

East Meets West: A Zen Buddhist Pedagogy for Teaching Preaching

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ABSTRACT

North American homiletics professors do not often consider Asian education theories in designing their curricula, despite the rich heritage and traditions of the Far East. In this paper I suggest Zen Buddhist pedagogy as one helpful conversation partner for those who teach preaching in the West. I examine the role of the teacher, student, and relationship between them in Zen philosophy, and suggest pedagogical strategies for use in introductory preaching courses.

In many Bible colleges and seminaries, students, even those in preaching, are only required to take one preaching course (if that). More may be offered as electives, but many professors of introductory preaching cannot take for granted that students will take other homiletics courses. The reality is that for a large number of students (perhaps even the majority of them), the introductory course is the only preaching course they will ever take. The challenge for those who teach these courses, according to Ronald J. Allen (2004), is “Can we construct a pedagogy that, in the same classroom, provides optimum modes of learning for people who have very different approaches not only to preaching but to learning to preach?” It is a pivotal question that has, for too long, gone unasked.

Almost twenty years have passed since Don M. Wardlaw and others at the Academy of Homiletics published their book-length study on how preaching is learned. Wardlaw and his colleagues called teachers of preaching to ask “not ‘How can we teach people to preach?’ but rather, ‘How do people learn to preach?’” (1989, 31)? It is a question that still bears asking. The answer—whatever it is—lies in pedagogy. Unfortunately, it is probably safe to say that most homiletics professors have never taken a course in pedagogy, and for those who have, their education will most likely have been limited to Western educational theories, with little to no time spent on comparable Asian philosophies.

The lack of attention to the Far East is troubling in several respects, but two issues are the most immediate cause for concern. First, there are an increasing number of students in our homiletics classrooms who come from other parts of the world that do not presuppose Western philosophies. Their styles of learning are different, as are their approaches to and understandings of preaching. Second, we in the West stand to learn much ourselves about

pedagogy when we consult the education theories of different Eastern traditions which are rooted in ancient religious and philosophical systems.

This paper seeks to begin that conversation. I begin by surveying and critiquing the typical Western approach to teaching introductory preaching. I then present an overview of Zen Buddhist education theory as a potentially valuable conversation partner for those who teach preaching in the Western world, and conclude with a few Zen-inspired pedagogical strategies that may be appropriated in our preaching classrooms.

WESTERN PEDAGOGY FOR TEACHING PREACHING

The Typical Introductory Homiletics Course

Most introductory homiletics courses, be it at the Bible college or seminary level, in an evangelical or mainline school, have very similar curricula. The twenty introductory preaching course syllabi I surveyed have several common features. All of them provide a brief course description. They also include a list of course objectives; goals that the professor hopes will be achieved by the end of the semester. These objectives focus primarily on the preparation, construction, and delivery of sermons (and in a typical twelve-week course, all but one of those weeks are spent on these practical matters). Perhaps the goal that homiletics professors most value is that students learn “a sequence of indispensable hermeneutical/homiletical steps from text to sermon” (Greidanus 2003, 2). The assignments in the introductory course are, thus, designed to help students achieve this goal, and include small assignments such as reading reports, reflection papers, and short oral performances, and culminate in (almost always one or two) preached sermons. Some introductory preaching courses also conclude with a final examination. Students are graded (on either a numerical or A-to-F scale), with the preached sermons typically making up 40-50% of the overall grade.

A Critique of the Underlying Theoretical Foundations

The similarities among introductory homiletics courses run deeper than what we find at the methodological level. In fact, it is fair to say that the methodological choices that professors make in structuring their courses reveal the underlying theoretical and theological beliefs that form the foundation of the curricula. If any of these beliefs turn out to be flawed or lacking, then we have cause to reexamine the methodological decisions and reshape the introductory preaching course. Let us consider five of the most significant theoretical assumptions and where they may fall short.

1. *Stated course objectives can be accomplished in a twelve-week, semester-long course.* All homiletics instructors approach the courses they teach with goals that they hope their students will be able to accomplish by semester’s end. Implicit in listing course objectives—something all syllabi do—is (1) the assumption that these objectives can

actually be accomplished, and (2) that they can be accomplished in the span of twelve or so weeks; but one must ask if this is necessarily the case.

