

REHABILITATING AND RECLAIMING THE “HERALD” IMAGE FOR PREACHERS IN THE SECULARIZED WEST

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ABSTRACT

The image of preacher as “herald” should be rehabilitated and reclaimed because it says something vital about what the secular west needs to hear and how it needs to hear it. This paper (1) reviews why, though *kerux* is rare in Scripture, biblical vocabulary and theology nevertheless endorse the herald metaphor; (2) suggests reasons preachers should embrace this identity despite objections raised against it; and (3) draws out implications for preaching, some of which will probably provoke debate in the EHS discussion time.

HERALD AS A LONG-POPULAR IMAGE FOR PREACHERS

The metaphor of preacher as herald has long been commonplace in homiletics. The herald of antiquity delivering an authoritative message in another’s behalf has seemed an apt way to image what the church’s ordained spokesmen do when preaching the word of God. The ancient herald proclaimed events, laws, decrees, or terms of peace for king, state, or god. He did not create his message or speak on his own authority, but spoke precisely what he was charged to speak, and in the name of the one who sent him.

Is this not what preachers do? “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God” (1 Peter 4:11). “And for this purpose,” Paul writes, “I was appointed a herald” (1 Timothy 2:7). The ancient audience received a herald’s message as coming from the sovereign himself; the church “. . . received the word of God, which you heard from us . . . not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13).

So we’re not surprised that a famous pastor would entitle a book for preachers *Heralds of God* (Stewart). Nor are we surprised to find claims like these in the homiletical literature: “The concept of heralding is . . . the characteristic way throughout the entire new Testament of referring to the ongoing proclamation of the Christ-event” (Mounce, 52). Preaching is “Accurately heralding the Word of God to a particular audience for a particular purpose by explaining, applying, and embodying that message” (Arthurs, 15). “Proclamation is human language through which God himself speaks, like the King through the mouth of his herald” (Barth, in McClure, 46). “*Kerussein* is herald’s work. The effectiveness and validity of what the herald proclaims are in direct relationship to the authority of the potentate who backs up the message” (Beaudean, 153). The chief NT metaphor for the preacher is “. . . the herald charged with the solemn yet exciting responsibility of proclaiming the good news of God” (Stott, 1961, 33).

Examples could be multiplied. The bottom line is that homiletics has long found it natural to identify the preacher as a herald.

RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE HERALD IMAGE

But this image of the preacher has also been challenged for a number of reasons. And for a long time: reservations about identifying preachers as heralds did not begin with the new homiletics of the late twentieth century or with the postmodern climate in which we currently find ourselves. It started with the Bible.

Kerux appears only four times in the LXX, three of these without Hebrew equivalent, and the fourth referring to a foreign, not an Israelite institution. The Hebrew prophets were not called heralds. Nor, ordinarily, were representatives of Jesus. Just twice Paul calls himself a herald (1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11), and both times qualifies the term somewhat by adding “and apostle.” The only other use of *kerux* in the Christian canon is 2 Peter 2:5 where Noah is called a preacher of righteousness. *TDNT*’s entry for *kerux* sums up: “How alien the idea of the herald is to the Bible may be seen from the fact that there is no word for it” (Friedrich, 694); and “The herald who plays so important a role in the Greek world is of little account in the NT” (696).

Why, when the ancient world had on hand a well-defined role which later generations of homileticsians thought was a good fit, were the biblical writers reluctant to adopt this image for its prophets and preachers? Three answers follow, each of which is still relevant centuries later.

1. Preaching matters more than preachers

The New Testament prefers verbs for proclamation over nouns for the proclaimer. The activity is more important than those who perform it. This can be seen by comparing *kerusso* (used sixty-one times in the NT) with *kerux* (three times), but also *didasko*, *euangelizesthai*, *katangello*, and *martureo* with their cognate nouns. This last verb is especially significant, because John uses “witness” in contexts where others use “preach.” And he, too, favors the verb (thirty-four times compared to only five – all in Revelation – for *martur/martus*). So even if there were no other problems with the word “herald,” it would probably be used infrequently simply because the Bible’s writers prefer to shine their spotlight on the activity of heralding/witnessing, rather than on the human mouthpieces who engage in that worthy work.

