all its experiences, requires doctrine.

In the face of acute suffering Moltmann's theology is profoundly hope-giving. Writing his *Theology of Hope* out of the depressing angst following the Second World War, a time of deep guilt and anomie, Moltmann considers again the doctrines of the resurrection and the cross. In the biblical narratives he discerns the contradiction between the cross and the resurrection as a dialectic. Resurrection promise contradicts the patent reality of the dead Jesus. The wholly dead is wholly raised to life, an act of new creation in the world. The resurrection begins "a historical process in which the promise already affects the world and moves in the direction of its future transformation."²⁸

In *The Crucified God* Moltmann shifts from the *resurrection* of the *crucified* Christ to the *cross* of the *risen* Christ. This sharpens concentration on the *incarnation* of future hope "by way of the suffering of Christ, in the world's suffering." His intention, he says, is "to make the theology of hope more concrete, and to add the necessary power of resistance of its visions to inspire actions."²⁹

Eventually Moltmann centers his exploration of the cross on his doctrine of God. Against the essentially Platonic *apatheia* of God, that God to be God cannot suffer as humans do, Moltmann turns back to the Gospels. There God's love is supremely evident in the accounts of the crucifixion. As the Son dies, he suffers in his love being forsaken by the Father. But the Father also suffers in his love; he grieves the death of the Son. The cross is a Trinitarian event.³⁰ The complete absence of God and the

complete presence of God are seen in the one Jesus. By raising the crucified Jesus to new life God created continuity in this radical discontinuity and confronts the contradiction between what reality is now and what God promises to make it. In the cross we see Jesus identifying with the world's godlessness, godforsakenness and transitoriness. The resurrection of the crucified Jesus is the new creation of *this* world. It is the Spirit's mission, arising directly out of the cross and resurrection, to move reality toward this new creation.³¹

This excursus on Moltmann's theology illustrates McGrath's contention that doctrine is "able to address, interpret and transform human experience, correcting it with the parameters of the Christian proclamation." Preaching doctrine, understood this way, allows "experience to be taken on new and hitherto unexpected depths of meaning." Experience by itself is "an inadequate foundation for theological affirmation." But when interpreted theologically through dialogue with the biblical narrative, "experience affords central insights into the existential dimension of the Christian faith."³²

4. *Doctrine as truth claim.* The concept of "truth" has at least three connotations: disclosure, faithful account, and trustworthiness. McGrath links these as denotations derived respectively from the Greek *aletheia*, the Latin *veritas* and the Hebrew *'emunah*. This gives the impression that "truth" in the cultures represented by these languages varies accordingly, an approach sharply criticized by James Barr more than thirty years ago.³³ Without accepting this linguistic base the three dimensions of truth as outlined by McGrath may still be usefully explored to illuminate the shaping of Christian doctrine in its earliest stages.

At the center of Christian doctrine is the disclosive presence of Jesus. Through him we discern the essential character of God as love. This is not some abstract timeless principle, but an incarnate, flesh and blood reality. Jesus generates in those who see him as a revealing presence the truth of their own existence as well as God's.

This is not a cultural-linguistic exercise. McGrath is highly critical of Lindbeck's "abandonment of any talk about God as an independent reality and any suggestion that it is possible to make truth claims...concerning him." For Lindbeck, doctrine is "intra-systemic" without necessary reference to anything outside the system such as history. Truth is confined within the cultural-linguistic community of faith.³⁴

The disclosive Jesus is approached through the narratives of scripture doctrinally understood as truthful accounts, as faithful witnesses. The biblical record is complex.³⁵ The text, many contend, needs to be read with a hermeneutics of suspicion. Retrieval of tradition calls for tough conversation that confronts unconscious as well as conscious systemic distortions. But it can, nevertheless, be retrieval if we are willing to enter into true dialogue with the text. This is an "unnerving place where one is willing to risk all one's present self-understanding by facing the claims to attention of the other."³⁶

Fiorenza's key to recovering a foundational theology is via a reconstructive hermeneutics of testimony. The truth of testimony has the "ability to disclose the meaning of an event in a way that is both theoretically and practically illuminating." Such testimonies include short formulas in the Epistles and longer narrative accounts in the Gospels. Together, and read within their context, they provide a reliable testimony, conveying the meaning of a past event, specifically in this case the event of the resurrection, and translating its illuminative and liberating vision.³⁷

