PREACHING AS CATALYST OF CHURCH RENEWAL

by

Philip E. Johnson, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the Divinity College

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the degree

Bachelor of Divinity

McMaster Divinity College

April, 1969

The author holds the following degree:

      B. A. (Waterloo University College)

Thesis work done under the supervision of Professor G. P. Albaugh.

Scope and content of Thesis:

This thesis treats the theories of communication and dialogue and their

application to preaching. It is contended that preaching as a two-way

encounter is an effective means of communicating the gospel for the

renewal of the local church. Chapter I is confined to an examination

of the theory of communication as it applies to preaching. Chapter II

expounds the principles of dialogue and indicates the relevance of

their application to the preaching process. Chapter III discusses

Robert A. Raines' experiment in church renewal at Germantown Methodist

Church, Germantown, Pennsylvania, in which preaching has been employed

extensively. Chapter IV presents the positive evidence for the im-

portant place of preaching in church renewal taking place under the

leadership of Wallace E. Fisher, minister of Holy Trinity Lutheran

Church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

PREFACE

The question for the church today is whether or not preaching can be recovered from its present doldrums to serve a dynamic function in church renewal. Persons outside and inside the church are rejecting preaching as an irrelevant and outdated means of communicating the gospel in the twentieth century. In upholding their view they point to the many "dead" churches which center their program in the traditional sermon given once a week. The church, they feel, cannot possibly be renewed through the efforts of such preaching. Others, however, contend strongly that preaching can be, and in forward looking churches is being, used as an effective means of communicating the gospel.

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that preaching can be an important and effective means of communicating the gospel in planned programs of church renewal. It will be contended that the church has failed to recognize and utilize the potential of preaching, and that where preaching is applied as a genuine two-way encounter, renewal can be experienced.

I wish to express my appreciation to all those who have given assistance in the writing of this thesis. Professor G. P. Albaugh has guided my reading and writing in a manner blending both rigorous discipline and compassionate criticism. Dr. M. J. S. Ford, second reader, has helped me to be more precise at several points. Miss Joan Oliphant has typed from manuscript with interest and care. Most of

all, I should like to thank my wife, Lyn, whose encouragement and understanding have sustained me in the discipline needed for the completion of my work.

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CHAPTER I

COMMUNICATION

We live in a "Communication Age". If we wish to capitalize on

its opportunities, it is of paramount importance that we have a clear

understanding of the total communication process. This chapter will

seek to ground the reader in the theory of communication by: (1) defin-

ing its nature; (2) describing its four basic principles of operation;

and (3) relating these principles to the practice of preaching.

Definition

Communication, simply defined, occurs whenever two or more

persons have a meeting of meaning.[1] Bringing to the communication ex-

perience an attitude, idea, or information which he desires to share

with someone else, each person must be prepared to give and to receive.

One must be willing to give his idea and allow someone else to receive

it, or must be willing to listen and receive an idea which another

wishes to give. Current research points out consistently that communi-

cation is not, as it was formerly conceived, a one-way process, but

rather a two-way process. Wilbur Schramm, a leading researcher in the

field of mass communication, indicates that when we try to share an

idea with someone else, or communicate, we are, in effect, attempting

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[1]Reuel Howe, The Miracle of Dialogue (New York: The Seabury
Press, 1962), pp. 22-23.

to establish a "commonness" with that person. When barriers prevent

this "commonness", or meeting, no communication takes place.

What are the purposes of communication? The above definition

has implied the purposes, but a more detailed analysis is necessary.

The first purpose of communication is to present information

and meaning which is conveyed and received between individuals and

groups.[3] Secondly, it can help persons make responsible decisions as

these relate to the truth. Third, it can bring back into relationships

a vitality similar to that which originally produced them. Finally,

in the personal encounter of communication, it may be to help persons

become more keenly aware of themselves and others.

Principles of Communication

Now that we have defined communication and noted its purposes,

it is our task to examine in detail four of its basic principles: (1)

its structure, (2) its language, (3) its dynamics and (4) its psychology.

Structure

Communication involves three essential factors: the source,

the message, and the receptor.[4] In effective communication all three

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[2]Clyde Reid, The Empty Pulpit (New York: Harper and Row, 1967),
p. 64, who accepts Schramm's view and elaborates upon it. See also W.
Schramm's "Procedures and Effects of Mass Communication", Mass Media and
Education, ed. Nelson B. Henry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954),
p. 113.
    [3]Howe, op. cit., pp. 56-65.
    [4]Eugene A. Nida, Message and Mission: The Communication of the
Christian Faith (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1960), p. 33.

factors must be present.

Recognizing that every type of communication takes place within a cultural context and a particular setting, the participants are required to fulfil their respective roles as they "stand in relevant, understandable relation to one another."[5] The source aims his intent at the receptor who is in a position to respond. Mutual adjustment would seem to be the key. Before a participant enters into communication, he must carefully consider the background of the other. In doing this, the source will adjust not only himself to the receptor, but also his message so as to facilitate reception. The receptor, too, will adjust to respond to the source's message. Often communication does not occur simply because there is no mutual adjustment. In other words, the participants fail to break down the barriers to communication.

One of the main barriers to communication is language.[6] We are all asked frequently what we mean when we use certain words. Since the same word may have different meanings for different persons, and its accompanying emotional content may present considerable complications, it is to be assumed that language constitutes a major barrier to effective communication. Because of this barrier, it is amazing that we are able to communicate verbally at all.

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[5] Ibid., p. 178.

[6] Howe, op. cit., pp. 26-31. One could go into the insights of the phenomenologists here, but a treatment of them has purposely been omitted. See Appendix A for books treating the views of the phenomenologists and others excluded from treatment in this thesis.

Another barrier to achieving "commonness" is the image one person has of another. If either the source or receptor, or even both, have misconstrued images of each other, there is slight hope of communication taking place. The chief problem here is the failure of the participants to accept each other as they are. The Canadian Indian, for example, has a distorted image of the white man, and when, coupled with the white man's image of him, communication is extremely difficult, since it involves filtering through the image barriers.

The respective anxieties of the participants form a third barrier to communication. Each participant brings to the experience, anxieties, either of a personal nature or pertaining to the matter under consideration. These have considerable effect upon the freedom of exchange so necessary for communication. A fourth barrier is the defensiveness that stems largely from the anxieties brought to the encounter. Each of us has a well-established system of defenses designed to protect our own personal welfare. There is no harm in defenses. If one did not employ some type of defense, he would not remain healthy for long; but when defenses prevent a meeting of meaning, they do not serve any significant purpose.

The holding of contrary purposes constitutes a final barrier to communication. A good example of this barrier is the strained relationship that often develops between student and professor. The former attempting to sleep during the latter's vigorous effort to arouse his interest in every conceivable way, inhibits true communication. Sometimes it would appear that professors heighten this inhibition by resolutely refusing to listen to student questionings.

These five barriers - language, images, anxieties, defensiveness, and the holding of contrary purposes - prevent a meeting of meaning. Expressions of a deeper problem - concern for our being - these factors must be transformed from communication barriers to communication carriers.

It has to be noted that a message has meaning only within a particular cultural context. The question thus arises whether effective communication is ever possible between persons of different cultures.[7] The answer is yes for three reasons. First, the processes of human reasoning are essentially the same, irrespective of cultural diversity. Second, all peoples have a common range of human experience. Third, all peoples possess the capacity for at least some adjustment to the symbolic systems of others.

Language

Having discussed the basic structure of communication, we shall now move on to deal with signs, symbols, the nature of meaning, and fundamental facts about the meanings of words.

All of us use symbols, many of which are word symbols. Thinking without using some kind of symbolism or representative system is quite inconceivable. E. A. Nida has said: "The real power of symbols results . . . from the indispensable function of symbols in the processes of conceptualization. Some thinking is possible without word symbols, but it is usually very diffuse and unmanageable and tied to

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[7]Nida, op. cit., p. 90.

immediate impressions and stimuli."[8] We shall deal first with the
matter of symbols and their meaning, and then proceed to discuss the
characteristics of symbols and codes. Language, the most complex and
significant code employed by men, consists of three essentials -
sounds, shapes, and a system.[9] But we must note that language, although
it is only one part of human behaviour, is probably the one pattern in
our behaviour that appears most unchangeable.

At this point we should define sign and symbol. The former is
an attempt to indicate the existence of a particular thing, event or
condition within a context. The latter is a label to identify a con-
cept and is a word that can be used apart from its immediate context
or stimuli. In summary, "signs identify some features of our environ-
ment but a symbol is an instrument by which we label and manipulate our
conceptions."[10]

There are two kinds of symbols, pure and iconic.[11] The former
in no way partake of the properties of its referents whereas the iconic
symbol definitely partakes of some of the properties of its referents.

What are the characteristics of symbols and codes? All are
arbitrary. Each person is compelled to choose arbitrarily or select a
symbol with which he is going to represent something. A further essen-
tial feature of symbols and codes is that they are adaptable to individ-
ual differences of usage. But as Nida points out:

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[8]Ibid., p. 3.

[9]Ibid., pp. 62-85.

[10]Ibid., pp. 65-66.

[11]Ibid., p. 68.

> Symbols, with all their arbitrariness,
> dependence upon convention, individual
> differences of form and diversities of
> meaning, are the basic ingredients of
> a language code, which consists of sym-
> bols and a system for their arrangement.[12]

A code, therefore is simply a system for the arrangement of symbols. It should be noted, however, that the use of symbols is limited in that they can obscure as well as reveal. This limitation of usage must always be kept in mind.

Moving on to the nature of meaning, it must understand that meaning has a bouble purpose - psychological and anthropoligical. It functions not only to express or symbolize concepts, but also for the promotion of purposes. It is interesting to note that adults have a child-like craving for perceptual models, conceptions which they can see with their minds, or better still, see with their eyes. In other words, adults want to perceive through pictures. When people are enabled to see in this broad sense, conceptualization and translation of meaning is assisted immeasurably.

Words, Nida explains represent only "a conceptual map of experience". We must not, he warns, confuse the map and the territory. We must not think that symbols are substitutes for experience. If persons know the verbal formulations or conceptualize, we cannot conclude automatically that they have experienced that to which the conception refers.

Three fundamental facts about the meanings of words deserve

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[12]*Ibid.*, pp. 137-157.

mention. No two people ever mean exactly the same by use of the same word. Coupled with this, is the fact that no two words in any one language ever have exactly the same meaning. Last, no two words in any two languages have exactly the same meaning. Thus, it can be seen that the nature of meaning is extremely complex. Equally complicated is the interrelations between source and receptor. The existence of these factors help us to appreciate why we as human beings experience so high a measure of misunderstanding.

Let us now turn to the dynamics of communication, and, seek to discern how language and structure are related.

Dynamics

I have already defined communication as the meeting of meaning between two or more persons. Now I will indicate the dynamics of this relationship.[13]

Here we must consider the potential of information and observe that its communication is governed by three principal factors - the unexpectedness of the announcement, the proximity of the event, and the value of the information to the participants in conversation.

When new information is imparted, two forms of reaction may follow — desire to accept it or fear of results of acceptance. The first of these reactions is the more generative and creative for it motivates men to try to emulate, imitate, and adapt new ideas or objects to their own use. The response of fear is probably the more intense reaction, and for some time tends to be the stronger and more

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[13]Reid, op. cit., p. 115.

dynamic. Expressed in a variety of ways, it is likely to take the form of unflinching loyalty to a particular social group in which the person feels secure from innovation suggested by the new information.

Previous mention has been made of the importance of community in communication. Community is a principal factor governing the potential effect of any type of news. The importance of community is to be found in the relationships and attitudes which influence and dictate communication.[14] In a geniune community, there is an attitude of trust, confidence, acceptance and honesty, which makes significant two-way communication possible. However, we cannot expect a deep sense of community to develop unless there is two-way communication. Communication, therefore, flourishes where there is a genuine sense of community.

We spoke earlier of the reactions triggered by the impartation of new information. What are the circumstances which make the response favourable. Essentially these are five. First it is necessary to have a society which is in the process of change for society which is in a state of equilibrium is usually quite difficult to change. Coupled with a society in the process of change is the favourable circumstance of the possibility of creating new social groupings. A third favourable circumstance is the recognition of unmet needs; this is extremely important because a need, no matter what it is, must be recognized before it can be satisfied. The fourth favourable circumstance for the development of response is the novelty of challenge. Groups will respond to a new challenge more readily than to an old one.