Surely the twenty-first century church should, like the first generation of Christians, honor preaching more than it honors its preachers. In a time when electronic media make international stars out of savvy communicators, when religious entrepreneurs attract cult-like followings, when pastors pursue advanced degrees and honorific titles, it’s good to be reminded that in the New Testament view of things the emphasis is on the message, not the messenger. Our primary concern should not be with the personality of the proclaimer (Brooks’s famous definition of preaching as “truth through personality” notwithstanding), but with the proclamation of God’s news. “The task of the herald is

not to *be* somebody, but to *do* something on another's behalf and under another's authority" (Long, 1989, 27).

2. Heralds were viewed as paid parrots

A second reason the first century church was reluctant to use "herald" as metaphor for ministers of the gospel is that ancient heralds were sometimes regarded as little more than paid parrots (Fant, 108). They need not care about the people to whom they spoke, or even care very much whether or not their message was heeded. All they had to do was deliver it and move on to the next town. A man could be a bad man and still be a good herald. What counted was that he make himself heard, which is why his chief qualification was a loud, clear voice (Mounce, 13).

This does not describe the preacher of the gospel! Christ's ministers love those to whom they preach (1 Thess. 2:6-12; 2 John 1). They are men of proven character, "faithful men" (2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Cor. 5:11), whose conduct, not just doctrine, matters (1 Tim. 4:16), who care passionately about the reception their message receives (1 Cor. 5:11-6:13). They do not simply unburden themselves of official proclamations and then hurry off to collect their pay; they plead (2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1), reason (Acts 18:4), and patiently instruct (2 Timothy 2:25), doing whatever it takes to win hearers to the faith (1 Cor. 9:22).

So if the preacher is in any sense a herald, he is also a pastor, and this shepherd image with its associations of loving, caring, healing and feeding must be allowed to correct or complement the herald image.

3. The ancient herald's high status

A third reason that the Bible did not identify its writers and other spokesmen for God with the herald of antiquity is that heralds typically held an honored status few prophets and no preachers enjoyed. As envoys of government, heralds were untouchable, protected from harm by custom and law (Brown, 49). Sometimes they served as ambassadors, carrying a kind of staff or scepter (Mounce, 12). Even in war time, they could dare to walk unmolested into the camp of the enemy (Friedrich, 689).

Contrast this high status with that of the Bible's prophets and preachers! A few court prophets in Old Testament times may have been honored as persons of stature (Samuel, Nathan, Daniel, for example), but mostly it was the false prophets who were respected by their contemporaries. Certainly, no New Testament preacher would compare himself with the high-status herald. His preaching (*kerygma*) was "foolish" (1 Cor. 1:21): both the content of preaching—about a crucified God—and the activity of preaching, since "heralding" is honored only if the herald's lord is recognized and respected by those who hear. The Greek herald was under the protection of the gods; to harm him while he was engaged in his duties was a serious offense (Evans, 316). But the preacher was "the scum of the earth" (1 Cor. 4:13), vilified and persecuted by the culture at large and under-rated even by the churches he served.

There have been times and places in church history when preachers were honored. But in the secular west, a minister of the gospel who takes "herald" as his defining identity may

be surprised to discover that it's a different time and place! Preachers are oddities, tolerated (barely) by the community. The churches who might be expected to honor them reserve the right to fire those whose preaching makes them uncomfortable, or whose personality or "visioneering" abilities are sub-par. Preachers do not enjoy the high status of ancient heralds.

Other reservations

To these centuries-old considerations we can add a couple more, raised by our contemporaries. Thomas Long notes that heralds cared little for rhetoric or literary artistry. They spoke plainly and without adornment what they'd memorized or read their messages verbatim. Viewing ourselves as heralds may lead preachers to disdain style, method, and communication strategies. But from literary approaches to Scripture, we've learned that these things matter to God. The Bible is artfully crafted and rhetorically sophisticated. We who handle this material must be as conscientious as its authors about how we say what we say, so that the aesthetic, affective, imaginative, and cognitive concerns of our texts are honored (Long, 28-29).

Others have questioned the herald image because it seems to confer on preachers an authority unacceptable to today's listeners, a kind of "I-am-the-wise-one-with-the-answers-from-the-Bible-because-I-went-to-seminary-and-am-giving-it-to-you-now-because-I-have-the-microphone-and-the-power-so-you-need-to-listen attitude" (Kimball, 87). This kind of authoritative speech is viewed as outmoded at best and unjust at worst because it tends to silence women, minorities, and the disenfranchised (McClure, 47).

