Preaching in the Missional Church

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> The forces of modernization, trailed by the deconstructive troops of postmodernism, have left Western civilization writhing in the throes of secularization. In response, some evangelicals are "going missional"[1] in an attempt to reach an increasingly pagan culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Proponents seek to move beyond a traditional emphasis on "missions" by establishing "missional churches" that engage all members and align all aspects of life with God's mission, God's reign in the world.

The seminary where I teach is part of a denomination committed to becoming a "missional church."[2] This paper represents my exploration of the implications of this commitment for my role as a professor of preaching at the seminary. Therefore, I am approaching this paper not as an expert on matters of secularization or the missional church, but rather as a sleuth searching for clues on more effective ways to equip students for ministry in a secular context. I am not attempting a critical analysis but rather an initial inquiry into the implications of the missional church vision for the field of homiletics. I have chosen to make numerous citations to allow missional church proponents to express their concerns in their own words. I look forward to receiving feedback on these exploratory ideas from my preaching colleagues at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society in October 2007.

In this paper, I will explain in brief the nature of secularization in the North American context and the challenges it poses for the church. I shall then seek to elucidate the unique response to secularization by proponents of the missional church, most particularly their perspectives on preaching. Finally, I shall explore the pedagogical possibilities for teachers of homiletics who hope to equip "missional preachers" for effective Christian ministry in a secularizing world.

Secularization in the West

The changes in the modern world, particularly in the last several centuries, have profoundly (re)shaped human consciousness, producing competing "realities" and new ways of knowing. Religious establishments, once the dominant force in many societies, now find their scope of influence vastly reduced. Theorists generally discuss the wide-ranging effects of modernization on religious institutions, beliefs, and practices under the rubric of *secularization*, describing "the process by which the sacred gives way to the secular." In the process of secularization, the plausibility structures which support religious beliefs have been dismantled or vastly altered.

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[1] I borrowed the term "going missional" from the theme of "Leadership Journal", Winter 2007.
[2] Eastern Mennonite Seminary is governed by Mennonite Church USA, founded in 2001 by a merger between two older Mennonite churches. The founding documents include the commitment to "become a missional church."

Sociologist Max Weber posited a pessimistic thesis of secularization that predicted an ongoing, straightforward and linear decline of religion in modern affairs. However, many modern theorists agree that a paradigm of unstoppable secularization, in which modern societies eventually come to exclude religion, does not reflect current North American reality. "Secularization is not inexorable, nor irrevocable, and it is influenced and 'bent' by other major forces in western history" (Hunter 1992, 31). Societies respond in different ways to the forces of secularity, adapting new ideas and adopting new ways of witnessing to their faith. Churches in America, for example, have responded differently than churches in continental Europe.

Marsha Witten (1993) studied how preachers in large Presbyterian and Southern Baptist Churches adapted to the forces of secularization by the way they preached about the parable of the Prodigal Son. Her analysis of their sermons showed that they employed linguistic strategies of accommodation, resistance, and reframing in response to the secular challenge.

A brief definition of secularization

Lesslie Newbigen (Hunsberger 1998, 142f) succinctly defined secularization[3] as follows: "Negatively, it is the withdrawal of areas of life and activity from the control of organized religious bodies, and the withdrawal of areas of thought from the control of what are believed to be revealed religious truths. Positively it may be seen as the increasing assertion of the competence of human science and technics to handle human problems of every kind."

I chose to cite Newbigen's definition of secularization here because he stands tall in his influence among proponents of the missional church. As an Anglican bishop, Newbigen worked for years as a missionary in India. His insights about secularization were sharpened by his observation of its differing effects in India and in his native Britain.

Newbigen witnessed the positive effects of secularization from the standpoint of missionary work in India. In an early essay, Newbigen (Hunsberger, 143) argued that the process of secularization "is accomplishing the kind of changes in patterns of human living for which Christian missionaries fought with such stubborn perseverance a century and a half ago -- the abolition of untouchability, of the dowry system, of temple prostitution, the spread of education and medical service, and so on."

As the example of Newbigen's work in India shows, the Christian church has at times been an ally in the secularization of societies, particularly when missionaries sought to "enlighten" local target populations clinging to traditional religious superstitions or pagan practices. They believed that the secularization of these societies would pave the way for belief in the Christian message as

[3] Of all the missional church proponents I studied, Kaiser (1996, 82) offers perhaps the most helpful definition of secularism. He views it "not as the decline of religion but as a redefinition of its role in such a way that religious beliefs are dissociated from the secular processes of world-structuring, and secular values are alienated from the sphere of religion (a combination of functional and substantive approaches)."

presented by modern missionaries who, along with the Gospel of Christ, brought western beliefs, practices, medicine, and institutions. But Hunsberger (p. 147) explains that Newbigen eventually came to see that the "process which secularized and desacralized the world was based on the "illusion" that failed to see that "men cannot live for long in an ideological vacuum." What was intended as a positive good had some concomitant negative long-term consequences.