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[14]Nida, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

Information thus has its greatest power when it is novel and fresh. A further fundamental principle underlying information theory is that the amount of information carried by any item is directly proportionate to its unpredictability. This is to say that if any one can predict the occurrence of a particular word or expression, then that word or expression carries relatively little information or impact.

Just as there can be development of response, so there can be decline in response. When this occurs, two essential techniques can be initiated to continue the momentum of response. New information may be supplied constantly and new applications of this information may be introduced. Within this development of response, we must not only give new information but also ensure that the new information receives specific application.

Psychology

In considering the psychology of communication, we shall be dealing with the basic ingredients of effective identification and proceed to explain communication in terms of ascending levels of effectiveness. We shall then present seven phases in the communication process, in other words, show how it functions, and comment briefly on the integrity of communication.[15]

The general prerequisite to any type of identification is that one must realize when he is communicating, that he is communicating with persons - with specific persons, not with a generalization;

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[15]Ibid., pp. 158-170.

not even with a type. If our communication is to be at all effective, our identification with persons should be as intensive as possible.

This leads us to discuss five basic ingredients of effective identification. First, we must fully recognize our own motivations. Next, we must come to know others. Third, we must participate in the lives of other people, not as benefactors but as colabourers; as co-searchers for meaningfulness in life. We must be willing, in the fourth place, to expose ourselves to being known; we must break down some of the barriers that prevent us from knowing each other, allow ourselves to be exposed to someone else as we really are. Last, the indispensable ingredient in identification is a genuine love for people. We must not only love everyone in general, but we must know and love specific persons. Only in this way can we effectively identify.

To connect these basic ingredients of identification, and explain them in terms of the various levels of communication, it must be remembered that mutual adjustment is involved in the whole communication process. Identification involves the totality of interhuman relationships. It is not one segment of man that we are dealing with here, but the whole man, a whole man identifying with a whole man.

The lowest level of communication is that in which the message has no significant effect on behaviour: the substance of the message is essentially self-validating. At the second level, there is a message which, though it has no permanent effect on one's total value system, does affect significantly his immediate behaviour. We are at the third level when the message not only concerns a large segment of

a person's behaviour, but also his whole value system; there is identi-
fication not only with the message that the source is presenting, but
also identification with the receptor of that message. Only as these
two are in harmony, and the source convinced that somehow the receptor
understands him, will there be any effective communication. The last
level of communication is one in which the message has been so effect-
ively communicated that the receptor feels the same type of communica-
tive urge as that experienced by the source. The receptor then becomes
a source of further communication of the message. At this level, the
real dynamic of identification is experienced. As the receptor identi-
fies with the message, it is inculcated and subsequently transmission
to someone else made possible.

In The Empty Pulpit, Clyde Reid detects seven main phases in
the successful communication process.[16] The first of these is trans-
mission, which occurs when the communicator presents his message to
a receptor. Next comes contact, the stage in which the listener hears
the source's message. This is followed by feedback, a return process
by which the listener reflects information back to the original com-
municator. Then comes comprehension, the point at which the listener
gains a genuine understanding of what the source means by the message
transmitted. Having genuinely understood the message, the receptor
is now in a position to accept, ignore, or reject the message. If he

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[16]Reid, op. cit., pp. 68-71. A consideration of "meta-
communication" has been purposely omitted. See Appendix B for books
dealing with this and associated subjects not treated in this thesis.

accepts the message he proceeds to the phase of internalization, which posits the possibility of change in the receptor's manner of behaviour. Finally, there is a trend among modern researchers to regard communication as incomplete unless it reaches the point where the source and receptor have a common, shared understanding and proceed to act on the basis of this understanding.

In concluding this section on the dynamics of communication, it should be called to attention that the integrity of the communication process requires that deeds match with words. When there is a contradiction between words and actions, deeds tend to communicate much more effectively than words.[17] Thus, communicators must take into account the fact that there is not only a verbal message, but a message of action.

Preaching as Communication

Having outlined the basic principles of the process of communication, we will now proceed to discuss a specific aspect of the process which holds the key to the truly successful ministry - preaching. We shall begin with a general section in which we shall indicate the relation between religion and communication; present a theological basis upon which we can build; and consider a general structure for preaching as communication. Then we will deal with the present crisis in preaching traceable to the negative factors of over-communication, hesitancy to give up conventional preaching patterns, and archaic use

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[17]Ibid., pp. 74-75.

of language. From this crisis we shall move on to indicate the true purpose of preaching and draw some implications for preaching as a means of communication.

General

If preaching is to be rescued from its present doldrums, we must recognize that communication of the gospel demands a response, acceptance or rejection, stemming from the listener's deeply rooted and most keenly felt values.[18] It should be noted, too, that preaching is the communication of a new way of life. These are the basic principles to which Howe refers when he declares:

> Preaching is an encounter involving not only
> content but relationship, not only ideas but
> action, not only logic but emotion, not only
> understanding but commitment.[19]

When we consider communication within the sphere of religion, we are concerned with the sending and receiving of messages in the same fundamental manner as in other forms of communication, but with some special features added.[20] There is present in religion the re-enactment of earlier communication through rites and ceremonies which in themselves constitute media for the communication of religious concepts to other religious persons. It may be added that the relationship between the various participants in religious communication is one of inter-dependence, since there is an attempt to establish a commonness with

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[18]Nida, op. cit., p. xiii.

[19]Reuel Howe, Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967), p. 42.

[20]Nida, op. cit., pp. 15 ff.

someone in regard to the Christian faith.

Certain beliefs underlie the practice of religion, without which there can be no communication to and from the supernatural. These include beliefs about the supernatural objects and the human participants in the communicative act, the past and present relation-ships of the participants, and the means by which communication, of whatever kind, is effected and maintained.

It is important, too, to note that theology defines the pre-suppositions of religious communication in terms of:

(1) The nature and role of the participants.
(2) The historical basis of communication.
(3) The techniques of communication.
(4) The validated content of communication.[21]

Thus, when we speak of communicating the gospel, we are speaking of a process unique to Christianity. In Christianity

> God does not merely communicate concepts about Himself. He communicates Himself, in the person of His Son, in whom the Word becomes flesh. In our faith it is God who takes the initiative in communication, and through the Incarnation, both by word and by life, communicates to men. Man in turn communicates with God, pre-eminently through prayer, but in the relation of a son to a father, who reserves the right to decide what's good for his children.[22]

Equity and love are the fundamental principles of interpersonal relations as taught by Jesus.[23] The former refers to that love which evidences itself in a treatment of one's neighbour as one treats himself. The latter is the attitude towards others which recognizes the

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[21] Ibid., p. 19.

[22] Ibid., p. 22.

[23] Ibid., pp. 216-217.

worth and value of people as God sees them. God in this way communicated with man, and showed us something of himself. As we learn about God through his communication with us, we have a basic justification for communicating with others.

Basically, the announcement of the Good News of the Gospel took on a threefold character for the early church.[24] It proclaimed that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. Therefore, one must repent, be baptized, and witness as a member of the new community of God. It is no wonder that the early church was so successful in its communication endeavours. The early Christian's understanding of the message was simple and clear. Consequently as a receptor of the message he was brought face-to-face with God in the person of Jesus. Early Christians did not conceive of themselves as committee members responsible for the establishment of a church but rather as communicators of a message, primarily sowers of the seeds of the Gospel. This Biblical view of communication implies that the Biblical revelation is not absolute.[25] It also implies that all divine revelation is transmitted not only in words, but in life itself.

It is important to note here that the theological basis for communication rests in the fact that God has communicated with man. Man, in turn, communicates God's message to others by bearing witness to the truth of God's message. The Holy Spirit is the direct communicator in the process. Thus Nida concludes:

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[24]Ibid., p. 220.

[25]Ibid., p. 225 f.

> . . . communication in which we are in-
> volved is not only supernatural in con-
> tent (in that it is derived from God);
> it is also supernatural in process, for
> the Spirit of God makes this message to
> live within the hearts of men. [26]

W. L. Malcomson, in his The Preaching Event, considers the
actual event of preaching in relation to congregation, preacher and
message.[27] This approach provides us with the basic structure of preach-
ing as communication. The preacher who is the source, presents his mes-
sage. The congregation, the receptors, receive the message.

Nida seeks to tabulate the results of the communication of the
Christian faith, indicating that the communication is normally followed
by one of five patterns of reaction.

> (1) Almost complete rejection.
> (2) Indifference.
> (3) Slow but steady acceptance by a small minority.
> (4) Rapid acceptance by a fast growing group.
> (5) Acceptance by one group and strong resistance
>   or fanatical opposition by another. [28]

The further point could be made that the sermon itself is a
message apart from its ideas or feelings expressed. Marshall McLuhan
holds the view that the context of the sermon - i.e. the externals in-
cluding the preacher's robes, the elevated pulpit and the ceremonies -
modifies the message of the medium, or may even add to it.[29]

Earlier comments made about information theory have implications

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[26]Ibid., p. 229.

[27]William L. Malcomson, The Preaching Event (Philadelphia: The
Westminster Press, 1968), p. 9.

[28]Nida, op. cit., p. 149.   [29]Reid, op. cit., p. 76.

for the preacher. He must make sure that he is not employing unfamiliar words in unusual combinations. He must also avoid swinging to the other extreme of use of hackneyed expressions. If we look closely at the teaching method of Jesus, we see that he spoke in the language of the common people, using a framework which provided optimum information as well as truth. Of Jesus' teaching Nida comments, "His words were truth with impact."[30]

Crisis

We in the Protestant tradition are faced with a preaching crisis, a crisis which to a great extent is a problem of communication.[31] From persons outside the church, as well as those genuinely interested in effective communication of the gospel in the church, preaching is being criticized severely. We are being reminded again and again that our present form of preaching just is not communicating in the manner we have described above.

R. J. Parsons, in recent doctoral research, tested some metropolitan Detroit church people and found that less than one-third of persons tested could give a reasonably clear statement of the primary question of the sermon to which they listened or the answer suggested in the message.[32] Another study, in which a questionnaire was filled out after the worship service in a New England church, indicated that 56 percent of those tested felt the minister's sermon was "superior"

[30]Nida, op. cit., p. 75.

[31]Howe, Partners, p. 42.

[32]Reid, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

and another 35 per cent felt it was "good". But in the following

questions, answers revealed that, irrespective of what they had felt

about the sermon, only 21 per cent had formulated and retained the

central idea of the message, and 40 per cent were unable to reply at

all.

Clyde Reid, Associate Director at the Institute for Advanced

Pastoral Studies, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, argues convincingly that

today we are confronted with an empty pulpit, commenting:

> The pulpit today is empty in the sense that
> there is often no message heard, no results
> seen, and no power felt. The emptiness of
> which I speak is an absence of meaning, a
> lack of relevance, a failure in communica-
> tion. To be sure, this is a relative empti-
> ness, not absolute. But it is emptiness,
> nevertheless. [33]

One would be inclined to agree with Reid, because most of the

sermons we hear are ordinary, dull, dry and unimaginative. They ramble

and are not in the main flow of life in the twentieth century. We

must realize, Reid says, that our present preaching pattern is a "yes-

terday-structure".[34] We are tending to rely on preaching as the sole

vehicle of communication of the gospel. It must be more than an event

by itself or communication will be incomplete.

Another current criticism is that contemporary preaching over-

communicates.[35] All too often, preachers have been guilty of feeding

their people with excessive amounts of a variety of spiritual food. So

much material is presented that the listener is literally swamped with

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[33]Ibid., p. 9.

[34]Ibid., p. 105.

[35]Ibid., pp. 90-92.

the information. A good suggestion in regard to this situation is that there should be periods of silence in which men can experience the presence of God and hear the words of faith. This would counteract in large measure our over-communication. What is being implied here is an attempt to bring into perspective the communication between God and man, and of God, through and between man and man.

Reliance on preaching alone to bear the burden of the communication task is definitely erroneous. Preaching will not become truly effective until we come to view it as an important segment of the whole communication process. For some time now, we have relegated the communication of the gospel almost solely to preaching, and we are the poorer for having done so.