Summary

Maybe the word "herald" is so handicapped by inappropriate connotations that we should abandon it. Maybe we should embrace instead our identity as shepherds or story-tellers or enablers or liturgists or teachers or—for those with the requisite gifts—poets. Tom Long acknowledges some value in the herald image but believes it's not our best option; he prefers "witness" (Long, 42-47). But another contemporary homiletician predicts that despite its deficiencies, the herald image will continue to be an important way of describing the preacher's task because it "expresses the centrality of God's action in preaching and reminds preachers *whose* message they are bringing to the church" (McClure, 47). Sharing that conviction, I propose that the herald image needs to be *rehabilitated* and *reclaimed* by preachers in the secularized west.

HOW THE HERALD IMAGE CAN BE REHABILITATED

The gospel herald's authority is textual, not personal

At an emergent gathering a few years ago, Doug Pagitt told about 1,100 alternative church leaders that "preaching is broken." One who was there writes,

For Pagitt, it is unhealthy -- even abusive -- to suggest that only a few, privileged individuals can speak for God. 'Why do I get to speak for 30 minutes and you don't? A sermon is often a violent act,' says Pagitt, a key figure among emerging leaders. 'It's a violence toward the will of the people

who have to sit there and take it.' To treat the sermon as an oratorical performance delivered by a paid and trained professional who claims to speak for God sets up an artificial power imbalance within the congregation, says Pagitt, a Baptist by training. It's hard for a congregation to practice the priesthood of all believers when the preaching perpetuates an image of the pastor as somehow more authoritative or spiritual than his or her listeners.

In an emerging church culture that values authenticity above all else, such an approach to preaching creates an artificial distance with the congregation, Pagitt suggests (Allen).

This kind of language concerns me. I find myself wishing, as I often do when reading emergent leaders, that they would take some humility pills and tone down the rhetoric. And I suspect that what's troublesome in Pagitt's remarks is not due to infelicitous word choice only; that he in fact shares with others in the "emergent conversation" a flawed view of authority noted later in this paper. But for the moment, let's suppose that what Pagitt and others object to is not so much true preacherly authority, which comes from the message preached, but an illegitimate counterfeit that comes from the credentials, education, glibness, or charisma of the preacher. There *are* preachers whose vocabulary and demeanor in the pulpit and whose less-than-exemplary lives outside the pulpit seem to say, "I'm privileged, I'm above you, I'm smarter than you, I know more," or (as in the attitude described on page 4 of this essay), "I have the microphone, so there." Pagitt and others are right to reject this kind of pulpit ministry.

Preachers are sheep as well as shepherds, pioneer listeners as well as speakers, members of the community who stand under the word and not just heralds of that word. There is no one secret for how to express appropriate authority without assuming inappropriate authority: every minister must crucify arrogance, pray as if his life depended on it for the sanctifying and empowering filling of the Holy Spirit, practice what he preaches, and so on. But if there was one key to legitimate authority it would be expository preaching. We have authority if we say what God says. "Authority comes from the preacher's mandate to proclaim the King's Word as a herald with all the authority of the throne behind him" (MacArthur, 1992, 327).

If a passage from the Bible serves as a pretext to say what the preacher wants to say, even if he says true and helpful things, he substitutes human authority for that of the word. But if it's clear to the preacher and to all who listen to him that his preaching is disciplined by the text, that in fact he has no warrant for speaking and nothing to say apart from the text, then he is a herald *with* and *under* authority. Preachers can make this evident in their preaching by taking time to read the text well, by rooting everything they say in some part of the text, by quoting it liberally in the sermon, using its words, images, and structure. I think it's important for preachers to open their Bibles when preaching. A friend who preached an otherwise fine biblical sermon held a sheaf of notes in his hand while preaching without a pulpit; no Bible was in sight. I knew when he was reading the words of Scripture from his notes and when he was using his own words, but I'm not confident that the congregation knew the difference. The unspoken and unintended

message may have been that this talk was not a word from God. The visual/symbolic value of The Book laying open in the preacher's hand cannot be stressed enough.