Much of what we now know as modernism grew up out of the stable societies with Christian majorities in western Europe. These societies built on the foundational precepts of Christendom to promote a "biblical secularity"—"the positive value placed on time, temporal events, and temporal goals in Holy Scripture" (Kaiser 1996, 79). The 16th century Reformation unleashed some of these forces with such dynamism that it exploded into all the colonies of Europe, including the Americas. The Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the growth of scientific knowledge were spawned by Christian assumptions. Therefore, Christians must not point an accusing finger at pagans, agnostics, atheists or practitioners of other religions as the primary proponents of secularism. Practitioners of Christian faith, whether nominal or devoted, are deeply implicated in the history of western secularization.

The effects of secularization on the Christian churches in the West

Many writers agree that the forces of secularization have brought about the end of Christendom, or what some have called the Constantinian era. This epoch was spawned by the "conversion" of Emperor Constantine in the fourth century A.D., at which time Christian belief was first tolerated by the Roman Empire in an official way. This turn of events not only brought an end to the severe persecution of Christians by the state, it eventually mandated Christian belief by the masses. Christianity became an official religion of the state. This development arguably increased the influence of the Christian faith throughout all levels of the empire and paved the way for Christians to serve in the government. It made possible the official establishment of Christian institutions. Thus, from one point of view, Christendom may be seen as an inarguable good.

But many theologians and missiologists have written about the negative effects of Christendom on faith and the Christian church. They observe that the complicity between church and state led to many moral compromises. And the presumption of a Christian population, however nominal in its faith commitments, effectively stifled both evangelism and Christian disciple-making.

Although the political dynamics were different from the Constantinian era, one may view the first centuries of colonial America as a period of Christendom. While the Founding Fathers included Free Thinkers, deists and agnostics as well as committed Christians, the Christian church has been particularly privileged by the democratic society they created. But recent court decisions in celebrated cases show that the civil liberties once enjoyed by Christians engaging in public actions of prayer or witness are being sharply curtailed. Christian churches can no longer assume the hegemony of Christian beliefs in the public square.

In an essay on public theologizing, Hunsberger (2006, 16) reiterates what he calls the "familiar litany" of effects that secularization has had on the church's public character and witness. In brief, they are 1) "the relegation of religious faith … to the private realm of permitted options, assigned to the private, family, and leisure areas of life and set outside the public ranges of life as having no

bearing." 2) "The shift in recent decades from what remained of the church's privileged chaplaincy role in the social and public space," and 3) "the failing confidence in modernity's reliance on autonomous reason, its epistemological certainty, its privileging of individual choice and self-interest, and its faith in progress," spawning "postmodern sensibilities corresponding to what has come to be called the 'postmodern condition.'"

Ian Randall (2007, 238-239), a tutor at Spurgeon's College in London, spoke of seven significant ecclesiological shifts[4] that British leaders are observing in the post-Christendom West. Each of these shifts is consistent with the effects Hunsberger observed above. Randall observed, however, that in a form of "reverse mission," many Christians from non-Western nations are "having a highly significant impact in Britain through large and growing Black majority and ethnically diverse churches."

Many denominations are witnessing similar dynamics in the United States and Canada. The majority of new churches are being planted by non-whites who eschew (post)modern western perspectives. This phenomenon may well show that Christians in the white majority have themselves been deeply compromised by the debilitating effects of secularism. Hunsberger (2006, 145-6) asserts that we Christians "are largely accommodated to the culture of which we are a part, and we live largely in terms of its most basic assumptions and values." In many cases, churches have taken on the role of a private religious civic club, which at times confuses citizenship with discipleship. Ron Sider (2005) wrote a stinging critique of evangelical Christian moral conduct in America. Citing statistics gleaned through recent surveys, Sider argues that the average evangelical is "living just like the rest of the world."

The response of the missional church to the secularization process

Proponents of the missional church seek both to address the problems of the church's worldly accommodation to society and to galvanize the church in its witness to an increasingly pagan world. They seek to stimulate a dynamic interaction between the Gospel, the church, and the culture. As Wyatt (1999, 159) explains, the Gospel incites conversation with both the world (about its godlessness) and the church (about its worldliness).

Leslie Newbigen, upon his return to his native Britain from missionary endeavors in India, observed that what was once a missionary sending nation had itself become a mission field. His subsequent writings helped to spur the application of missionary principles learned in India to a post-Christian and increasingly pagan society at home. Newbigin posited the notion that the church, in its very life, becomes the best witness to a pagan society. The missional church is conceived through the union of ecclesial and missiological parents.