Summarizing the crisis in preaching, Howe comments:

> The crisis of preaching, therefore, exists
> because the meanings of the gospel are unmet
> by the meanings we bring out of our lives;
> and the meanings that emerge out of living
> are unmet by the timeless meanings of God's
> Word for us. The performer, monological,
> clergy – monopolized type of preaching is
> incapable of meeting the crisis construc-
> tively. [36]

Having described the crisis in terms of communication and over-communication, let us move on to record some of the charges that are being laid against conventional preaching.

Howe points out that preaching, preserved in a mould, has lost its potential creativity.[37] He enumerates four characteristics of conventional preaching which indicate the critical nature of the present

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[36]Howe, _Partners_, p. 45.   [37]_Ibid._, p. 34.

situation. He criticizes:

> (1) Physical arrangements.
> (2) Manner of preaching which reflects the clergy's monopolistic role.
> (3) Unrelatedness of the gospel to life.
> (4) Absence of organized response or feed-
>   back from the congregation. [38]

There is as well a loss of meaning because of disabling images.[39] The preacher may take on the image of an exhibitionist who performs for his congregation through a masterpiece of communication; or he may contract a paralysis in which the demands of preaching frighten him so much that he is unable to get down to the grass-roots preparation needed to equip him for his task.

Lack of preparation would seem to be another charge against conventional preaching.[40] Ministers should take time not only to glean substance and ideas from written materials, but also from his personal relationships in the home, church and elsewhere. Bluntly, ministers should make themselves aware of what is going on around them and then preach out of the breadth of their experience.

Seven responses of laymen to contemporary preaching are recorded by Howe.

> (1) Sermons often contain too many ideas.
> (2) Sermons are composed of too much analysis and too little answer.
> (3) Sermons are too formal and impersonal.
> (4) Preachers assume that laymen have a greater knowledge and understanding of biblical and theological lore and language than they actually do.
> (5) Sermons are too propositional. They contain too few illustrations; and the illustrations are often too literary and not helpful.

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[38]Ibid., pp. 35-37   [39]Ibid., pp. 22-24.   [40]Ibid., p. 38.

(6) Too many sermons simply reach a dead
     end and give no guidance to commit-
     ment and action. [41]

These comments of laymen speak for themselves.

Reid levels several other charges against conventional preaching to which I would like to refer   briefly. Agreeing that most sermons are boring, dull, and uninteresting, he finds most of today's preaching to be irrelevant. Ministers are unable to feel the trends and tendencies in life of which they should be aware and to include mention of these in their witness. Preaching today is not courageous preaching. It does not lead to change in persons nor do preachers expect that as a result of their efforts men will change. Reid also points out that preaching has been overemphasized. It does not have a monopoly on the communication process. It is only one phase of a total process of communication of the gospel, the communication of a way of life. [42]

But, we may ask, why has there been no striking change in the church's approach to preaching? [43] The primary reason is that preaching has provided a predictable situation. We know exactly what is going to happen. As a result there is very little threat to the status quo, the individual or his way of life. The preacher too may resist change because by abolishing the sermon he may lose what he considers to be a necessary emotional outlet for his feelings. Furthermore, many preachers shy away from any introduction of dialogue since it threatens to

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[41]_Ibid._, pp. 26-33.   [43]_Ibid._, p. 97.

[42]Reid, _op. cit._, pp. 26-31.

expose the basic religious illiteracy of both clergy and laity.

From these charges laid against conventional preaching, let us move on to consider one further aspect of the crisis, that which relates specifically to language. It is commonly held that preachers tend to use complex, archaic language which the average person does not understand. To a great degree this criticism is valid; but in so criticizing we must realize that no other religion is so thoroughly word-oriented as that which follows the Judeo-Christian tradition. We are highly dependent upon words and in a sense are the inheritors of a faith transmitted through the words of scripture.

Is there a special Christian language? Is there a particular language that a preacher must use in order to communicate the Christian gospel? Before we deal directly with this question, let us provide some background, by outlining the basic presuppositions about language and communication which underlie the Biblical view. Briefly, they are as follows:

      (1) Verbal symbols are only "labels" and are of human origin.

      (2) Verbal symbols, as labels for concepts, have priority over visual symbols in the communicating of truth.

      (3) Language and symbols reflect a meaningful relationship between symbol and behaviour.

      (4) Communication is power.

      (5) Divine revelation takes place in the form of dialogue. [44]

Is there then a special Christian language? Upon listening to

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[44] Nida, op. cit., pp. 223-225.

many preachers, one begins to realize why sermons are so unrevealing.

Their language somehow does not reveal the meaning of faith in the

accepted language of the day. Certainly if language is to be an ef-

fective means of communication, if the sermon is to be effective, the

preacher must employ language which translates the theology of the way

of life, into meaningful words for his congregation. We are compelled

to use life-like words to proclaim the Good News.

J. W. Burbidge, in his article "The Language of Christian

Faith", states:

> All meaningful language derives ultimately
> from experience. Unlike the experience of
> the physical world, however, religious ex-
> perience has apparently no objective co-
> referent, and therefore religious language
> cannot claim to say anything meaningful
> about the observable world. [45]

This raises the whole problem of the subjective and objective in relig-

ious experience. The author suggests that any adequate analysis of

Christian language must concern itself with the objective and subjective

aspects of faith, both of which are expressed in all Christian language.

Clearly, the language of preaching as communication must evi-

dence balance in its subjective-objective relationship, and possess a

life-like, direct simplicity.

Purposes of Preaching

Let us conclude by first dealing with the purpose and implica-

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[45] J. W. Burbidge, "The Language of Christian Faith," Canadian
Journal of Theology, XII (January, 1941), 21-26.

tions of preaching.

Ray Pearson believes that the pruposes of the sermon are three: proclamation, demonstration, and implantation. But surely preaching is meant chiefly to be communication of the Christian faith.[46] The preacher's task is to lead men to communicate with God, to come in contact with God in such a way as to make decision necessary about God and about the way they live. Leslie J. Tizard has remarked: "The preacher should lead men to meet God face-to-face in such a way that they cannot escape the impact of God upon their lives."[47] Howe's further comment regarding purpose of preaching is also revealing.

> Preaching is meant to be communication. Communication is necessary to relationship; and without it there can be no relation. The great purpose of preaching is not that the congregation shall hear the preacher, but that the dialogue between God and man be directed and informed. Preaching, therefore, is significant only when it is communication that activates and informs the dialogue between God and man.[48]

This is to say that preaching must not be considered as a programme by which we propagandize men and women into the church. It must be viewed as identification with others, so that they may see our identification as realistic participation in their lives. The ministry of Jesus illustrates this point superbly.[49] He lived with men and ob-

[46]Reid, op. cit., p. 39.

[47]Leslie J. Tizard, Preaching: The Art of Communication (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 24.

[48]Howe, Partners, p. 41.   [49]Ibid., p. 83.

served and felt their needs. He looked for the meaning they placed

on life, employed their symbols and thus was enabled to convey his

ultimate meaning. He identified so closely with them that men receiv-

ed, accepted, and acted upon his message. This should be our purpose

in preaching as well. Howe explains that one of the duties of the or-

dained minister is "to preach the Word in such a way that it activates

its meanings in the lives of people so that they engage the meaning of

the world with the meaning of the Word."[50] The minister's task, there-

fore is to allow God to speak His message through him, exciting his

hearers to live for God in the world.

Let us assert at this point that preaching does play a legiti-

mate and important role in the life of the church. Reid enumerates

five main purposes for which it can be properly and appropriately em-

ployed:

> (1) To inspire by the proclamation of God's
>   good news.
> (2) To bring new and relevant information to
>   gathered people of a congregation.
> (3) To challenge with a new vision.
> (4) To reinforce present attitudes.
> (5) To reinforce confidence in times of crisis.[51]

The significance of these purposes are far reaching. The

preacher must be prepared and willing to lead in a movement to raise

the level of conventional preaching. He must be willing to work, to

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[50] Ibid., p. 110.

[51] Reid, op. cit., p. 100.

study, and to initiate.[52] He must realize that preaching is a form of
mass communications involving feedback,[53] and be courageous enough to
promote not only a listening congregation but a dialogically oriented
one.[54]

Reid would also add that we live in a new age which has five
main implications for preaching.

> (1) We must find means of communication that
> will reach people through all the senses
> at once.
> (2) We must use a variety of methods.
> (3) We must learn to teach through involving
> people rather than talking at them when
> they have ceased to listen.
> (4) Modern man will be convinced more easily
> when our actions and words show a high
> correlation, when they do not contradict
> each other.
> (5) The "new man" is increasingly impatient
> with those structures in which he is only
> a passive spectator.[55]

Conclusion

The last of these implications leads me directly to my con-
cluding comment for this chapter. We must continuously realize that
preaching has to be a two-way process.[56] Preaching must foster a two-
way flow of information for effective communication to take place, and
is indeed an incomplete process if not supplemented with dialogue.
The primary aim of preaching as communication is the effecting of a
dialogical relationship between preacher and congregation.

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[52]Dwight E. Stevenson, The False Prophet (New York: Abingdon
Press, 1965), p. 142.

[53]Reid, op. cit., p. 82   [55]Reid, op. cit., pp.60-61.

[54]Howe, Miracle, p. 132.   [56]Ibid., p. 102.

CHAPTER II

DIALOGUE

The conclusion of Chapter I indicated that communication, correctly understood, is a two-way process. This chapter will elaborate upon this theme by: (1) defining the nature and purpose of dialogue; (2) enumerating the general principles upon which it operates; (3) examining the possibilities of preaching as a dialogical instrument.

Definition

It was implied in the preceding chapter that communication, if it is genuine communication, is dialogue. We may state the case differently, saying that where there is communication there may be dialogue, but where there is dialogue, there is certain to be communication. Dialogue is communication par excellence!

When we communicate, or attempt to communicate, the relationship we seek to develop is one of mutual understanding involving adjustment. Here again we are dealing with dialogue, - not with abstract objects or generalities - but with real persons; thus we present our message to a receptor or partner in dialogue, who is in a position to respond.

Everything previously said about communication applies equally to dialogue because dialogue is true communication. The basis for our consideration is to be found in Howe's two definitions of dialogue, both of which stem from a primary assertion that every person has an onto-

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logical concern, i.e. each has a concern for his being.[1] This concern

for our being is bound up with our relationships with other persons.

His basic definition of dialogue is as follows:

> Dialogue is to love, what blood is to the body.
> When the flow of blood stops the body dies.
> When dialogue stops, love dies and resentment
> and hate are born. But dialogue can restore a
> dead relationship. Indeed, this is the miracle
> of dialogue: it can bring a relationship into
> being, and it can bring into being once again a
> relationship that has died.[2]

The last segment of the quotation reflects the miraculous nature of

dialogue and probably accounts for the title of his book, The Miracle

of Dialogue. Dialogue is the essence of life. Man, if he is to be a

real person, must be dialogical.

Howe's alternate definition is worth noting because it points

out the close relationship between communication and dialogue.

> Dialogue is that address and response be-
> tween persons in which there is a flow of
> meaning between them in spite of all the
> obstacles that normally would block the
> relationship. It is that interaction be-
> tween persons in which one of them seeks to
> give himself as he is to the other and seeks
> also to know the other as the other is.[3]

Dialogue, therefore, consists of a two-way flow of meaning which is

made possible because the barriers of communication have been broken

down. The key to dialogue is acceptance not only of self but of

others.

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[1] Reuel Howe, The Miracle of Dialogue (New York: The Seabury Press, 1962), p. 26.

[2] Ibid., p. 3.   [3] Ibid., p. 37.