Graham Johnston offers some additional counsel for preaching with authority without being authoritarian (Johnston, 94-95).

1. Preachers should be careful not to make every issue a test of orthodoxy. Not every truth claim bears the same weight.
2. Speak of Christianity positively, without taking cheap shots at other religions.
3. Acknowledge that some things are gray.
4. Admit to your own struggles. A degree of vulnerability lets people know you're a pilgrim, too, and that though you speak with authority, you don't pretend to *be* the authority.
5. Don't go looking for a fight. Skeptics will only get sidetracked from the main issue if you major on minors.¹

But the gospel herald does not parrot the text

Without retracting anything in the previous section about the text of Scripture being the preacher's sole source of authority, it must be said that it's not enough to simply read the text and then sit down (this was the view of a cult-like group I encountered in college; they believed that to comment on the Bible—to preach—was to add to God's word). Nor will it do to repeat texts like "Slaves, be obedient to your masters," or "You shall not suffer a witch to live," or numerous Old Testament prophetic oracles without some fairly sophisticated interpretive adaptation to our time, culture, and dispensation.

One difference between the ancient herald and the preacher is that the time lapse and geographical/cultural distance between the herald's reception of the message and its delivery were minimal. He went out from his master's presence and delivered the message to its intended audience. But if he spoke those same words to a different city or decades later in an entirely different rhetorical situation, they would not mean what they meant before. It would not be faithful stewardship of his responsibility.

Heralds of God's word proclaim texts written many centuries ago to different cultures and situations. So heralding must include theological exegesis and pastoral sensitivity, or we'll be stating the right message but to the wrong people or at the wrong time. Perhaps it's better to conceive of expository preaching not as saying what the text says, but saying what the Spirit is saying *today* through the text.

¹ I have retained Johnston's numbering, but paraphrased and shortened his points. His fuller version is a mostly helpful plan for avoiding unnecessary dogmatism. My one reservation comes on his last point, where he mentions sexuality and abortion as the kind of "symptomatic" issue we shouldn't get sidetracked on. But of course, these are the life and death issues on which the Christian and the Christian alone has an authoritative word to speak.

Heralds today must also think hard about sermon structure, word choice, and other dimensions of homiletics. Some who over-stress the herald image (notably, some disciples of Karl Barth) disparage such concern with skillful communication: how dare we think we can improve on God's word? (Long, 26-30) But, as already noted, the Bible itself bears evidence of artful composition. Its messages were not dictated, but breathed into men of God who were moved by the Holy Spirit. These men then shaped the divine-human word in culturally understandable forms and unique personal styles.

The gospel herald lives his message

Although the ancient herald could be detached from his message, dispassionately parroting what he was paid to say, the preacher of the gospel has *experienced* the truth he heralds. He is not a neutral observer, but one whose will, imagination, and affections have been captivated by the word he speaks. This is a strength of Haddon Robinson's definition of expository preaching: ". . . the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of the passage in its context, *which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher*, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers" (Robinson, 21; *emphasis added*). The herald's experience of the message is not a nice add-on, but an essential part of authentic preaching.

People in the secularized west, particularly young people, care deeply about authenticity. They sniff out phoniness and despise it. "Whether or not the congregation believes and trusts the preacher, whether or not the preacher is perceived to have integrity, undeniably affects to some degree the receptivity of the hearers" (Long, 30).

The gospel herald cares passionately about people

Michael Quicke warns against one weakness inherent in the herald image: "At its worst, herald preaching can be so focused on a text that it ignores the needs of the hearers" (Quicke, 100). Preachers who take their identity as heralds too far, without also embracing other, balancing identities may care only about delivering the message correctly and not with whether the message actually connects with or helps anybody. But this is clearly not an option for the preacher of the gospel.

Heralds in antiquity did not have to love those who heard them, but we who proclaim a message of love from a God of love have to incarnate that love. If we're not careful, we can distort our message not by changing the words God gave us but by living lives that speak louder than and counter to our words. It's one thing to love preaching; it's another to love those to whom we preach..

Summary – why bother rehabilitating a flawed image?