Key tenets of a missional church

[4] In summary form, the shifts may be described as the movement 1) from the centre to the margins, 2) from majority to minority, 3) from settlers to sojourners, 4) from privilege to plurality, 5) from control to witness, 6) from maintenance to mission, and 7) from institution to movement.

The particular concerns and emphases of the missional church have their roots in an International Missionary Council held at Willingen in 1952. Conference participants discussed the concept of mission as God's work in the world. In summary documents after the meeting, the concept of *missio Dei* (the mission of God), was named as an essential element in Christian mission. "The emphasis was placed on the mission of the Triune God in the world in relation to all three persons of the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (Van Gelder, 2004, 438-9). As Barrett (2006, 177) explains, the specific emphasis of the *missio Dei* was on "the mission as God's, not the church's, and on the church, participating in the *missio Dei*, as missionary by its very nature." This emphasis remains the central focus of the missional church movement.

The term "missional," first used in 1907 (according to the Oxford English Dictionary) as a synonym for the adjective "missionary," was called into service in the missionary councils as a modifier to express the ontological nature of the church. As Richard Bliese (2006, 239) argues, speaking of church *and* mission creates a bifurcation, dividing what must stay together. In Bliese's mind, that is the rationale for using "missional" as an adjective describing the church. Or in Van Gelder's words (2004, 446), "The genetic code of missional church means that it is missionary in its very essence." In a similar vein, Guder (1998, 182) cites Norman Kraus: "The life of the church *is* its witness. The witness of the church *is* its life. The question of authentic witness is the question of authentic community."

The work of the now defunct missionary councils is being carried on by other entities. The Gospel and our Culture Network (GOCN) took up the mantle, seeking to put into practice Leslie Newbigen's hopes that the churches in the west could indeed become missionary agents to our own culture. The stated purposes of the network are "to provide useful research regarding the encounter between the gospel and our culture" and "to encourage local action for transformation in the life and witness of the church." The association has produced a list of volumes named the Gospel and our Culture Series, beginning with Guder et. al.'s *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Another book series -- Christian Mission and Modern Culture – produced by Trinity Press, carries many of the same emphases.

As a leader in the GOCN, Hunsberger (2003, 149) set forth four trajectories of self-awareness for the missional church:

1. "We own our cultural-ness, our own culture." We join with our secular neighbors in living within the particularities of the American culture.
2. "We have the habit of continuous conversion."
3. "We are a living demonstration of the gospel." More than rational proof, secularized people want to see whether it is possible to live by the mandates of Christian discipleship.
4. "We structure our lives around being a sent community instead of a vendor of services." For many churches, this involves a fundamental shift in identity, pastoral leadership habits, community formation, and orientation to the church's mission.

Another primary emphasis in the missional church is a concern for apostolicity, the recapturing of the missionary spirit of the early church (before Constantine) when Christians were a minority living on the margins of the empire. As Hunter (1992, 35) argues the "situation we face today is much like what the early apostolic Church faced." In short, these believers 1) faced a population with no knowledge of the gospel, 2) turned the hostile persecution into a positive attitude toward

the Christian movement, 3) witnessed to an empire with entrenched religions, and 4) invited people to join the messianic community and follow Jesus as Lord. “These were the components of persuasion in the ancient apostolic setting.”

Alan Roxburgh, (2006, 12-13) proposes a paradigm of leadership that contrasts the operating models of a typical pastor with that of a missional pastor who functions in an apostolic way. He also asserts (Roxburgh 1997, 62) that “discipling and equipping require a leadership that demonstrates encounter with the culture in action. This is the role of the apostle.” “Pastor, as apostle, is foundational to all other functions.”

Yet another key aspect of the missional church is the concern for a Christian community that serves as an alternative to worldly culture. Guder (1998, 119) asserts that “If Christian faith makes any difference in behavior, then the church in conformity with Christ is called to an alternative set of behaviors, an alternative ethic, an alternative kind of relationship, in dialogue with the surrounding cultures. Its difference is itself a witness to the gospel.” Again, “An important task of the church is to discern what are those key points at which to be different from the evil of the world;” “some kind of dissent is required if the church is to be genuinely missionary to the dominant culture” (Guder 1998, 127). As Stutzman and Hunsberger observed, (2004, 107) a declaration of allegiance to Christ at times takes “the form of a deliberate, prophetic witness over against some public policy or practice or proposal for public action seen as counter to the claims of God.”

Gibbs and Bolger (2006) explain that some churches, including “emergent churches,” define their missional commitments largely in response to the concerns of postmodernism. They show that postmodern churches seek to “transform secular space” by overcoming the dualisms produced by modern culture. They offer brief explanation of the ways these churches attempt to address modern dualisms such as truncated theology, linear expressions of faith, body/mind dualisms, homogeneity, individualism, self-interested exchange and commodification, clergy/laity split and spectatorship, controlling forms of leadership, truncated spirituality, and separation between church life and contemporary culture.