One must be very careful to distinguish between the dialogical principle and the dialogical method.[4] The former implies an openness to the other side, a willingness not only to speak but to respond to what we hear. One may use any method, monological or dialogical, group or lecture method, to achieve this goal. In other words, a reciprocal relationship must be developed, regardless of method, that will provide ample opportunity for both address and response. Notice, however, that "the employment of the dialogical principle calls for correlative thinking; a thinking that looks for reciprocal relations between things, between persons, between meanings and truths, between theory and practice, between little meanings and ultimate meanings."[5]

What is the purpose of dialogue? Certainly not to offer our answers to the questions of others,[6] or to avoid the securing of consensus with the point of view of the communicator. The true purpose of dialogue is to make use of the only means by which a broken relationship can be restored to its original vitality.[7] Dialogue can do this because it represents an open and free relationship, a communication relationship which allows the participants to be unshackled from conformity and at the same time made available for transformation. To be able to participate in this type of action one must become a "dialogical person", who by Howe's definition is: (1) a total, authentic person; (2) an open person; (3) a disciplined person; and (4) a related person.[8]

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[4]Ibid., pp. 40-42.

[5]Ibid., p. 42.

[6]Ibid., pp. 52-55.

[7]Ibid., p. 64.

[8]Ibid., pp. 70-82.

Principles of Dialogue

Having defined dialogue and its purposes let us move on to discuss three main principles of dialogue - its structure, its language, and its dynamics.

Since the basic principles of communication structure apply to dialogue, it is unnecessary to add detail concerning dialogical structure at this point.

The language of dialogue may rightly be called the language of relationship, for the basis of dialogue, as it has been defined, is a process involving relationships of persons.[9] When persons relate to each other in a dialogical fashion, they speak two languages. They speak the language of mutual address and response plus an additional language of trust and love.

In dialogue each person brings to his communication interaction, an experience that provides background for the words he uses. The words, then, although symbols, are expressions of past experiences in relationship, expressions of men living in relation. But to be effective, communication must not stop at words. It must go beyond mere words and speak the language of relationship.

The aim of dialogue, therefore, is to awaken in others a response of trust and love. When we do, whatever we say in words will have meaning beyond words, since there is a mutual trust and love in each other. Howe submits that our need today is to speak not only the

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[9]Reuel Howe, Man's Need and God's Action (New York: The Seabury Press, 1953), pp. 65-76.

language of words, but the language of relationship. Certainly, it is obvious from this discussion, that the spirit of the relationship determines the nature of the communication.

Dynamics, the third principle in dialogue, deals primarily with the whole area of interpersonal relations. They form the basis for what we have described as the language of relationship. Thus it is imperative that we understand the working elements in a dialogical crisis, and record our observations on the loss of dialogue as well as the changes produced by it.

Reuel Howe indicates the five main elements that appear in a dialogical crisis as follows:

> (1) The drive on the part of each to affirm himself.
> (2) The threat that each feels in the other with respect to accomplishment of that goal.
> (3) The need on the part of each to save and justify himself.
> (4) The need on the part of each to sacrifice the other in order to save himself.
> (5) The participation in the crisis of the spirit of truth whose purpose is to move everything to everything else that is. [10]

These factors often interact in such ways that dialogue becomes impossible. Howe makes three helpful observations concerning those occasions when dialogue is thwarted.

> (1) In these exploitive and self-justifying situations the relationship necessary for dialogue is broken because mutual trust no longer exists between the parties.

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[10] Howe, _Miracle_, p. 95.

(2) The person who is the victim in this
broken relationship dies.
(3) There is a loss of God. Indeed God
always seems to us to be dead when we
substitute our thoughts about him for
living in response to him. [11]

However, when dialogue does take place, beneficial changes are

produced.

(1) Dialogue forms in us the characteristics
of the dialogical person.
(2) Dialogue can change the meaning of ex-
perience.
(3) Through dialogue, life situations acquire
new possibilities.
(4) In dialogue is revealed the comprehensive,
related character of truth. [12]

Let us now move from this general treatment to a specific con-

sideration of preaching as dialogue.

Preaching as Dialogue

It is important to realize that the entire concept of covenant

with God is based upon two-way communication in which God proposes and

man accepts. With the coming of Jesus Christ, we witness the fullness

of dialogue and fellowship with God. Our aim therefore, as Christians,

is to be dialogical persons, like Christ, through whom God speaks to

others.

Within the context of the worship service, the preaching sit-

uation has all the essentials of communication structure, i.e. the

preacher is the source, the sermon is the message, and the members of

the congregation are the receptors. It would seem that the primary

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[11] Ibid., pp. 85-87.   [12] Ibid., pp. 119-121.

task of the preacher, as an educated and trained agent, is to stim-
ulate his congregation's minds to consider their relationship with
both God and man.[13] But he does not work alone. He assists and is
largely dependent on the laity who are part of the church.[14] From
their personal experience, they bring to their worship varying view-
points and opinions which must be appreciated if there is to be a true
meeting of man and God.

There must be creative tension in the preaching situation
which enables minister and laity together, through dialogue with the
contemporary, to renew tradition; and through dialogue with the tradi-
tion to give depth and perspective to the contemporary. Another
necessary tension is that which occurs between vitality and form.[15]
The restoration of this tension is the chief over-all task of dia-
logue.

Diagrams illustrating graphically the preaching situation and
the barriers to dialogical preaching appear in Tables 1 and 2 (pages 35
and 36). From them we can discern the purpose of dialogical preach-
ing, to "help laymen to think through in their own as well as tradition-
al terms the meanings of contemporary dialogue between God and man."[16]
Anything that blocks the achievement of this aim constitutes a
barrier which may be dealt with directly and consciously or may be

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[13]Reuel Howe, _Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dia-
logue_ (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967), p. 41.

[14]_Ibid._, p. 109. [16]Howe, _Partners_, p. 74.

[15]Howe, _Miracle_, p. 126.
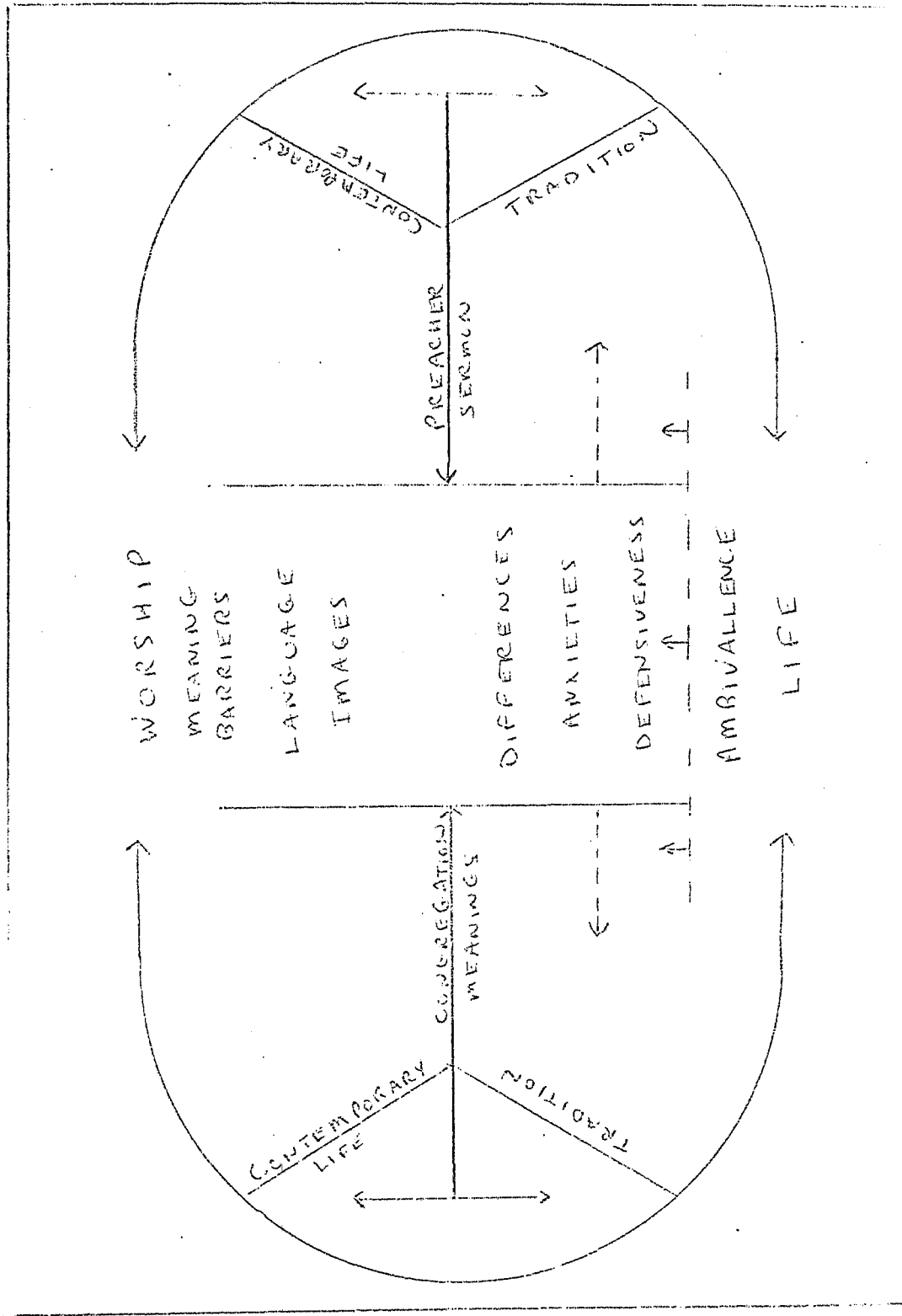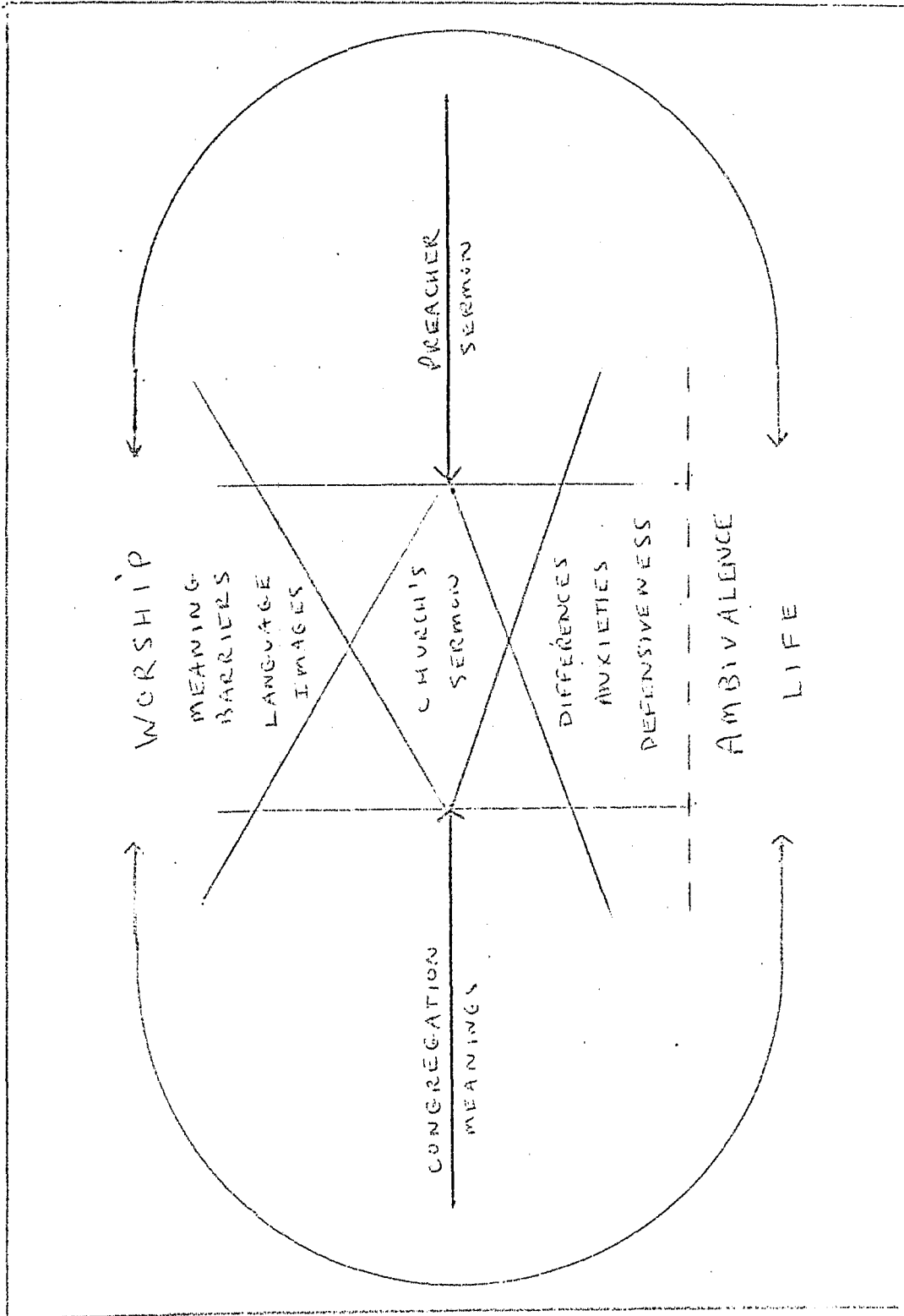
TABLE I

BARRIERS TO DIALOGICAL PREACHING

TABLE 2

HOW DIALOGICAL PREACHING
MEETS BARRIERS

solved or overcome incidentally through dialogical preaching.