The God disclosed in Jesus by faithful witnesses is a trustworthy God. Doctrine seeks internal coherence that encourages trust. Accordingly, it evolves not as isolated

units which contradict each other but as a thoughtful conceptual framework that requires ongoing reflection, challenge and correction (*semper reformanda*). For some, doctrine also requires an external correlation, a public discourse to test the reasonableness of its claims to reliability. To others, it is an intratextual reading based on criteria internal to the community of faith.³⁸

Doctrines are invitations to encounter the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, but, even more, to be encountered by that truth. Soren Kierkegaard believed that doctrine is nothing less than an existential imperative, a challenge to become Christian.³⁹

Truth understood as disclosure, faithful account and trustworthiness illuminates preaching. Vitalized by their ongoing quest for truth, sermons dare to point to the reality of God and invite the congregation to reflect on the truth of their own reality as people, and specifically as God's people. Is there not a yearning, amid the cacophony of competing persuaders in society, to hear the candid, transparent, and forthright word of truth? Are not preachers called as stewards of the truth to offer faithful exposure of what is? The reality we seek is unbounded: the truth about the world, especially its hidden pain, its silenced sufferers, its ideological masking.

This voyage toward disclosure requires not only doctrine's unceasing search to discover but also a sensitive trust between preacher and congregation. It will need to be a reciprocal trust transparent enough for each to learn from the other.

The discernment implied here begins by enabling the congregation to join the biblical witnesses seen as agents of disclosure. For too long preachers have prevented listeners from interrogating the records of these witnesses to converse with them, as though such activity would threaten their faith. Such a consequence is unlikely if the interrogation is truth seeking. This is especially so if the interrogators allow the biblical witnesses to raise their own questions of the congregation, and also if we allow that God alone is judge!

Ordinary Christians, says Tracy, have "a natural hermeneutical competence" which "does not wait upon the results of debates over...hermeneutical theories." It only asks that we be "prepared to risk our present understanding." This interpretive skill is latent within the congregation because hermeneutics begins by asking fundamental questions and these arise from the enigmas and struggles of life that are part of being human.⁴⁰

Craddock is attributed with changing the course of much contemporary homiletics when he introduced a new model for preaching in the early 1970s. Instead of the traditional deductive approach in which the preacher offered the results of what was struggled within the study, Craddock boldly proposed to let the congregation travel inductively to experience the *discovery* of truth.⁴¹ The preacher then relinquishes the authority derived from protecting information and trusts listeners to be able to overcome their fear of the text's plurality and ambiguity since this is the very nature of texts themselves. Preacher and congregation are partners together.

In our continual (and often struggling) search for truth we have found doctrine a trustworthy companion. So preaching finally becomes an invitation to be, to live the gospel. For all their thoughtfulness and rhetoric, sermons are, in the end, words of the grace of Christ that generate trust. The journey taken together is one of courageous risk leading into the revelatory power of the text.⁴² Dwelling within it we can acquire a new lens for seeing, a new way of being.⁴³

NOTES

¹ While the focus of this essay centers largely on the congregation, it should be read with the same critical “dis-ease” as that expressed by John Cobb in relation to a congregational approach to theological education. I share his concern that the scope of the church’s mission is often too limited in congregations. See his chapter in Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and Barbara G. Wheeler, eds., *Beyond Clericalism: The Congregation as a Focus for Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

² George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984), 133. Lindbeck calls this an “intermediate stage” in Western culture, “where socialization is ineffective, catechesis impossible, and translation a tempting alternative.”

³ Hugh Montefiore in the introduction to his edited collection of essays, *The Gospel and Contemporary Culture* (London: Mowbray, 1992), 2-4.

⁴ *The Gospel and Contemporary Culture*, 5. Cf. Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks, The Gospel and Western Culture* (London: SPCK, 1986) and *Truth to Tell, The Gospel as Public Truth* (Geneva: WCC, 1991).

⁵ A primary debate woven throughout this paper is that between the communitarian Yale “school” of narrative theology (represented by Frei, Lindbeck, and Thiemann) and the correlationist Chicago “school” of philosophical hermeneutics (represented by Tracy and Ricoeur).

⁶ Charles A. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture, A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 380-83.

⁷ *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 385-86. This new synthesis met “the legitimate aspirations of Classicism for a principle of order,” but also disclosed “worlds to which Classicism, from the limitation of its outlook,” remained inevitably blind (400).

⁸ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge, Towards a Post-critical Philosophy*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 266. Augustine’s maxim *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis* (unless you believe, you shall not understand) implies “a dialectical combination of exploration and exegesis. Our fundamental beliefs are continuously reconsidered in the course of such a process, but only within the scope of their own basic premises” (267).