A term that has to be explained at length may not be the best way to say what one means. An image that's a subject to such serious misunderstanding that it has to be "rehabilitated" may not be the best way to speak of one's life's work. Is it worth all the effort to clarify what we mean and don't mean by "herald"? If preachers and churches are abandoning the herald metaphor, if the Bible itself seems reluctant to use it, why "reclaim" it? This is the subject of the next section of the essay.

WHY THE HERALD IMAGE MUST BE RECLAIMED

“Heralding” is the controlling metaphor for proclamation in the New Testament

Although, as we’ve noted, *kerux* is rare and relatively unimportant in the Bible, *kerusso* is the most important and, we might say, the “privileged” verb for the proclamation of the gospel, dominating the thirty-three verbs for speaking God’s word found in the New Testament (Runia, 7). Its sixty-one occurrences, combined with fifty-four times for *euangelizesthai* and eighteen for *katangelo* – both of which are virtually synonymous with *kerusso* – make heralding vocabulary by far the dominant way of talking about Christian proclamation. (This explains why scholars looking at the same data can write such apparently irreconcilable conclusions as that of Fant, who says that “herald” is almost never used for the preacher in the New Testament (Fant, 108) and Stott, who says that of all the images in the Bible for those who preach, herald is the commonest (Stott, 1982, 35). Fant is counting nouns, Stott verbs.)

“Heralding” summarizes the program of Jesus (Luke 4:44). He came to preach (Mark 1:29; Luke 4:18-19), and sent the twelve out to do the same (Mark 3:14). Heralding, he said, would be the age-long task of the church (Matt. 24:14; Mark 15:16). By this indispensable ministry people are saved (Rom. 10:14; 1 Cor. 1:21). Although other verbs are needed to complete the picture of what oral ministry of the word looked like in the first century, for none of them do we find the kind of solemn, weighty urgency of Paul’s charge to Timothy: “In the presence of God and of Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:1-2). Here, “preach” serves as the over-arching rubric for the other imperatives—verbs that flesh out *how* Timothy will carry out his commission to preach.

If any verb in the New Testament could vie with “preach” for pride of place in the church’s vocabulary of proclamation, it would be “teach.” But teaching in the church builds on or grows out of preaching. The news of what God in Christ has done for sinners—and this is what’s heralded in preaching—grounds all doctrinal reflection, instruction, and exhortation. Although *kerygma* may not be temporally prior to *didache*, as Dodd once ventured, it *is* logically prior. “Teaching is the expounding in detail of that which is proclaimed. The relation is that of an axiom to its explanation and application. As such, the connection is logical rather than chronological. Or, to change the figure, *kerygma* is foundation and *didache* is superstructure” (Mounce, 42-43).

So we herald, even if we don’t call ourselves heralds. We may follow the precedent of NT noun usage, and not call ourselves “preachers” (or even care very much what others call us!); but we’d better be sure we follow the Bible’s *verb* usage and “preach.” Paul did not insist on being called a “preacher,” but he did say, “Woe to me, if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16) Reasons why heralding is still vital in our time follow.

The secular west needs “news”

Countless listeners inside and outside the church think that the Christian message is one of many options in a pluralistic spiritual market: a program of moral reformation or a code of conduct or a philosophy or an invitation to join an organization or a warrant for capitalism (or socialism or feminism). But what the Christian message is, and what the world desperately needs and won't get anywhere else is *news*—news of what the sovereign, gracious Lord of the universe has done to reconcile unworthy us to himself and the response on our part that his initiative calls for. Preachers and homileticians and churches need to be clear not only about the goodness of the good news, but the “newsiness” of the good news. We have to pay attention to the character of Christian proclamation as a noteworthy report that we could not have invented but which comes to us from “outside,” so that when we teach, our teaching is *kerygmatic didache*, when we exhort, our exhortation is *kerygmatic paraklesis*. All our speaking grows out of the kerygma, which is to say we are heralds.

Herald is an identity and heralding a mode of speech that best preserve the character of gospel as news. “Hear ye, hear ye,” says the preacher, and the listener is primed not for a theological discussion or a tale or a religious pep talk, but news.