One does not enter into dialogue without risk. Its use requires courage and openness. Howe points out that

> The principle underlying dialogue is: 'He
> who loses his life for my sake and the
> Gospel shall find it.' This means that we
> enter into relationship not for the purpose
> of gaining, but rather for the purpose of
> giving, with the prayer that we may lose our
> pretensions, our defensive need to justify
> ourselves, and gain, instead, a reassurance
> of life by having it affirmed in our relation-[17]
> ship with another.

In losing our life for Christ's sake, we are the message.[18] Delivering

to the world the Good News by word and action, clergy and laity must

join together to live up to this daring concept. Only when we, the

message, personally encounter the world, will the message of God's

love be communicated to others.

Toward Dialogical Preaching

Let us now consider how we might move toward dialogical

preaching.

First, the proper relationship must be established between

preaching and listening. Howe provides valuable insight here.[19] He

suggests that one of the purposes of preaching should be to raise

searching questions. When the preacher does this, he arrests the in-

terest of his people, gets his meaning off the ground, and gives them

opportunity and assistance in formulating their convictions. As they

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[17]Ibid., p. 101.

[18]Howe, Miracle, p. 97.

[19]Howe, Partners, pp. 76-78.

formulate their own convictions and fashion their own interpretations, the way is being prepared so that further learning and growth can take place.

Secondly Howe suggests that preaching requires the employment of the principle of inclusion. When we speak to other persons, we should always include their own individual meanings. We should attempt to be aware of their doubts, questions, and affirmations. Sermon illustrations should be closely oriented to the congregation's experience in thought and feeling.

Further, preaching ought to be a co-operative activity for both preacher and congregation. Some have thought, in the past, that preaching was solely the minister's task. But this is far from the truth. Both congregation and preacher must strive together, mutually adjusting, to help each other. It is worth noting that the preacher does not speak to, but for and with the whole community of God. Dr. Daniel Walker, pastor of the First Methodist Church, Pasadena, California, suggests that laymen should learn to listen to preaching.[20] They should learn to listen as a reporter, a philosopher, a counsellee and an executive.

How do the preacher and congregation begin dialogical preaching? Before anything significant can occur, both preacher and congregation must recognize that communication requires partnership. With-

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[20]Daniel D. Walker, Enemy in the Pew? (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1967), pp. 93-4.

out this fundamental understanding, any attempt at dialogical preaching
will surely fail.

Howe answers our current question by suggesting that the
preacher should instruct the laity on their role.[21] The layman is not
a spectator, similar to a fan at a sports arena, but one who must be
involved in all that is said and done. His role is not a passive role.
Indeed, the role and function of the layman is extremely active and
demanding. He must learn to listen and apply effectively.

Study groups should be introduced. If this kind of preaching
is to be successful, all concerned must view it as a mutual project.
Through groups of ten to twelve, members of the congregation encounter
each other on a more familiar and informal basis and are afforded the
opportunity of speaking their minds. During the sermon, of course,
verbal response from the congregation is not possible nor desirable.
Some churches have experimented with this open-type dialogue but its
value is somewhat limited.

In several churches, study groups meet during the week to
study the passage of scripture to be used in the Sunday sermon. This
not only prepares the group for the sermon through study and discussion,
but also assists the preacher in knowing his congregation's needs,
thoughts, and wishes. Studies at the Institute for Advanced Pastoral
Studies, reveal that

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[21]Howe, Partners, pp. 92-96.

the more meaning people can bring
to the preaching, the more they will
hear; and the more they hear the
better they will be able to live re-
flectively. For these people the
cumulative effect of the church's
preaching is the fruit of dialogue.[22]

Another way in which dialogical preaching can be initiated is
in the making of provision for feedback on the sermon. Using a tape
recorder, the group discusses the sermon without the presence of the
minister, who in turn can listen to the tape afterward. To summarize,
"the feedback process can begin to change the quality of a congrega-
tion's listening which, in turn, inevitably changes the quality of
preaching."[23]

From our discussion thus far, it is clear that the preacher
must act as an instructor. His task, in part, is to assist the con-
gregation in finding meaning from his preaching by instructing them in
their role, using study groups and making provision for feedback. In
other words, the preacher must bear in his person, the qualities of a
"dialogical teacher", which are, according to Howe:

1. His communication serves the principle of
   dialogue by whatever methods he uses.
2. He is alert to the meanings that his students
   bring to the moment of learning.
3. He endeavors to help his students formulate
   their questions and meanings as preparation
   for responding to information and understand-
   ings he is presenting to them.

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[22]Ibid., p. 90.

[23]Howe, Miracle, p. 99.

4. He recognizes himself to be a resource
   person, one who uses his knowledge,
   wisdom, and skill to help students cor-
   relate the meaning of their lives with
   the meaning of the gospel.
5. He strives for broad understanding of the
   meaning of dialogue and of its practice.
6. He is not defensive about the content he
   offers.
7. He believes that each person seeks to
   find his own special form and task.
8. He speaks and acts in his capacity as
   educator and departs from his plan with-
   out anxiety because he trusts both the
   working of the Spirit and the inner work-
   ings of his students. [24]

Clyde Reid suggests four basic criteria for evaluating models

which include dialogue in the life of the church. First, with regard

to imparting the content of the faith, discussion concerning beliefs,

doubts and values should be characterized by freedom and aimed toward

practical applications of the faith.[25] Second, over a period of time,

the same people should be held together in groups of fifteen or less.

Third, the over-all dialogue structure should permit a freedom of per-

sonal encounter so that concerns and feelings can be shared and trust

can emerge. Finally, the minister should view his task as a freeing

agent for dialogue among his congregation in order that he may act as

a catalyst and become unnecessary himself.

Reid, in his Empty Pulpit has an information section in which

he cites and describes seven dialogue models:

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[24]Ibid., pp. 137-141.

[25]Clyde Reid, The Empty Pulpit (New York: Harper and Row,
1967), pp. 114-115.

> Model A — Preaching Plus Discussion
> Model B — The Sermon Seminar
> Model C — Ongoing Small Groups
> Model D — The East Harlem Model
> Model E — Church of the Saviour Model
> Model F — Sermon Replacement
> Model G — The Retreat Model   26

Any minister who wishes to test the worth of any of these models in the

instruction of his congregation will find Reid's treatment of each most

helpful.

In this chapter, we have indicated throughout that dialogue is

essentially two-way communication between persons. In the two succeed-

ing chapters we will describe this two-way encounter as it is working

successfully today in two of America's most vital church experiments —

those of Robert A. Raines and Wallace E. Fisher.

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[26]Ibid., pp. 106-114.

CHAPTER III

ROBERT A. RAINES

> When there is authentic congregational
> life, where people are being called in-
> to the covenant and sent forth as
> secular evangelists, the life of God in
> our midst breaks out of the ancient
> liturgy and will not be held within the
> old forms. The worship service becomes
> a 'happening', something alive, an event
> which can be shocking and glorious. I
> used to believe in the early years of my
> ministry that the most significant events
> of our congregational life happened else-
> where than in Sunday morning worship: i.e.,
> in the small groups where the covenant
> became real to us, and in mission groups
> and personal service where evangelism
> took place. But in recent years I have
> come to realize that the congregational
> celebration on Sunday can be the deepest
> and most profoundly real and moving event
> of the week. It is very difficult to
> describe why and just how this may be so.
> It is more to be apprehended that compre-
> hended; more to be caught up in than to
> observe. But there are times in the con-
> gregational celebration when we feel the
> power and glory of God moving in our midst.[1]

The author of the above statement is the Reverend Robert A.

Raines, presently the minister of Germantown Methodist Church, German-

town, Pennsylvania - a pastorate to which he was called following

creative service at Aldersgate Methodist Church in Cleveland, Ohio.

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[1]Robert A. Raines, The Secular Congregation (New York: Harper
and Row, 1968), p. 98, underlining mine.

In his present pastorate church membership declined from 2000 in 1950

to 1150 in 1960, but with stabilization of membership at about this

latter figure church giving rose twenty-five per cent from 1961 to

1967. New programs within the church have expanded both the spiritual

and secular life of the congregation, allowing obselete forms to be

discarded and new forms of mission, prayer and action to take their

place.

This chapter will seek to describe how Raines understands and

employs preaching as a two-way encounter in the total process of church

renewal. Special attention will be given to: (1) his basic views con-

cerning church renewal; (2) the place which he assigns to preaching in

the renewal process; and (3) the specific results of his application

of this concept of preaching.

Church Renewal

For Raines, the imperative for our time is conversion (i.e. re-

newal of Christian life) within the church. We must reaffirm the

necessity of the communal life of the church. As individual Christ-

ians our witness is limited. Linked together in church fellowship with

God all things are possible for us.[2]

To convert lives is the task of God, but to create the con-

ditions favorable for conversion within the life of the local church

is the labor of Christian laymen and ministers. Since conversion takes

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[2]Robert A. Raines, New Life in the Church (New York: Harper and
Row, 1961), p. 73. For a selected bibliography on church renewal see
Appendix C.

place in koinonia, the church must foster and sustain the conditions

in which koinania can be known and experienced - the conditions of the

redemptive fellowship, the fellowship of the concerned, the fellowship

of sharing, caring and bearing. Raines defines koinonia succintly as:

"Heaven on earth. God present with us in Christ."[3] Koinonia is the

context of conversion, the fellowship in which lives are changed by

Christ. It requires personal participation and mutual sharing.

Early in his career, Raines came to feel that true koinonia

could be experienced only in small groups.[4] Thus he declared: "The

strategy for our time is the small-group approach. We must train a

hard core of committed and growing disciples who shall serve as leaven

within the local church."[5] In his view the development of koinonia re-

quires commitment to four conditioning factors: Bible study, prayer,

deep sharing of faith and life, and participation in Holy Communion.

He suggests strongly that Bible study in small groups should be at the

core of koinonia groups for the following reasons:

> (1) Reappropriation of the biblical message has
> historically been integral to the significant
> awakenings or reformations in the history of
> the church.
> (2) Bible study is the determinative substance of
> the fellowship of the small group.
> (3) Bible study is the best way to get large
> numbers of people into small groups.[6]

To be, or seeking to be, a mature Christian demands an essential first-

hand knowledge of the Bible.

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[3]Ibid., p. 69.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., p. 78.

[6]Ibid., pp. 80-83.

Even though life within present church structures is often
hollow and irrelevant to the church's mission, Raines dares to believe
that there is hope for the reshaping of congregational and personal
life within conventional structures.[7] His basic contention is that some
type of structure is necessary, but that present structures must under-
go change, and that in this change allowance must be made for both the
pietist and secularist points of view.[8]

Preaching

What role does Raines assign to preaching in this task of
church renewal? Although he makes very few direct references to
preaching in his first major work, New Life in the Church issued in
1961, one can discern in his later works a significant shift in em-
phasis from small-group strategy to worship in which preaching plays
a major role.

Purpose

Assuming that by itself Sunday morning worship service is no
longer an adequate structure for celebrating the life and work of the
metropolitan congregation, Raines comments on the relationships of
persons in this difficult setting:

> Their independence of each other and
> lack of mutual belonging is virtually
> guaranteed by the anonymity and mo-
> bility of the metropolis. The biblical

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[7]Robert A. Raines, Reshaping the Christian Life (New York:
Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 1-13.