⁹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 105. It is important not to romanticize Augustine by individualizing his contribution. The communal reception of his theology is integral to its contribution as a doctrinal legacy.

¹⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), 7-11. McGrath defines Christian doctrine as “communally authoritative teaching regarded as essential to the identity of the Christian community” (11). Cf. S. W. Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 262-86 and Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in D. R. Culter, ed., *The Religious Situation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 639-88. The balance of this essay will draw largely on *Genesis of Doctrine*, the 1990 Bampton Lectures offered at Oxford University. I suggest that this work be read alongside David F. Ford, ed., *The Modern Theologians, An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), and, for me, also Francis Schussler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology, Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1986) and David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1987)).

¹¹ *Genesis of Doctrine*, 11.

¹² *Foundational Theology*, 118-19. Of course, the biblical testimonies have to be read contextually in light of later conflicts between church and synagogue. But this should not obscure the point that Fiorenza is making. Cf. Tracy’s hermeneutics of retrieval, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, chapter 5.

¹³ *Genesis of Doctrine*, 35-80. These four dimensions or “theses” are mutually interactive and describe “the essential elements of doctrine as an historical phenomenon, which any theory of doctrine must be capable of accommodating” (37). I am summarizing much of this material with specific notations only here and there.

¹⁴ *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 39. McGrath is drawing on F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (Cambridge, 1986), 178. Cf. Lindbeck, “Operative doctrines are necessary to communal identity. A religious body cannot exist as a recognizably distinctive collectivity unless it has some beliefs and/or practices by which it can be identified.” *The Nature of Doctrine*, 74.

¹⁵ Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), chapter 2.

¹⁶ Cf. L. G. Jones’ analysis of Alasdair MacIntyre’s treatment of the community-forming quality of narrative, “Alasdair MacIntyre on Narrative, Community and the Moral Life” *Modern Theology* 4 (1987), 53-69.

¹⁷ E.g., Richard B. Hayes, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983).

¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, "Towards a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (London: SPCK, 1981), 73-118.

¹⁹ *Genesis of Doctrine*, 58-59. Scripture, adds McGrath, does not take the form of creedal statements although a few distillations are evident here and there.

²⁰ Cf., Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit, A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 1977), 295-96, 303.

²¹ See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), especially 93-104. On the various ways narrativity may be reflected in preaching, see Don M. Wardlaw, ed., *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983).

²² Richard Lischer, "The Limits of Story," *Interpretation* 38 (1984), 26-38.

²³ David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), has called attention to this interplay. After introducing the importance of careful theological thinking (29-30), he requires "moves" within a sermon to incorporate reflection (theological and otherwise), oppositions (questions and attitudes of the congregation within their cultural setting), and lived experience (pictures of life), 30-33. In later chapters he explores three possible modes of preaching: a narrative retelling of the biblical story with interwoven analogues, explanations, and interpretations; a reflective mode which stands back and tries to understand the text through deliberate theological reflection; and a mode of praxis that focuses more intentionally on particular human situations. While the reflective mode is the most explicitly oriented to doctrine, all three seek to incorporate scripture, doctrine, and experience. For a general introduction to theology and preaching, see William J. Carl III, *Preaching Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

²⁴ *Genesis of Doctrine*, 68-69.

²⁵ Ricoeur has frequently stressed the power of poetic language to create possibilities for new seeing, hearing and acting, in, for example, "Imagination in Discourse and in Action" in A.T. Tymieniecka, ed., *The Human Being in Action* (London: D. Reidel, 1978), 3-22; "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination and Feeling," *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978), 143-59; "The Narrative Function," *Semeia* 13 (1978), 177-202; and "The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality," *Man and World* 12 (1979), 123-41. The possibilities (and limitations) of transformation through imaginative engagement proposed here is explored at length, including Ricoeur's treatment of the cognitive dimension of theology, in Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative*.

²⁶ F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh, 1960), 78-83, as cited by McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 69. Brian Gerrish, in his critique of Lindbeck's interpretation of Schleiermacher concludes with a general comment, "Dogmatic theology...is needed for the sake of responsible preaching in the primary language (poetic and rhetorical) of the community. Learning the language and telling stories do not make a theology, they make a theology necessary." "The Nature of Doctrine", *Journal of Religion* 68 (1988), 92.

²⁷ From "The Dry Salvages" in Eliot's *Four Quartets* cited by McGrath, *Genesis of Doctrine*, 70

²⁸ Richard Bauckham, "Jürgen Moltmann" in *The Modern Theologians*, I, 299. Cf., Moltmann's *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1967).