In fact, neuroscientists and educational psychologists tell us that every person not only learns differently, but learns at a different pace. Course objectives may be practical, even necessary statements, but as developmental molecular biologist John Medina argues (2008, 67), “there is no reason to suspect that the brain pays attention to these expectations.” There is also the added matter of determining whether or not these objectives are met. How do professors really know if students have learned what they sought to teach them?

2. *Preaching belongs more to the realms of rhetoric and poetics than it does to theology.* While all introductory homiletics courses devote the majority of class time to practical matters—exegesis, application, sermon form, and the like—preaching is at least as much (and some would argue is especially) a theological task (Kay 2007). At the very least, then, one would expect that introductory homiletics courses devote more than one or two out of twelve classes to theology. Is it really the most valuable use of limited class time and resources to shape students into preachers with oratorical polish but who are unable to articulate a theology of preaching? What sort of preachers are our Bible colleges and seminaries nurturing and producing when we feed them a steady diet of rhetorical pragmatics and basically ignore theology?

But there can be nothing more important for a preacher than to understand how theology is connected to homiletics. Theology is behind everything a preacher says. Ronald Allen notes that “in the same way that glasses sit between my eyes and the rest of the world, the preacher’s theology sits between the preacher and the sermon. The preacher does not simply preach the Bible but interprets the Bible through a theological lens” (2008, 4). And as L. Susan Bond reminds us (2002, 5), “Homiletic theory, or the integration of theology and method, is at the heart of every sermon, whether we recognize it or not.” Our introductory homiletics courses do not pay adequate attention to this reality.

3. *Introductory preaching students should only focus on mastering one homiletical methodology as opposed to being exposed to multiple approaches to preaching.* In his review of Ronald Allen’s *Interpreting the Gospel*, Paul Scott Wilson raises a fundamental issue for those who teach preaching (1999b, 18):

an unresolved issue about introductory homiletics: What is the best way to teach it? At least two broad choices present themselves in past textbooks: One can teach students an approach that identifies basic principles and has some degree of versatility, or one can teach many methods and forms in the hope that students will find something that works for them.”

O. Wesley Allen, Jr. notes with both appreciation and caution the approach to teaching preaching commonly found in the homiletics classroom (2008, vii):

Traditionally, professors of preaching choose a primary introductory textbook that presents a theology of proclamation and a process of sermon development and delivery from a single point of view. To maintain such a singular point of view is the sign of good writing, but it does at

times cause problems for learning in pluralistic settings. One approach to preaching does not fit all.

His remarks highlight one of the problems with teaching students only one methodology: increasingly the students in our classrooms were, at some earlier point in their lives, educated in foreign countries and do not necessarily learn the same way that Westerners do. In fact, no two students (even two Western-educated students) learn in exactly the same way because no two brains are wired the same way (Ojemann 1989). Teaching Haddon Robinson's methodology (or Eugene Lowry's or Fred Craddock's) exclusively is to necessarily limit the scope of our teaching impact. Our students not only come from many different contexts but preach in many different contexts.

There is also an assumption that students—once they have mastered the initial methodology learned in the introductory course, and as they grow as preachers—will continue to learn and seek out fresh approaches to sermonic form. The accuracy of this assumption is, at best, unclear, and at worst, misguided and flawed. The matter is further complicated for those in the introductory course who enter already having years of pulpit experience. For some, the method taught may be a familiar friend, for others it may be a welcome addition to their homiletical repertoire, but still for others it will be nothing more than a form to learn for the sake of a grade.

4. *Preaching twice is useful in helping students achieve course objectives.* Most introductory preaching courses only give students two in-class opportunities to preach full-length sermons. Most professors, if asked, will probably say they wish students had more opportunity to preach, but due to time constraints, twice is all that can be managed. There is also, likely, the hope that additional preaching courses will provide more opportunities for students to hone their craft. But, given the uncertainty of whether students will take such courses, it must be asked, is preaching twice sufficient?

5. *The assessment criteria employed are useful in helping students achieve course objectives and determining whether they have achieved them.* Preached sermons, as noted earlier, make up 40-50% of the preaching student's grade. Some of the syllabi I surveyed included a sample sermon evaluation form, showing the criteria by which sermons would be graded. These criteria include exegetical accuracy, sermon clarity, and delivery. What message are we communicating to our students when (1) we make these the standards by which a sermon is judged, and (2) we judge sermons in this way? Should sermons even be graded? (Or weighed as heavily as they are in a student's overall grade?)