[8]Raines, Secular Congregation, p. 12.

> word falls on ground that has not
> been corporately plowed. The ser-
> mon is given the impossible burden
> of trying to re-create a covenant
> community which is not even in
> existence. The lack of authentic
> community in the congregation makes
> it like an audience and the minister
> like a speaker or entertainer. [9]

Thus he believes that the chief function of the sermon should be to en-
able a congregation to grow deep roots and become a covenant community.
It is mandatory in his thinking that today's faithful congregation
must be a congregation with roots - theological, denominational,
ethical, institutional - a congregation not bound to its past, but with
respect for it. The sermon does not, however, operate alone towards
this end. To be effective it must function alongside three other en-
abling actions: (1) The reshaping of the "come" and "go" structures of
the congregation; (2) the revitalization of the "stay" structures; and
(3) the reforming of congregational worship. [10]

Raines defines a "come" structure as whatever we require or do
not require of seekers and of ourselves at the point of membership in
the congregation. The "go" structures are the various ways whereby
people are equipped for secular evangelism in the metropolis. He points
out further that a workable structure must be "secular in time and
place; ecumenical in composition; chiefly composed of laymen; [and]
shaped around a specific human need or issue." [11]

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[9] Ibid., p. 81.   [11] Ibid., p. 87.

[10] Ibid., pp. 82-108.

The second enabling action is the revitalization of the "stay" structures. In detailing these Raines gives first place to the sermon. His people prepare and use a congregational lectionary, the purpose of which is to involve the entire congregation in reading the biblical passage to be used as the basis of the sermon of the following Sunday. Tidings, the congregation's weekly newsletter, contains an exegesis of the passage so that members can read it more knowledgeably. Further, commentaries are made available for those who wish to study more deeply. Also koinonia groups often study lectionary passages, using commentaries as well as the actual sermons preached as source material. Other means which are used to increase the impact of preaching and promote dialogue include:

(1) Study Groups.

(2) Adult Classes on Sunday Morning.

(3) "Listening to the World." This is a group which provides fresh and creative ways of listening to God through the use of contemporary art, drama, and novels.

(4) Teacher's Seminar. Teachers of the junior high and high school departments of the church school are required to participate in a teacher's seminar that meets twice a month through the year. The seminar is taught by a professional theologian from the congregation.

(5) The Ecumenical Institute. It provides an ecumenical context for study of major social issues.

(6) The Church Book Store. Books are brought and made available to the congregation in the context of the

> coffee hour in the social hall
> following Sunday morning worship.
>
> (7) Post-service Coffee Hour. Casual
> and informal, this hour provides
> an opportunity to talk with both
> the minister and lay people about
> the sermon or other pertinent issues.
>
> (8) Lenten Daily Readings. This is a
> booklet prepared by forty members.
> It serves as a day to day source
> for meditation.
>
> (9) Retreats. These provide priceless
> opportunities for inspiration of the
> congregation through diverse in-
> sights and experiences which can be
> provided in an intensive weekend
> context.
>
> (10) "Greentree" and "Tower". The former
> is a social group for young "couples"
> and "singles". The latter is a social
> group for older "couples" and "singles".
>
> (11) Christian Faith and Life Class. This
> is compulsory for members and offers a
> unique initiatory, educational and
> dialogical experience. [12]

Only through the additional "stay" structures of committees on member-
ship, education, finance, fine arts, mission, and worship can the
energies of the congregation be redirected and empowered for the mis-
sion of secular evangelism in the world.

The third enabling action relates to the reformation of con-
gregational worship so that it becomes both a missionary and secular
celebration. A truly missionary celebration inculcates a joyous will-
ingness of men to be called and sent by God and is demonstrated by

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[12] Ibid., pp. 88-97.

response to the Word throughout the service and the bringing forth of the offering by laymen after the sermon. The secular celebration is expressed in terms of response to events of every-day life in prayer, creed and sermon – all of which are expressed in contemporary, man-on-the-street language.

Application

How does Raines apply this concept of preaching to its practice? One may say that he does so by seeking to make preaching the motivator, educator and sustainer of Christian action.

Since conversion begins in awakening, one of the primary functions of preaching is to motivate, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, a responsible decision to follow Christ. Conversion continues by decision. Thus preaching not only initiates awakening in which conversion begins but assists persons to make decisions in the Christian life. So that persons may be enabled to make these decisions in keeping with the needs of the world in which they live, the pulpit must be absolutely free for whoever preaches. Raines reports that many sermons on Vietnam have been delivered to his congregation, the prevailing temper being that of responsible dissent from government policy. All converts are urged to join koinonia groups that they may gain the needed wisdom and support of others in determining the responsible Christian action in whatever problem is faced.

Conversion is only the initial act in coming to God. The Christian life is an ever-growing experience. To prepare people for such a lifetime of growth the church must also be an educator. Raines

gives preaching a large place in this process of education. Its function is to reshape the church, and through the church, the individual, into the image of Christ. By good preaching the church is helped to become a family of Christ, our participation in which will be characterized by three constitutive elements:

(1) We will belong to Christ by belonging to each other.
(2) We will learn Christ's love by learning to love each other.
(3) The family of Christ will become a ministering community. [13]

In this way, we will become personally involved with each other and with God. Moreover, the local parish may be reshaped into an "army of the Lord" - the focal point where Christians can be equipped for mission. In this phase of development, the church will require:

(1) A new kind of recruitment: a new concept of discipleship and a new method of invitation to discipleship.
(2) A new kind of equipment. Having defined its own mission, the congregation will prepare for effective living in the world: in the family, at work, and in the community.
(3) A new kind of deployment. This will be characterized by an open-door policy, a joint visitation of newcomers, shapes of mission in secular structures, a focus on specific sectors of culture, and new structures. [14]

Personally involved and related in the family of Christ and equipped as soldiers in the "army of the Lord," the local church will become a ser-

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[13] Raines, Reshaping, pp. 17-33.
[14] Ibid., pp. 34-51.

vant people and a witnessing community. The common factors that usual-
ly emerge as a church becomes a servant people are the following:

> (1) Mission is born in <u>koinonia</u>.
> (2) Mission is born in the heart of one
>   person at a time.
> (3) Mission reaches to 'the least of
>   these.'
> (4) Mission structures become ecumenical
>   and unconventional.
> (5) Suburban or urban captivity is broken.
> (6) The 'far off' and the 'near' come to
>   feel the need for each other. [15]

The local church cannot be reshaped effectively without the
prior reshaping of its individual members. The purpose of preaching is
thus to educate individuals to allow Christ to shape their lives after
his and to gain a sense of forgiveness at not having permitted him to
do so sooner. At this point Raines remarks:

> Preaching which penetrates to the person
> in his aloneness will be preaching which
> is addressed to the person in unfettered
> expectation that God can speak to him a
> liberating word - a word that he can
> truly hear and find personally liberating.
> There will be an urgency born of confidence
> in the Holy Spirit. [16]

He testifies from personal experience that his sermons relating to for-
giveness have communicated with listeners at a very high level. One
woman heard the word of forgiveness in a sermon which centered upon
Paul's description of his encounter with the risen Christ. This aware-
ness of forgiveness opened the woman's life to the grace of Christ and
changes began to take place in her relationships with others and in her
awareness of herself.

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[15] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 62-64.   [16] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 86.

We are also reshaped as individual Christians through being commissioned as agents of reconciliation in the world. The preacher's task at this juncture is to endorse an ethic of active involvement to bring the separated together, "to open windows of communication and doors of fellowship where we live, work, and worship, so that the fresh air of Christ's Spirit may blow into every corner of the church and the world - that Spirit of truth which sets all men free."[17] As liberated, commissioned Christians, we are set free to walk in the Spirit. Christ frees us from the bondage of false security, false evaluations of personal worth, a false concept of progress, and delivers us from a false longing, righteousness, and freedom.[18] To walk in the Spirit, then, means to walk in the creativity of faith, the certainty of hope, and the spontaneity of love. It is particularly important that preaching be marked by creativity. As Raines explains: "Creativity is the rare combination of imagination and daring, sensitivity and courage. The Spirit frees us to be open to all experience and to be alert to that which is significant in people and events."[19] In creative preaching the living Christ takes shape in the individual as the one who forgives him, commissions him an agent of reconciliation, sets him free to walk in the Spirit, and orders his living. In regard to this last point, the preacher's task is to educate his people in a discipline that is based on Christ's principles for action. Raines states that the ordered life is:

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[17]Ibid., p. 107.
[18]Ibid., pp. 108-123.

[19]Ibid., p. 118.

> under the rule of one Lord, who unites
> our energies, focuses our being, and
> controls our doing. He organizes and
> simplifies our life, so that it is like
> an arrow and not the sprayed bullets of
> a shotgun. This is a life which is
> collected, clarified, and reordered.
> The ordered life is the life of quiet
> confidence and sustaining inner power. [20]

Thus the Christian's life is a sober one: competent, focussed, urgent

and given to prayer. The preacher's overall educational function,

therefore, is to enable his people to discern, for discernment leads

to participation, and participation to witness.

The third and final function of preaching is sustainer. For

Raines, conversion begins in awakening, continues by decision, matures

by growth, and endures or is sustained in discipline. After educating

his people in the ordered life, the preacher must sustain conversion

by giving disciplinary instruction relating to: (1) corporate worship,

(2) daily prayer, (3) Bible reading and study, (4) the giving of money,

(5) service, and (6) witness.[21] Note that the first three are ways in

which we open ourselves to receive grace from God, and that the remain-

ing ones are ways in which we share with others the grace given to us.

Aware that controversy, strife, and suffering bring joy through re-

conciliation, the preacher's task as reconciler is indeed difficult.

He is required to sustain his people in the midst of turmoil. On July

30, 1967, the Sunday after the race riots in many American cities, Raines

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[20]Ibid., p. 129.

[21]Raines, New Life, pp. 60-61.

preached on the subject, "Who is Responsible for the Riots?"[22] His

people had come to worship asking whether there was any message from

the Lord on the riots. This illustrates the fact that preachers, in

order to sustain their people, must be alert, aware, contemporaneous

and extremely sensitive to the immediate needs of their people and the

world. Inevitably this means that most effective sermons will be

"dated" and unsuitable for pulling out of the file for future occasions.

Results

What results has Raines achieved in employing his concept that

good preaching serves as motivator, educator and sustainer of the

Christian life?

The chief result of his preaching, used in conjunction with

koinonia groups and other dialogical means, has been to produce changed

and changing lives. Expectant, joyful, urgent and contemporary, his

preaching has brought concrete results. One woman testified to the

motivating power of his preaching.

> And this is where just what I was afraid was
> going to happen, happened. We got in-
> volved. For me, it started with a sermon,
> a sermon on what is probably an ancient
> sermon theme, the subject of values.[24]

Members of Germantown Church, believing that the sermon has a motivat-

ing influence, always encourage and invite prospective members to

worship, usually before taking recourse to other means.

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[22] Raines, Secular Congregation, pp. 91-93.

[23] Ibid., pp. 1-2.

[24] Raines, New Life, p. 93.

Another result of Raines' preaching has been a new creation in the Germantown church - the emergence of an effective lay ministry. Lay ministers are becoming leaders in the church, operating as needed leaven, accepting the call to preach, and to participate in the training of others for a lay ministry.[25] This movement demonstrates how effective preaching can be as a means of communicating the gospel. First the preacher motivates, educates and sustains the layman in the Christian life. Then the layman motivates, educates and sustains another layman in the same. Significantly, by chain reaction, a task usually relegated to the ordained clergyman, has been taken up by laymen. Raines reports that in the last three years, twenty of his lay parishioners, three-fourths men and the remainder women, have preached on Sunday morning. They also preach when the pastor is on summer vacation.

This development definitely indicates the recovery of the sense of mission within the local church - to other churches, in daily work, and in the family and community. We see this recovery plainly in Raines' Secular Congregation when he points out several "go" structures that have been reshaped by the new sense of mission, viz.