Missional church approaches to preaching

In spite of the growing body of literature on the missional church, I have found little emphasis on preaching by its primary proponents. In my admittedly incomplete sampling of the literature, cited in the reference list below, I found mostly brief references to preaching. Only one chapter-length essay directly addressed the topic. Perhaps the likely reason for this gap is that missional church theorists seem to carry some disdain for traditional preaching. Most seem to consider it a service of the “vendor church” that must be altered to reach people on the margins of society.

In spite of the paucity of scholarly materials on preaching written by missional church proponents, I offer the following distillation of key characteristics of “missional preaching.” These characteristics are extricated not only from a reading of the primary scholarly texts, but also the journal articles written by preachers committed to the missional vision.

Missional preaching prepares God's people for their work in the world. Guder (1998, 6) maintains that effective Gospel preaching arises from a missional hermeneutic. This method of interpretation "works from the basic assumption that the New Testament writings are directed to communities which are primarily and essentially defined by their missionary vocation. They are apostolic communities, that is, churches founded by the apostolic proclamation with the purpose of continuing that witness in their particular contexts."

Too often, in Guder's mind, the typical "mission sermon" placed the vision of unevangelized pagans overseas before the congregation which was to respond with its prayers, its gifts, and the commitments of those who were called into "fulltime service" (4). Although churches rightly send missionaries to distant places, the missional church desires to equip every member for missionary witness in their own context. As Guder (1998, 9) states:

> The ministry of the Word disciples God's people so that they can move out into the apostolate for which God's Spirit calls and empowers them. Gospel preaching is, therefore, always ultimately ethical in its orientation, because it addresses the shape and behavior of Christian witness in the particular place in which each community is God's sent people. Gospel preaching is the public testimony of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all the contending idols and powers which lure the church away from faithful and obedient witness.

Catherine Gunsalus González (1995, 28) speaks in a similar vein: "If the identity of congregation as the people of God, marked as such by their baptism, is the beginning hermeneutical point for the preacher, then the mission implied by the [biblical] text may be easier to discover." She believes the preacher should be alert to the missional purpose in each biblical text as a way of reminding—indeed, equipping—the people of God for their mission in the world.

Missional preaching grows out of the "agonistic" encounter between the gospel and the church. Wyatt (1999) recommends *agonistic* preaching, born out of the internal struggle that results from the conversation of the gospel with church and culture. "Out of the intense dialogue between culture and gospel within ourselves, there grows a compassion that animates the missionary conversation as a dialogue, not a monologue" (159-160). Agonistic preaching is "the struggle to proclaim the gospel in such a way that it 'frames' the entirety of our ministry in light of the context we live in" (160).

Wyatt describes four key expressions of agonistic preaching. It is 1) iconic, 2) midrashic, 3) parabolic and 4) poetic. He believes these forms of address touch postmodern people. Iconic preaching leaves listeners with images, verbal icons of Jesus Christ "that will go with listeners" into their homes, schools, and workplaces. It builds our identity as Christians.

Midrashic preaching intends the same purpose as Haggadic midrash. It is, "at one and the same time, a sustaining and a subversive activity. It nurtures us into a deeper residence within the biblical world, while nudging us awake along the way to notice how many of our perceptions, assumptions, and expectations of both church and world are grounded in commitments to principles and powers other than the sovereign love of Yahweh" (165). "In the deepest sense, midrashic preaching locates us by reinforcing our sense of participating in the heritage and mission of the people of God" (166).

“Parabolic preaching primarily dislocates us from our certainties and idolatries. It brings us face to face with the living God whose presence destabilizes all that we thought was secure and well-founded” (167).

Wyatt refers to poetic preaching not as a genre, but to the “capacity to dream and evoke visions on behalf of God's people.” “The poetic in our preaching gives compelling voice to what it's like to be a marginalized and demoralized people” (168).

Missional preaching takes place in many contexts outside the traditional worship service, including the public square. Guder (1998, 135) claims that “‘Preaching’ has come to mean something quite different from the New Testament definition of the word. In many North American churches, preaching is practiced only within the church, to the faithful, on Sunday morning. Such preaching probably bears more resemblance to the New Testament concept of ‘teaching’ than to its concept of ‘preaching’.”

Missional church theorists agree that Christianity must eschew the privatization of religion so common in the secular context. Instead, Christians must engage in public life and witness as a way of communicating the gospel. James Brownson (1996, 251) insists that the term “gospel” has a distinctly public character; it identifies Christian faith as news that has significance for all people, indeed for the whole world.”