James Thompson thinks that the narrative and inductive forms of the new homiletics may be better suited to listeners who are already well-grounded in the Christian faith than to our increasingly post-Christian environment. He points out that when Fred Craddock advocated inductive forms in *Overhearing the Gospel*, he intended to help jaded church people appropriate a message they already know (Thompson, 9).² But what if people don't know the message? How *can* they know it, without someone preaching to them (*kerusso*, Romans 10:14) – heralding news and summons from the Sovereign Lord? Thompson appreciates narrative (though he warns that narrative could easily become a new one-size-fits-all mode in place of older preaching forms); but he argues that Paul's epistles, which are not narrative but direct speech, can teach us much about preaching in a pagan culture (Thompson, 14-15, 25-26).

Can a herald tell stories? Certainly. Can a herald's sermons shape themselves on narrative or inductive principles? Of course. Jeffrey Arthurs, whose definition of preaching as heralding appears in the introduction to this essay, offers that definition in a book that advocates variety in sermon forms. Heralding does not require one and only one form; it does not necessitate a deductive outline or discursive style. It does, however, imply directness, urgency, and seriousness appropriate to the announcement of news from the King. The preacher as herald may tell stories, but not as a good ole boy spinning yarns; the preacher's stories have bite. The preacher as herald may structure sermons inductively, but not so that listeners can come to their own conclusions and their autonomy be respected; these inductive sermons will sound an unmistakable summons to heed the word of God. The preacher as herald may adapt his language to his audience,

² Craddock said that his book was a meditation on Kierkegaard's sentence, “There is no lack of information in a Christian land; something else is lacking, and this is a something which the one cannot directly communicate to the other.” But we no longer live in a “Christian land” and there's definitely a lack of biblical information in the secularized west.

but not so as to soften or make more palatable or relevant what God has charged him to say. The preacher as herald may practice vulnerability and transparency, but not so as to make himself the focus of attention or to undermine the authority of his office. The preacher as herald may craft the sermon artistically, but not in such a way or to such a degree that attention is drawn from the message to the artistry. The preacher comes to deliver news.

The secularized west needs an authoritative message

In Scripture alone—the herald’s message—we hear that *theospneustos* truth which saves and sanctifies (2 Tim. 3:15-18). As Haddon Robinson puts it, “This God-breathed book gives us all we need to know to be all we need to be in all of life’s situations.” Who but the herald can make such a claim in our time? Where but in the Bible will people find such a sure foundation on which to build a life?

Our contemporaries may not *know* that they need an authoritative message. Indeed, they may well be skeptical about “metanarratives” and distrustful of authority figures (including preachers) who offer overarching explanations of how the world works. But the fact remains that God has given us an infallible metanarrative in the Bible and an authoritative, overarching explanation of all of life in the Christian world view. He knows we need them.

Every generation has found some aspects of the Christian message uncongenial. In our time it’s the foundational *authority* of Christianity’s truth claims. But why should our hearers’ blindness to their true need cause preachers to quit doing what preachers have done for centuries, heralding the eternal and eternally true gospel? When asked why he advocates a traditional expository preaching model even in a postmodern environment, John MacArthur, Jr. responded:

The bottom line is that expository preaching confronts the amorality of postmodernism with an authoritative message of absolute truth. It’s not a question of debating. It’s not a question of trying to find some way to sneak that in. It’s an issue of confronting this kind of thinking with the absolute authority of Scripture and then letting the Spirit of God make the application to the heart. Expository preaching is the only thing that is going to change anything. There isn’t any other way to affect people positively aside from hitting them with that kind of authority. In my own preaching, my objective is not to court the postmodern mind. My objective is to confront it - to hit it stone cold in the face with truth. It’s irrelevant to me how the person thinks. It’s only relevant to me how they need to think. So I’m not going to play around with their sensitivities to postmodernism (MacArthur, 2002).

Perhaps we don’t have to be as in-your-face as MacArthur, but surely he’s right in this: just because the culture is confused about authority doesn’t mean the preacher has to be confused. Personally, I do want to understand how a postmodern person thinks. I don’t just want to “hit” people with authority. But being aware of the radical perspectivalism of postmodernism doesn’t mean I have to capitulate to it. Understanding the epistemology of our contemporaries doesn’t mean I have to adopt it.

In a paper on preaching in a post-Christian culture, Duane Litfin laments the emergent church's "valorizing of postmodernity" (Litfin, 4). He critiques Brian McLaren's strategy for evangelism and preaching in our time—a strategy that will, if widely adopted, prove disastrous because it works from postmodern perspectives that are utterly incompatible with the authoritative truth claims we are called to herald.