> (1) Covenant House. Situated in a poverty area and supported by church members, the house is the permanent residence of two women whose services include medical care for the people of the block.
>
> (2) The Glass Door. Funded by a special offering from the congregation, and dedicated to provide special services of tutoring, recreation, and assistance in securing employment, the Glass Door is a place for youth to talk, to listen, to dance, and to be together.

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[25] Ibid., pp. 103-111.

     (3) Wellsprings. It is an interracial
interfaith group of laymen and clergy
devoted to the renewal of metro-
politan Philadelphia, and to the re-
newal of their own congregations and
themselves. Started in July 1964 as
a dialogue group of people from many
congregations and meeting in the homes
of the participants, Wellsprings moved
through several months of personal
conversation and the developing of
trust and friendship to the point of
action.

     (4) Mental Health Mission Group. Arising
out of a _koinonia_ group, concerned per-
sons took volunteer training at the
Norristown State Hospital and have be-
come a kind of therapy group seeking to
work with other people in Germantown
concerned about mental health, more
adequate counseling and therapy services
in the community.[26]

Obviously Raines has had an appreciable change of mind concern-
ing the value of preaching in the movement for church renewal. Whereas
in earlier years he attributed little or no value to preaching, now he
admits heavy reliance upon preaching as a two-way encounter to effect
renewal.

[26]Raines, _Secular Congregation_, p. 86 f.

CHAPTER IV

WALLACE E. FISHER

>Let any ordained minister of Christ's church
come before the tribunal of biblical evidence
to get his bearings if he does not believe
that God was in Christ, that the Scriptures
witness to that mighty deed; and that preach-
ing is a primary means for communicating this
news to man. Treason against one's government
is despicable and dangerous. Treason against
the kingdom of God - unconfessed and persisted
in - destroys and robs Christ of his appeal. [1]

The author of the above statement, Dr. Wallace E. Fisher, is

pastor of the Lutheran Church of The Holy Trinity, Lancaster, Pennsyl-

vania, the oldest church in the oldest city of its size in the middle

Atlantic sector of the United States. This church was established as

a congregation in 1730 in a village which at that time was only a

frontier post of the British Empire. The church building was dedicated

in 1766 with the patriach of Lutheranism in America, Henry Melchior

Muhlenberg, officiating. Prior to Fisher's present ministry, however,

Holy Trinity had become an old downtown church located at the heart of

an eastern metropolitan area of 285,000 people, and an institution quite

indisposed to involvement with the life of a surrounding industrial

city so affluent and cultural that it was supporting five schools of

higher education. This development seemed to be leading the church in

the direction of sure demise. But Fisher's coming has brought great

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[1] Wallace E. Fisher, Preaching and Parish Renewal (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 32.

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change. He reports that in spite of deaths and heavy transfers trace-
able to the mobile membership of the industrial community, membership
has increased steadily under his leadership from 1,018 to 1,700. At-
tendance at worship has grown from an average of 300 to an average
1,350, including a Friday noon service.

The likeness of the present "New" Trinity to the "Old" Trinity
of twenty years ago is slight. In synod organization the Old Trinity
maintained a lackluster image. Little or nothing was expected of her
in terms of strength or support. The community with which she was most
involved viewed her as proper, proud, exclusive, a strong bulwark
against social change. Within her own congregation, two images pre-
vailed. One of these, held by the old guard, was that Trinity deserv-
ed recognition in Lancaster and in Lutheran circles and her policy
should be "Touch nothing, disturb nothing, change nothing."[2] The other
image, held by the vast majority of the congregation who cared little
and had lost heart, was that the church's work was not their respon-
sibility, but that of called and elected leaders. This is the church
to which Wallace Fisher came in 1952.

This chapter will seek to describe how Fisher understands and
employs preaching as a two-way encounter in the total process of church
renewal. Special attention will be given to: (1) his views concerning
church renewal; (2) the place which he assigns to preaching in the

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[2]Wallace E. Fisher, From Tradition to Mission (New York: Abing-
don Press, 1966), p. 30.

renewal process; and (3) the specific results of his application of this concept of preaching.

Church Renewal

Fisher affirms his belief that the parish is an arena where men either relate to each other casually and escape rugged encounter with God, or where sinners discern life's true meaning in the person-hood of Christ and for his sake surrender priestly service.

Trinity's present testimony is for renewal which roots in the Word of God - renewal based upon

> The good news of God's saving work in Christ --
> the message about the essential nature and pur-
> pose of God in every evidence of his dynamic,
> saving activity, initiated at creation and re-
> vealed progressively at his pace through myth,
> legend, historical events, historical persons
> (Amos, Hosea, John the Baptist), and preeminently
> in the historical person of his Son, Jesus Christ.[3]

Grasping of this fact is important because Fisher's entire report of his work at Trinity rests on this foundation. He also adds by way of further explanation:

> The born-again congregation, motivated by the
> Word, will adapt, borrow, and invent the ne-
> cessary methods and mechanics to communicate
> relevantly its source of new life. A fresh
> awareness of the relevance of God's Word, a
> growing disposition to search the Scriptures
> with Christ as guide, a healthy regard for and
> critical interest in theology, a fresh exam-
> ination of and unqualified commitment to the
> biblical images of the church and its ministry,
> a new awareness that the offense of the gospel
> breeds tension, conflict, and personal suffer-
> ing - these are needful in the parish if there
> is to be spiritual rebirth.[4]

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[3]Ibid., pp. 22-3.   [4]Ibid., pp. 23-4.

Such a new-born congregation can communicate relevantly its source of new life!

When I talked with Dr. Fisher at a retreat on parish renewal held at Yokefellow Institute in January, 1969, he pointed out to me that two tensions must be kept in communication if renewal is to occur. The first of these is the tension between the existential and the historical. The second is the tension between the subjective and the objective. These tensions are ever present in his treatment of the process of church renewal.

Further, life within his congregation is ordered for the sake of freedom. He is of the opinion that parish life should be well order-ed, not because his people delight in tending the institution, but because effective administration frees persons to communicate the gospel, to use their _charisma_ creatively. In other words the institu-tion is a vehicle for communication: a vehicle for renewal.

A key to parish renewal is the existence of a right relation-ship between clergy and laity, which may be evidenced by:

> (1) Mutual confidence in the practice of prayer;
> (2) Willingness to face up to mistakes in judg-ment. Always to acknowledge these mistakes to one another and to the congregation if the admission serves constitutive purposes;
> (3) Mutual interest in a growing commitment to theology as an effective tool for Christ's ministry; and
> (4) Mutual patience.   5

The best way to understand and evaluate Fisher's thoughts on renewal is to follow his outline of the course of Holy Trinity's renewal:

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[5]_Ibid._, pp. 173-175.

    (1) The pastor must be convinced that parish
       renewal is possible, that the gospel is
       relevant,and that Christ enables his
       church to stand against the gates of hell.
    (2) The responsible parish pastor recognizes
       that while his parish is intended to be
       and can be a concrete means through which
       God works meaningfully in reaching his
       beloved world in a particular moment of
       time at a particular place, it is _not_ the
       only means.
    (3) Parish renewal calls for the clear-eyed
       recognition that theological and practical
       correctives must be viewed only as cor-
       rectives, not as substantive approaches.
    (4) Both clergy and laity must recognize,
       identify and face up to the need for re-
       newal in their congregation.
    (5) If parish renewal requires that the
       clerical and lay leaders identify and
       face up to the images projected by the
       congregation, it also requires that they
       examine critically the community in which
       the congregation exists.
    (6) Parish renewal requires the pulpit, the
       classroom, and the counseling hour.
    (7) Institutional forms are inescapable.
    (8) Because the image of ministry enter-
       tained and projected by pastors and people
       affects radically the degree to which the
       church exercises Christ's ministry, it is
       imperative that both discern and orient to
       an authentic image.[6]

The clergy and laity are considered to be partners in preaching,

teaching, and counseling, but one discerns in the preceding summary,

the emphasis placed upon the creative influence and dynamic leadership

of the parish pastor. Commenting on this integral aspect of church re-

newal Fisher asserts:

> Effective leadership in the church is not a
> mystery; it is open to analytical appraisal.

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[6]Wallace E. Fisher, "From Tradition to Mission", in Renewing
the Congregation, ed. Robert W. Long (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing
House, 1966), pp. 144-156.

> It requires a measure of courage, a dash of
> imagination, average intelligence, firm
> character, emotional resilience, balanced
> judgment, and hard work - as it does in any
> other field of human endeavor. But there is
> one radical difference. Pastoral leadership
> orients to the biblical image of ministry.[7]

Solid pastoral leadership oriented to the biblical image of ministry,

is indispensable in congregational renewal. Ministers grounded in

the Word, and who, with clarity, can put it into the words of men, will

communicate effectively the good news of Christ and transform their

congregations into flaming fellowships.

Preaching

The opening quotation of this chapter affirmed strongly the

importance of preaching as a primary means of communicating the gospel.

To extend his conviction one step further, Fisher goes beyond this

statement to declare:

> Parish renewal in the Lutheran Church of the
> Holy Trinity, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and
> the sustenance of its new life are inextric-
> ably bound up with biblical preaching. The
> staff, official board, parishioners, and many
> in the community share this conviction. We
> are convinced that parish renewal and biblical
> preaching are inseparable.[8]

Let us now proceed to develop in detail Fisher's own understanding

of the purpose of preaching and how he employs it in effecting renewal.

Purpose

The authentic preacher follows in the tradition of Jesus who

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[7]Fisher, _Preaching and Parish Renewal_, p. 93.
[8]Ibid., p. 7.

"came preaching" to the world. A unique servant of the word, called to be colabourer with Christ, the preacher places his confidence in the gospel of God and in the human activity of preaching, foolish in essence, and yet an elemental tactic in God's overall strategy to save the world. Although the task of preaching would seem to require men of noble stature, Fisher reminds us that it is within the grasp of any committed person, who "possessed of emotional resilience and intellectual curiosity, accepts God's authority, honors his demands, claims his promises, and works at preaching."[9] Working at preaching demands that one be culturally aware, alert, responsive and faithful to the Word, intensely pastoral and practised in speech characterized by clarity and simplicity.

Preaching like this produces responses which demonstrate that preaching is relevant. Some persons approach enquiring, some walk away, others deeply hostile, reject the gospel and its bearer, but all are valid responses. Every preacher who accepts God's strategy, no matter what the cost to himself, knows that straight-forward presentation of God's promises and demands creates tension, stirs controversy, and incites conflict. In a very real sense there must be some measure of conflict and controversy if preaching is to be effective.

At this point, Fisher is helpful by providing four guideposts for preaching.[10] First, the preacher must demonstrate honesty in

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[9] Ibid., p. 25.

[10] Ibid., p. 28 f.

his own acceptance of Christ as his personal Saviour and guidance as his personal Lord. Second he must show to his parishioners his true humanity by demonstrating that he lives in the same human situation as those to whom he ministers. Third he must be willing to admit his failures, and in honest humility pray and plan with his people to find a new means for correcting an error of judgment. Finally, the dominant note in his preaching, as in all prophetic utterance must be hope.

Again Fisher would emphasize that the Word, concretely and relevantly put forth in preaching and teaching, <u>always</u> creates dialogue - positive and negative - between pulpit and pew. Where a minister preaches the Word, demonstrating that God is at work in him - in his daily encounter and service, men will listen and respond because the preacher has taken the risk to become the message. When called to the "Old Holy Trinity", Fisher quickly realized that before dialogue could take place, it was imperative that both the clergy and the laity grasp a clear and authentic image of ministry. To achieve this goal he had to teach the congregation to distinguish between illusion and reality. Trinity possessed the gospel, but the gospel did not possess Trinity.

I have already indicated the prevailing conflicting images of Trinity held by the synod, the community, and the church membership. These were barriers to dialogue and renewal. Parish renewal based on the repentance and new commitment of clergy and laity required, that

both come before the tribunal of biblical evidence and wrestle with that evidence, allowing the Holy Spirit to fashion an authentic image of ministry for them. The Word of God in its healing and offense, grace and judgment, gospel and law was the essential and informing strength and substance of authentic ministry which commanded transforming power in person to person confrontation. The discernment, acceptance, and projection of that image were essential to Trinity's birth and equally essential to the continuance of its new life. Throughout this struggle, the Trinity fellowship discovered that unless the God to whom they witnessed was allowed to authenticate himself in the person of the herald, their communication of Christ was sharply delimited.