²⁹ J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 5. Earlier Moltmann speaks about how his theological writing emerged from his World War II experiences. Experiences, he says, are not in themselves important. Their significance lies in what they do to the person who has had them (1-2).

³⁰ *The Crucified God*, 228, 245, cf., "Trinitarian Theology of the Cross," 235-49 and also *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981) where Moltmann challenges monotheistic and monarchical doctrines of God. The biblical narrative, he argues, cannot be adequately interpreted through these formulations but only through a Trinitarian theology. The New Testament proclaims God "in the narrative relationships of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit which are relationships of fellowship open to the world" (64, cf. 93-94, 129-32). On *apatheia* see also Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

³¹ "Jürgen Moltmann," 295-96, cf., *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 292-307, for a concretizing of a Trinitarian ecclesiology.

³² *Genesis of Doctrine*, 71-72. McGrath cites Luther's statement that experience "is what is required to be interpreted rather than what does the interpreting" (25). Cf., also the former's comment that doctrine today needs "to interpret experience, without being reduced to its categories or bound by its preliminary intimations" (72).

³³ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: SCM, 1961). Barr demonstrates that words do not give rise to concepts; concepts are created by the use of words read in context.

³⁴ *Genesis of Doctrine*, 29. McGrath contends that Lindbeck avoids addressing the question of how a community *learns* its own language as though it is just an a priori “given.” For McGrath “doctrine...is not something that is just there...it is something which purports to represent adequately and accurately the significance of an historical event and is open to challenge concerning its adequacy as an interpretation of that event” (30-31). Cf., the critique of postliberal preaching in William Sacks, “Willimon’s Project: Does it Make Sense?” *The Christian Century* (April 19, 1989), 412-14. According to Sacks, here truth is viewed as a function of enculturation and one does not need to ponder it; “one simply accepts the truth as one participates in it” (413).

³⁵ Hans Frei distinguishes between reading the Bible as history-like narratives and eternal truths (both of which he finds inadequate), and reading it as story (taking it to mean what it says as an intratextual reading). Cf., *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). Frei’s view has been influential among postliberals like Lindbeck and Willimon. Gary Comstock has compared the hermeneutics of Frei and Ricoeur and found the latter’s more appropriate for narrative theology, “Truth or Meaning: Ricoeur versus Frei on Biblical Narrative,” *The Journal of Religion* 66 (1986), 117-40. See also Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative*, chapter 7 and William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology, A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990).

³⁶ Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroads, 1981), 93, cf., 66-81. Paul Ricoeur speaks of moving beyond a hermeneutics of suspicion to a hermeneutics of belief, a postcritical reading of the text, *Essays in Biblical Interpretation*, 15, cf., 119-54. I have tried to spell out the homiletical implications of Ricoeur’s understanding of witness in “Preaching Justice: The Witness of the Spirit,” *Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics*, (December, 1983), 41-46. See also Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative*, 256-65.

³⁷ *Foundational Theology*, 31 and 46. Fiorenza’s treatment of New Testament testimonies in chapter two should be read together with his broader exploration of hermeneutics in chapter five, 108-22. In my view McGrath does not seem to have wrestled as adequately with the critical issues surrounding the veracity of the biblical witnesses as Fiorenza has.

³⁸ Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 71-91. For his critique of a correlationist approach to truth claims, see 186-88. “Revisionists” stress the importance of dialogue with modern philosophy, culture and social practices in making claims about truth. “Postliberals” emphasize attention to the grammar of the Christian tradition. See James J. Buckley, “Revisionists and Liberals,” in *The Modern Theologians*, II, 89-102, and William Placher, “Post-liberal Theology” in the same volume, 115-28. Cf., *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 15-17.

³⁹ Cited by McGrath from Kierkegaard’s *Unscientific Postscript*, 332, where a qualification is added: “The possibility of knowing what Christianity is without being a Christian must...be affirmed.” *Genesis of Doctrine*, 79. On participatory knowing, see further *Personal Knowledge*, 65, 264-68 and 299-324. Here Polanyi is challenging John Locke’s isolation of knowledge from faith, arguing that they belong together.

⁴⁰ *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 86. This, while challenging, is good news for the congregation which can, as a result, be treated with intelligence and a new respect. It is also important for those preachers who have remained intimidated by the world of scholarship. If truth be entirely told, there is often just as much fear between so-called scholars themselves!

⁴¹ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Bartlesville, OK: Phillips University Press, 1971).

⁴² Cf., Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 350-53.

⁴³ It needs to be added that preaching as outlined in this paper is part of a larger web, the total experience of the congregation in its worship, learning, decision making, caring, fellowship and mission.