There's no room in this paper to sketch emergent versions of the gospel or gospel proclamation; most EHS members have read enough about "po-mo" to have a fairly good idea of what McLaren and others propose—fuzziness not just on specific truth claims but on the category of "Truth" itself; false antitheses between authoritatively proclaiming the gospel and authentically living it, and so on. Litfin states that if McLaren and other emergent reinterpreters of the church's message and methods are right, ". . . then, by these standards, the ministry of the greatest evangelist of all times must be deemed a failure. [Paul's] itinerant ministry as a herald met few of [McLaren's] criteria, and thus becomes a deadly model for today" (Litfin, 8). But, he concludes, "Neither Paul's method nor his message were mistaken. He informs us that both were given to him directly from Christ. Thus we need not call into question Paul's confidence in the Gospel. We need only seek to emulate it, and then call into question any analysis that fails to do the same" (Litfin, 9).

PROPOSALS FOR DISCUSSION

I doubt that most EHS members will dispute the implications I've drawn so far from the preacher's identity as herald. To be evangelical is to believe we have an authoritative evangel to herald, and that this message is not fundamentally philosophy or moral improvement but news of what God in Christ has done for unworthy sinners. The following proposals, however, may be more debatable. I offer them for the sake of what I hope will be worthwhile discussion at the 2007 EHS meeting. And because I'd rather discuss them than exposit and advocate them, I will be brief.

If the preacher is a herald, he does not have to "earn the right to be heard."

Paul's itinerant ministry did not allow time for building personal relationships with those he sought to win. He simply heralded the truth, confident that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, even if the listener doesn't know the messenger. Preachers who minister in one locale may feel a keener need than Paul did for pastoral relationship, transparency, and vulnerability with their congregations. Is it not helpful for those who hear us to know us warts and all? Yes. As long as we don't think, mistakenly, that our "warts" diminish the power of the preached word. Martin Luther insisted that the preacher must not allow awareness of his own sinfulness and inadequacy to undermine the authority of preaching. Imperfect as he is, he must be able to "boast" that his preaching is the very Word of God (Runia, 41-42).

If the preacher is a herald, the sermon should ordinarily be monological

A herald does ask for discussion and debate. The message is not put forth as a topic of conversation; it is proclaimed and complied with. When sermons end with Q&A or counterpoint, it detracts from the givenness of the message. Certainly there are times in the life of the Christian community for discussion and even rousing debate. But is there not also a time for the people of God to hear “Thus says the Lord” and respond not with deliberation but with faith and obedience? “Monologue is inherent in heralding – and appropriate for gospel proclamation (Evans, 322).³

If the preacher is a herald, preaching should not worry too much about “relevance”

Robert Mounce hopes that evangelicals will not repeat the mistake of nineteenth century liberals who sought to make the gospel “relevant” to their times. Relevance ended up meaning a kind of “friendly rapport with the spirit of the age” that “vaporized” the biblical kerygma into a message of vague optimism (Mounce, 155-56). We need to apply the gospel to human need, which is ultimate, not adjust it to human culture, which is ephemeral.⁴

Someone approached William Willimon after he’d given a lecture and said, “The trouble with you preachers is that you just don’t speak my language. You don’t say anything that relates to my world.”

He meant it as a damning criticism, I’m sure. I replied, in love, “Where in the world would you get the idea that I, or any of my pastoral sisters and brothers, would want to speak in your language or to your world? I don’t want to speak to your world. I want to rock your world! I want to give you a new language you wouldn’t know without my preaching. I want to destroy your world and offer you another. I’m a prophet, for God’s sake! (Willimon, 11)

³ Evans’s assertion that heralding – proclaiming the gospel – is appropriately monological comes in an article in which he says preaching is *not* the pastor’s task. He laments the emphasis on preaching in Christian assemblies, arguing that a more dialogical mutual ministry of exhortation was the post-apostolic pattern and should be ours as well.

⁴ Os Guinness’s *Prophetic Untimeliness*, eloquently and passionately echoes Mounce’s concern. Guinness laments how far evangelicals have gone in following the disastrous curse of liberalism, idolizing culture and relevance and forfeiting authority. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.

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