In addition to orienting Old Holy Trinity to an authentic image of ministry, Fisher has learned to promote the concept of preaching as dialogue by use of other means. He encourages parishioners to take notes during the sermon or, if they prefer, to later set down the major points from memory.[11] Specially prepared sheets are made available in the pew racks for those who wish to follow this practice. Quite often, Fisher reports, sermon notes are used in "Coffee and Conversation with the Clergy," and also for teaching and evangelizing purposes.

"Coffee and Conversation with the Clergy," held on the second Sunday evening of every month, involves from 75 to 100 persons, some parishioners, some guests. The setting is informal. All have the

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[11]Ibid., pp. 203-204.

opportunity to meet and talk with each other, and to speak if they wish during the discussion period.[12] Initiated as a forum for the discussion of the sermons preached in Trinity during the previous month, it now includes other areas of concern relevant to the Christian life. This monthly gathering has become a deeply meaningful time of dialogue and encounter. Its purpose, obviously realized, is to provide persons in the parish an opportunity to ask questions and to voice their thinking about matters that most concern them.

Thus, preaching at Trinity has become a dialogical encounter, a cooperative effort. Fisher affirms the results for any other congregation that will attempt the experiment by promising:

> The elected lay leaders, in cooperation with
> clergy who work at preaching, will actively
> cultivate an expectant, wholesomely critical,
> decisive congregational mind toward preach-
> ing, because they recognize that man needs
> to be nutured from the Word. It is this
> nuture which motivates the laity to proclaim
> the Word.[13]

Such a situation fosters genuine communication. Preaching refashions persons whom God enables to transform their culture.

Application

Fisher is at one with Raines in assigning to preaching the three-fold task of serving as motivator, educator, and sustainer. He explains this three-fold perspective in his own words as follows:

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[12]Ibid., pp. 205-206.

[13]Wallace E. Fisher, Preface to Parish Renewal (New York: Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 102.

> Forthright biblical preaching which avoids
> the marginal (shallow moralism) and pene-
> trates to the heart of man's profound
> dilemma (guilt and meaninglessness) and
> speaks to his loneliness persuades per-
> sons to repent, encourages them to trust
> God, and gives them identity. Linked
> with evangelical teaching, it motivates and
> equips them to exercise Christ's ministry
> in the world. Apart from biblical preach-
> ing, worship becomes esoteric or perfunctory;
> the sacraments are viewed as cultic rites or
> mechanical tests for membership; evangelism
> remains a human activity; stewardship is
> equated with 'raising the budget.' The ne-
> glect of biblical preaching weakens the
> church's witness because it violates the
> biblical image of ministry. [14]

As he sees it, wherever a company of committed people accepts the

authority of God's Word and shares it through gospel preaching,

evangelical teaching, and pastoral counseling, Christ confronts per-

sons as he did in Galilee.

Fisher's firm belief that preaching can reach out, lay hold

upon, and motivate persons has been strengthened by what has taken

place under his ministry at Trinity. Having accepted the biblical

image of ministry, Trinity's clerical and lay leaders grew in the con-

viction that the renewal of their parish hinged on two fundamental

issues: whether the parish leadership would accept the authority of

God or of man; and whether the laity could be enlisted, trained, and

equipped to proclaim Christ. As they discerned more clearly this

biblical image of ministry, they concluded that God's tactics call for

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[14] Fisher, Preaching and Parish Renewal, p. 17.

any activity in which persons confront persons in their freedom with the Word, Preaching, certainly a personal communication of the Word, was accepted as an integral part of God's overall strategy. They did not assume that preaching independent of other functions of ministry could motivate and equip members to witness and render priestly service, but they were reminded that "Jesus came preaching." In following his example, the membership of Holy Trinity was motivated to accept the authority of God and to enlist, train, and equip persons to proclaim Christ. It is this motivational function of preaching that prompts persons to listen to, think about, react and respond to God's promises and demands.

In addition, functioning as a motivator, preaching has a valid function as educator. The whole structure and context of preaching is oriented to teaching. Fisher reports that he delivers sermons which deal with the interpretation of Scripture and various aspects of Christian faith and doctrine. In preparing a sermon he discusses its content with his vestrymen and about a dozen church school teachers so that both can enhance its teaching impact. The Sunday Church School in Lancaster also provides a means of extending the educational effect of the sermon, by insisting that:

> (1) Content teaching, rooted in biblical and confessional theology is essential.
> (2) Committed competent teachers are indispensable.
> (3) The clergy be called upon to teach as well as preach.
> (4) Adults and youth be taught in special settings outside as well as during the church school hour. [15]

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[15] Fisher, Tradition, p. 73.

The crucial need in the Sunday Church School is considered to be a confrontation where persons decide for Christ before they attempt to teach his way of life persuasively. This focus upon the principle that the Christian teacher is the message expands the background for dialogical encounter between pulpit and pew.

The teaching role of preaching is extended beyond the scope of the Trinity Sunday Church School by the creation of surrounding structures designed to promote effective dialogue. Among these are the following:

> (1) Youth Program. Ninety per cent of the parish youth worship regularly after confirmation.
> (2) Annual Teen-age Forum on Dating and Courtship.
> (3) Adult Bible Study Hour. This group has contributed greatly to the rebirth of Trinity Church and the strengthening of its new life.
> (4) Small Bible Study Groups.
> (5) Book Review Sessions. Both clergy and laymen introduce books considered to have a vital contemporary message.
> (6) Books and Coffee Gatherings. These provide opportunity for persons to converse with persons, to communicate with one another rather than talk at each other. Books are read prior to these occasions to promote more active discussion.
> (7) Parish Library, the resources of which may at any time be supplemented by those of the local seminary library.
> (8) Religious Drama Group. The workshop arrangement of this group attracts persons who wish to act, and see in religious drama a vehicle for lay preaching and teaching in a secular society.
> (9) Lay Theological Study. Trinity fosters interest in theology as a tool for effective teaching and witnessing. [16]

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[16] Ibid., pp. 84-100.

This brings us to the third and final use of preaching at Holy Trinity, the exercise of its function as sustainer of the Christian life. The congregation, having been motivated and educated, now faces the problem and challenge of keeping the fellowship aflame for God. The sermon must be essentially pastoral to accomplish this task. It must speak to the depth of man's needs so really that he is either rehabilitated or is prompted to seek assistance in the form of counseling. Later in this chapter we shall speak at some length of the way in which this has sustained and is sustaining the membership of Holy Trinity in their Christian convictions. Here I wish to mention only Fisher's account of the response to two of his sermons, both of which were designed to play a sustaining role in the life of parishioners. Speaking of response to a sermon entitled "Does Prayer Make Any Difference?", he writes: "This sermon created counseling appointments; strengthened vestry support, and won new members to Trinity."[17] Here reference is not only to individual needs but also to corporate needs and strengths. His detailed analysis of the response to another sermon, "Why Must People Suffer?" is even more informative:

> It opened a number of pastoral conversations
> and precipitated fourteen new counseling
> situations. The punitive aspect of suffer-
> ing prompted five persons to seek help
> (guilt). The remedial aspect intrigued
> three. Five came to explore 'the margin
> of mystery' around human suffering, not-
> ably their own. One came because the

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[17]Fisher, Preaching and Parish Renewal, p. 68.

redemptive aspect of suffering challenged
him. [18]

With this understanding of Fisher's concept of preaching as
motivator, educator, and sustainer of Christian life, let us move on
to a more detailed consideration of the total effect which this con-
cept has had upon the functioning of Holy Trinity in its Lancaster
setting.

Results

Quite obviously Trinity is well on the way to creating a new
image of its function within the Lancaster community. As Fisher de-
scribes the evolving image:

> (1) Some view Trinity as a betrayal of the
> church because its corporate ministry
> reacts and speaks concretely to political,
> economic, and social issues.
> (2) A small corps of longtimers still prefer
> the 'old Trinity'.
> (3) Several hundred devoted, hard-working,
> generous members, having labored valiantly
> for more than a decade, feel that Trinity
> has 'arrived'.
> (4) The dominant image is that of a church
> which is presently 'aflame with the Spirit
> who is the Lord and Giver of life' and
> valuing a 'theology which is ... passion-
> ately missionary.' [19]

Further, the congregation has developed a koinonia in which
God is able to transform members into witnesses. Men are accepted,
understood, and cared for as persons. Evangelism has become spontan-
eous as well as disciplined. Members maturing in the faith:

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[18] Ibid., p. 59.
[19] Fisher, Tradition, pp. 179-181.

(1) Worship expectantly every Sunday;
(2) Invite guests and seek out pro-
spective members;
(3) Discuss sermons at home, at work
and at social gatherings; and
(4) Discipline themselves to practice
the Christian stewardship of money.[20]

In reference to the last point, although under Fisher's ministry current

expenditures at Trinity have risen from $30,000.00 to $125,000.00

annually, the parish benevolence has increased from $14,000.000 to

$100,000.00 annually; and the budget has been oversubscribed every year

since 1957.[21] Moreover, the church's witness is felt in the fibre of

community life. Accepting its Christian responsibility to examine

both man and society in the light of God's Word, members equip them-

selves for the day to day encounters with the world. Sermons pene-

trate not only into family life but into the community at large: the

world.

The following quotation serves to summarize the total out-

reach of Fisher's preaching, as he considers its effect in a retro-

spective glance.

> Persons and families were discussing the content
> and implications of the sermons not only at home
> but also at work, over bridge tables, at country
> clubs, in service clubs, at school, on college
> campuses, at cocktail parties, and in taverns.
> Equally significant was the rising tide of dia-
> logue between pew and pulpit. Prompted by these
> dialogues, the clergy selected and shared a wide
> range of theological and biblical works. The
> resources of the parish library were developed
> partly in response to inquiries. Some persons
> were also guided to the theological seminary
> library where the staff were willing counselors.

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[20]Ibid., p. 107.   [21]Ibid., p. 121.

A few inquirers, judged able to serve re-
sponsibly as they learned, were invited
to teach and evangelize in the parish. All
inquirers were encouraged and helped to
pursue their biblical studies and to foster
theological readings and discussions in
their homes and among their friends. This
running dialogue between pulpit and pew
eventually created the stated monthly op-
portunity for it - "Coffee and Conversation
with the Clergy." The dialogues also en-
riched the people of God by correcting their
ordained ministers at various points and
challenging them to preach more relevantly.
Mimeographed and printed sermons were read
and reread, used in discussion groups, and
distributed widely by the parishioners. A
teen-ager reported that a mimeographed
sermon, "God and the Super-Patriots," was
the basis for a discussion in a high school
class. The memorial sermon for the late
President John F. Kennedy found its way into
a junior high school. A sermon on marriage
was circulated widely in college circles.
Ten thousand copies of "God and the Organ-
ization Man" were distributed by Trinity
members.

   The slow but steady growth of the wor-
shipping congregation - a vigorous witness
in any community, the rising tide of dia-
logue and encounter, the laity's sharing of
printed sermons in and beyond the community,
and the mounting corps of lay preachers not
only attracted new worshipers but also opened
doors in business groups, literary and cultural
clubs, [Parent-Teachers Association], service
clubs, colleges, and the local theological
seminary and interdenominational groups for an
ever-widening proclamation of the Word. Trinity
Church was getting into the world. More than
other sermon-encounters for the parish and com-
munity in those early years, the one on
"McCarthyism" is imprinted on our congregational
memory as decisive for Sunday morning preaching
by the clergy and for weekday proclamation by
lay members.   22

22Ibid., pp. 60-61.

This summary highlights the most encouraging feature of forth-right preaching. It creates a hard core of committed men and women who are willing at great sacrifice to become lay preachers and lay evangel-lists. They occupy the parish pulpit occasionally and preach regular-ly throughout the community. Fisher relates with understandable pride that "hundreds of members [of Trinity] preach and teach Christ spontaneously to one, three, or six persons."[23] One cannot help but be inspired by this demonstration of complete communication of the Gospel. As a result "Trinity parish - stirred, aroused, motivated by the Word in preaching and teaching - began to witness, too!"[24]

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[23]Ibid., p. 64.   [24]Ibid., p. 67.

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