Brownson (252) goes on to say that “for New Testament writers, the gospel is inextricably tied up with the identity, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, a story that is announced as an act of God that finds hopeful promise for the whole world. The New Testament finds its point of departure in the conviction that the person of Jesus, including his death and resurrection, is “news” of public significance that needs to be told.”

Hunsberger (2006, 17) asserts that *kerygma*[5] and its verbal counterparts, although they are usually translated “preaching,” have “nothing to do with what we now call preaching–a homily or exposition or sermon given in the context of (usually) Sunday worship. Its meaning field has to do with the function of the “herald,” the news announcement by the official spokesvoice of one in power or authority. The public broadcast of the news, the “*public* action” of it, is the form of witness the New Testament describes.”

Linford Stutzman and George Hunsberger (2004, 95) posit that in the New Testament communities, “life together ’in Christ’ was purposeful, intended to manifest before the watching world the promise and possibilities of the coming age.” “The church as a community, the church’s message, and the church’s worship are all cast in the most public of language. Worship is public witness.”

Keifert (1992, 131) sees the worship planner as a rhetor, reflecting the public nature of worship. “A rhetor, in the sense I propose, is a person who leads a public conversation, appealing to

[5] Stutzman and Hunsberger (2004, 106) posit that three of the Greek words commonly used to describe the church’s gathering for worship—*ekklesia*, *kerygma*, and *leitourgia*—all have to do with the public nature of the gathering.

traditional sources and contemporary inventions on behalf of shared purposes and goals. In this sense of the word, all worship planners are rhetors. As rhetors they lead and nurture the local church in evangelical, gospel-centered public conversation and action on behalf of the world."

Missional preaching is concerned with authenticity of life and witness, not simply proclamation of spiritual propositions. Oudshoorn (2006, 14) avows that to be missional, the western church must learn to "speak Christianly in the midst of Babel." "Christian living, coupled with faith in the Holy Spirit, ought to provide the content and meaning of the Christian message. When Christianity is proclaimed in this way then the church will be equipped to reveal a radical new way of being human in the midst of a western culture dominated by the idols of free-market capitalism and liberal democracy."

In a concern for authentic witness, McPhee (2006, 136) states that both communication of the gospel and comportment are "essential to our call to witness and evangelize." "They are like two wings of an airplane. Without them, the message will not fly." Stutzman and Hunsberger (2004, 151) state that "the missional church both *proclaims* the gospel and *embodies* the gospel."

Gibbs and Bolger (2006, 188) voice the same concern. They avow that "Christians demonstrate a way to live truthfully, not point to a set of abstract, truthful propositions. They approach this truth through compelling lives of people serving God. Postmodern churches do not fight to defend abstract notions of truth. Apologetics not primarily embedded as a truthful way of living will be resisted."

Missional preaching deliberately draws contrasts between the gospel message and the practices and values of American civil religion, aiming for conversion from habits shaped by participation in American democracy to habits formed through Christian discipleship. Guder (1998, 137) insists, "Public announcements of God's actions in the world are a call to conversion, to turning around, to giving up idolatries, and to placing one's loyalty in the one true God and God's reign." This is just as true for believers in the church as for nonbelievers outside the church. As Hunsberger (2003, 149) has noted, we are engaged in a dialogue "between the gospel's version of things and the versions our culture supplies us at the most assumed levels. It means we are always in the place of being converted, again and again." Secular people, especially youth, seek for authenticity and vulnerability in the church.

Roxburgh (1999, 257f) makes the point that apostolic congregations are not concerned primarily with reaching the unchurched or the needs of the people in their community. "The primary focus of the *apostolic congregation* is the formation of a people whose life witnesses to the apostolic message." In his view, authentic apostolicity has to do with fundamental grounding and reference point in the Incarnation of Christ. The content of the faith that is proclaimed is as important as the fact that it is being proclaimed. Therefore, the church must continually examine its life to see whether or not it is being faithful to the gospel in its life and witness. Missional preaching helps to accomplish this task by continually clarifying the gospel for the life of the church.

Guder (1998, 114) declares that

> the message of the reign of God, the gospel, is always communicated with the thought constructs and practices prevalent within the cultural setting of the church in a specific time

> and place. But when truly shaped by the Holy Spirit, this message also points beyond its present culture's thought forms and customs to the distinctive culture of God's reign proclaimed by Jesus. For this reason, the church is always bicultural, conversant in the language and customs of the surrounding culture and living toward the language and ethics of the gospel.

Missional preaching has a cross-cultural dimension. Brownson (1996, 233) suggests that the "tendency of early Christianity to cross cultural boundaries is a fertile starting point for developing a model of biblical interpretation. It is fertile, especially for our purposes, because it places the question of the relationship between Christianity and diverse cultures at the very top of the interpretive agenda." Missional preaching, then, engages in various ways with people outside the dominant culture or even the "churchly" culture, the privatized gatherings of Christians in local communities of faith.

Cheryl Bridges Johns (1999, 19-20) declares that "it is the delight of the Spirit to accomplish the missionary task among the ordinary and the powerless. I believe that the future of our mission in North America resides in the marginal people of our society. If we are to have a viable mission the rest of us must go there." She goes on to declare that "the future of mission in North America is a scandalous future for most of us. It calls for us to receive the prophetic witness of the marginalized," "becoming part of their communities of faith, rather than vice-versa."

Cardoza-Orlandi (1999, 3) asserts that the faith's "bloodline is energized as the Christian religion crosses all types of boundaries—geographical, cultural, religious—and interacts with those realities. The Christian struggle to bring the faith to bear on the daily life of God's people becomes the hermeneutical key to understanding the vitality of the faith." This struggle, in his mind, "should be the *sine qua non* of preaching, particularly missional preaching."

Cardoza-Orlandi (5) believes that the theorizing about the missional church could be greatly enriched by an intercultural dialogue between North Americans and our neighbors to the south. He asserts that "the struggle for daily bread or the challenge of interacting daily with neighbors who profess a different faith creates a unique relational dynamic" that can provide unique insights on the interaction between faith and daily life. Traditional Western theological reflection often centers on the Bible, tradition, denominational polity, etc., and misses the richness of discussion engendered by existential intercultural and inter-religious praxis.

Cardoza-Orlandi continues (7): "Missional preaching is a ministerial, personal, and communal action in which the congregation listens and discerns the testimony of the Christian people in their struggle with and participation in the activity of God in the world." The existential praxis of people, engaged in witness in daily life, provides much of the grounded resources for missional preaching.

These comments reflect Newbigin's (1986, 146) assertion about the benefits of seeing our own culture through the eyes of "Christian minds shaped by other cultures." Our need for this interaction is greater than theirs at this time, he insisted, since "they have been far more aware of the dangers of syncretism, of an illegitimate alliance with false elements in their culture, than we have been" (147).

Missional preaching employs an interactive style of presentation that engages postmodern listeners in a participatory manner. Postmodern or Emergent churches have perhaps voiced the strongest commitments to participatory worship contexts. Perhaps no missional leader[6] has written with more passion on this subject than Doug Pagitt (2005), pastor of an emergent community called Solomon's Porch. He contrasts traditional preaching, which he derogatorily labels as "speaching," with "progressional dialogue." The purpose of progressional dialogue is to bring about substantive changes in the changes of the "sermon" content in the "context of a healthy relationship between the presenter and listeners." He describes the process as follows:

> I say something that causes another person to think something she hadn't thought before. In response she says something that causes a third person to make a comment he wouldn't normally have made without the benefit of the second person's statement. In turn *I* think something I wouldn't have thought without hearing the comments made by the other two. So now we've all ended up in a place we couldn't have come to without the input we received from each other (23-24).

At Solomon's Porch, Pagitt employs progressional dialogue on behalf of the sermon in two ways: 1) for sermon preparation, which involves in-depth conversation with others, and 2) "the weekly open discussion that happens during the sermon" (24).

Pagitt (26) states his vision as follows: "I can imagine a church—and a people—who see themselves as preachers in one another's lives. Not preachers with inarguable speeches, but people who engage, inform, and build life into one another. Any preaching practice that results in less collective interaction and building of one another should be used sparingly and abandoned as soon as possible." He uses even stronger words: "Occasional usage likely won't hurt anyone, but to make a regular practice of speaching may well be an act of relational violence that is detrimental to the very communities we are seeking to nurture" (25-26).

Pagitt's concern for communal interaction is echoed by Gibbs and Bolger's account (194) of convictions in the emergent church. "Because of the aversion to the sacred-secular split, community formation becomes primary and the church service secondary." "Most churches," they aver, "are committed to remaining small enough to facilitate in-depth relationships."

Missional preaching employs storytelling[7] and metaphorical language in an "abductive" mode. Windsor (2005, 20) employs the Engel Scale[8] to show how different types of preaching—

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[6] The book cover describes Pagitt's congregation—Solomon's Porch—as a holistic, missional, Christian community.

[7] George Hunter, though not necessarily a proponent for the missional church, in his book *How to Reach Secular People* also eschewed the term "preaching," employing instead the more generic term "Christian communication." He interviewed evangelical preachers such as Bill Hybels, Rich Warren, Jim Harnish, Robert Schuller and Bruce Larson to see how they frame their message to secular people. He found that these Christian communicators used word plays, proverbs and other maxims to instill important truths in vivid form. p.104. He also found that they have "recovered the art of discovering and telling stories, particularly "redemptive analogies" and the kinds of stories that enable people to more or less discover the point for themselves." p. 105

[8] The scale was designed by James F. Engel to show the stages through which secular or other unchurched people move toward faith to become growing, productive Christians.

deductive, narrative, inductive, and abductive—may be most effective among certain audiences. He posits that the traditional deductive type may be most helpful for equipping the most faithful saints in the church. The abductive mode, in contrast, is designed to seize people by their imagination and transport them from their current world view to a new one, may be the most effective type for the most secularized listeners.

Winsor writes with a concern for the secularized, the hardened, the hostile, and the apathetic individuals who are rarely touched by typical Sunday preaching in churches. In that vein, he sees the parables of Jesus as the best models to imitate. He outlines eleven characteristics of Jesus' parables then goes on to discuss a troika of parabolic modern communication strategies that may perhaps be adapted for parabolic use by missional preachers. They are the well-told joke, the political cartoon, and the TV commercial. Although preachers may depend on the deductive mode as the mainstay of their preaching, they may develop new effectiveness in reaching the unchurched by fashioning "quality pieces of abductive communication" that can be pressed into service in "the media and public life" (24).

In a table entitled "Operating Models of Leadership" Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk (2006, 12-13) contrast two columns labeled "pastoral" and "missional." Under the heading of "pastoral," they assert that "preaching and teaching offer answers and tell people what is right and what is wrong." They characterize preaching as "telling, didactic, reinforcing assumptions, and principles for living." Under the missional heading, they assert that "preaching and teaching invite the people of God to engage Scripture as a living word that confronts them with questions and draws them into a distinctive world." They characterize this kind of preaching as "metaphor and stories," and preaching that "asks new questions" (12).

Missional preaching is shared among those in the congregation who are effectively sharing the gospel with others. A number of missional church proponents expressed particular concern about the professionalization of the contemporary pastorate and the general neglect of equipping for the ministry of laity in the church. Guder (1998, 195) asserts that the typical seminary reflects the ethos and clerical paradigm of Christendom. He declares that this view "effectively eclipses the gifts for leadership in the non-ordained contingent of God's sent people, those known in Christendom as the laity. Ministry remains identified with the static roles of clergy as priest, pedagogue, or professional, all dispensers of spiritual resources."

For the church to be truly missional, the gifts of all members must be released, including the gifts of preaching. Cheryl Bridges Johns (2006, 17, 19), averred that Jesus, the eschatological prophet, has by agency of the Holy Spirit poured forth the Spirit of prophecy on the people of God as an eschatological community of prophets. Embracing the "prophethood" of all believers can equip the church for the missional task in North America. She states further: "It appears to me that Luke fuses the priestly power to bless with the prophetic power to disrupt. The result is a priestly-prophetic community whose vocation is mission." She declares that "when the congregation is a community of prophets, it actively participates in the sermon. The congregation is to share in the same "anointing of the Spirit" as the preacher. The effect is that the sermon becomes a field of communication which surrounds the whole congregation."

Implications for the Pedagogy of Preaching

As noted in the paragraph just above, missional church proponents are calling for changes in the church's notion of leadership, both in its conception of the pastoral role and of the methods by which leaders are trained. If indeed the whole church is to be equipped to be the people of God, we must conceive of ways for leadership training to extend beyond the traditional pastoral role. Throughout missional church literature, I found embedded hints regarding new directions for training preachers. But no one says it more clearly than Roxburgh (2006, 205), who throws down the gauntlet to seminaries with the following words:

> Ministry formation must shift away from the professionalized, abstractionist forms of training that still dominate the church across North America. Formation and ministry development must occur as apprenticeship within local communities rather than as extractionist models that equip for the needs of their denominational systems and the regulations of the academy. This is not to diminish the importance of theological and intellectual formation, but the pedagogies and location of formation must change. The notion of "professors" located in distant places to whom one goes for three years to be trained for "ministry" has no correlation with what is happening in the contexts where the church is now finding itself. What is starting to emerge is a new sense of what it means to be the people of God in terms of incarnational embeddedness in, with, for, under, and against the communities, neighborhoods, and networks with which people actually find themselves. This shift away from attractional church models to missional communities in the midst of people must have its concomitant shift in terms of ministry formation.

In times of "liminality" and "discontinuous change" as Roxburgh (2005) labels our current reality, we must humbly explore new models for training preachers for the missional church. We have little basis for certitude about what will work best in their formation. This is a time for exploration, for experimentation, for calling on God to show the way forward in faith. I agree with Roxburgh that it is also a time for cooperation between traditional leaders and emergent, postmodern leaders (22). We have many insights to gain from each other and the body of Christ on earth hardly needs more fragmentation than the habits of modernity have already prompted.

I am drawn by Demond's (2002) explication of pedagogy and epistemology for preaching. Though not writing as missional church advocate, his concept for "reflection-in-action as a way of knowing squares with the apprenticeship model advocated by Roxburgh and others. Demond draws on the work of Donald A. Schon (1983 and 1987), who theorized about how professionals in various fields of endeavor get to know what they know, and how they teach others what they know. Schon was particularly interested in moving beyond the technical know-how to the way professionals learn how to draw upon their experience to solve problems or act helpfully in new or demanding situations. Demond (4) suggests that a "student-preacher must experience trying-in-action and achieving-in-action before he or she can know-in-action. Only as the student and the accomplished practitioner engage together in the practice context, with both words and actions, can this convergence of understanding and consequent new learning occur."

This idea is not new. As Demond (4) asserts, "teachers of preaching have long espoused the historic educational models of apprenticing (individual coaching) and practicum learning (group coaching)." Yet, as Demond (4-5) observes, these modes have often been marginalized in the

classroom-bound approaches in the University, Bible College, and seminary. I agree with him that we would do well to "reposition and reinvigorate the coaching model and invite the exploration of some non-traditional homiletic educational approaches" into the seminary classroom.

Clinical Pastoral Education educates through reflective practice. The same patterns could be used to engage effective missional leaders as coaches for student preachers. Students wanting to learn missional preaching could work as apprentices alongside more experienced leaders. Cardoza-Orlandi (1999, 3) asserts that he learned how to preach by listening and observing his pastors and later by "listening to and integrating the suggestions and critique of my parishioners." He confesses: "I believe I received the best possible training in the congregations—maybe even better than that received in seminary."

Systematic feedback to sermons in congregational settings can indeed be deeply instructive for preachers. It can serve as a hedge against the most unhelpful traits of "speaching." Many congregational members have deep wisdom they could share with student preachers, whether in preparation for sermons or in sermon feedback sessions. For generations, congregants in my faith tradition employed a form of sermon feedback called *Zeugnis* (Greiser, 2003, 24).

Seminaries will do well to cultivate a system of "teaching churches" where professors can help structure the learning process and provide helpful theoretical insights. This is consistent with Guder's (1998, 214) insistence that "apostolic, missional leadership will be learned through apprenticeship within communities." Having served as a denominational leader, I echo his assertion that "current ecclesiastical systems and judicatories could take the first steps to such an approach by examining how those in positions of bishop or area minister could make the apostolic function the heart of their callings. At present, these kinds of leaders are primarily administrators, advisors, or consultants" (Guder, 215).

I am not yet ready to abandon the traditional homiletics classroom. Students can learn a great deal in the classroom about the history of preaching along with the skills of biblical exposition, sermon development, and effective public presentations. As Gatzke (2006, 73f) has posited, some of what is promoted as emergent or postmodern preaching shares attributes with the New Homiletic. Students have much they can learn in the classroom about new modes of preaching. But in and of themselves, these skills are incomplete for the missional task. Students must learn to share the gospel outside the four walls of the classroom. They must have opportunity to share the gospel with secularists, agnostics, hardened skeptics, and unchurched postmoderns. They are not likely to learn modes of "abductive" preaching without significant interaction with the people they are trying to "abduct" or capture with their sermons. They need to observe skillful missional preachers in action, not only in the pulpit but in other more interactive settings.

Student preachers must be given opportunities to interact cross-culturally with Christian people from other cultures, with people from other religions, and with people on the margins of society. Interactions in these settings can help students shape their sermons to address the questions that are being posed by people in settings very different from the student. Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi (1999, 4) asserts that many American Christians carry such radically individualistic and compartmentalized faith commitments that they do not readily experience the interpenetration of faith and witness assumed in many Third World Christians. He suggests that the "vitality of

Christianity in the southern continents is due to the interaction of the faith with the multiple factors of life" in "daily *praxis*." By arranging cross-cultural interaction with believers who live by very different assumptions, theological schools in North American can help student preachers become more aware of compromises and blind spots in their faith commitments.

Finally, training schools must find ways to equip a range of people, beyond the seminarian or other matriculated student, for the ministry of preaching. To reach our world for Christ, we need a multitude of lay people (if such a term is even appropriate), to announce the gospel in every corner of our nation, indeed around the globe. These preachers can benefit from instruction in preaching even though they will not earn a degree in one of our evangelical institutions. We will do well to provide training for them in the context where they live and work.

To train missional preachers will require a reorientation and new ways of educating the people of God. The skill of missional preaching cannot readily be taught in the classroom; it must be honed in the trenches. Most of all, training missional preachers will require an outpouring of God's Spirit, not only on individual leaders but on the communities of God's people who long to be about God's work. Ultimately, we must cry out to God for enablement to equip God's people for God's work in God's way.

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