Could the way in which our preaching courses are graded be a detriment to real learning? Unfortunately, we do not have adequate ways to truly assess the long-term effectiveness of our introductory preaching courses. Wilson suggests that "homiletics and the church as a whole [must] do a better job than they have of addressing what makes a good sermon, ... of tracking and evaluating preachers over a period of years, from their introductory coursework to their mature individual expression" (1999b, 18).

Despite our inability to gauge the long-term effects of the introductory homiletics course, studies done in other educational settings suggest that in as little as four months following

a semester-long course, students tend to have forgotten most of what they were taught. In an experiment conducted on university students, Henry Rickard and his colleagues found that just four months after taking an introductory psychology course (1988, 151–52; cited in Myers and Jones 1993, 14), students knew only eight percent more than a control group who had never taken a psychology course. Until we have evidence to believe that something different is happening in our homiletics classrooms, it is probably best to assume that our preaching students have similar levels of retention. In other words, our pedagogical strategies have likely not been yielding any meaningful, lasting learning.

ZEN EDUCATION THEORY

Asian Pedagogy

As a corrective to our exclusively Western approach, then, a study of Asian education theory, in general, and Zen Buddhism, in particular, offers the potential to inform and transform the way we teach preaching. The aim of such a study is not to dismiss Western pedagogy altogether, but to offer a critique of our prevailing educational methodologies and to suggest areas of improvement. Asian civilizations have existed for as long as Western ones; they are rich in tradition, heritage, and wisdom, and yet remain a largely untapped pedagogical resource in the preaching classroom. (This has not been not the case in education more broadly [Götz 1988; Valentine, Jr. 1971; Kobayashi 1963] or in other disciplines [McCloud 1993, 81–82].) While such a study could focus fruitfully on Confucianism, Taoism, or other Eastern religions and philosophies, this paper concentrates on Buddhism, and one particular stand of Buddhist thought, Zen.

Zen Buddhism

Just as one cannot speak of Christianity as though all its adherents believe and practice the same thing, so we cannot speak of Buddhism as though there exists complete uniformity of belief among Buddhists. While its roots may be traced to India, there are several different stands of Buddhism, two of which in particular have exerted the greatest influence. Theravada Buddhism emerged in southern India with the belief that enlightenment is personal and can only be achieved through internal means. Mahayana Buddhism, originating in northern India, believes on the other hand, that enlightenment can be brought about by external factors. Zen belongs to the Mahayana branch (Lee and Weiss 2002, 22–23).

There are further distinctions within Zen, itself. Japanese Zen (the focus of this paper) has three schools: Rinzai (by far the largest), Soto, and Obaku. These schools differ primarily at the level of teaching technique as opposed to philosophical foundation; their distinctions are not relevant to our discussion.

Most North Americans have at least some familiarity with the world of Zen Buddhism. From its influence on the Beat Generation to references on the Fox television cartoon,

The Simpsons, one could say that Zen has become ubiquitous in the West. For Zen scholar, Hu Shih (1953, 3), however, the typical North American perception of Zen is that it is “illogical, irrational, and therefore, beyond our intellectual understanding.” But this is not an accurate understanding of Zen. Victor Hori levels a similar critique of Western appropriation of Zen (1994, 26): “Individualism, antiauthoritarianism, the self of feeling, rejection of institution, etc. are the themes that Western interpreters of Zen have wanted to find in Zen. ... One then should not be surprised at how American-like (how Protestant) the chorus of claims made about Zen sound.”

If the Western conception of Zen is inadequate, what exactly is it? We will approach this question by considering the purpose of education, the role of the teacher and student, and the relationship between them in Zen education theory. We will also see how Zen critiques Western education and learn something of the educational methodologies employed by Zen teachers.

The Purpose of Education

The chief objective of Zen learning is to know oneself. “For the truth is not in what you hear from others or learn through understanding. Now keep yourself from what you have seen, heard, and thought, and what you have within yourself” (D. T. Suzuki 1976, 299). All education in Zen is directed toward this existential self-understanding, or *kensho* (best translated as awakening).^{*} The term *kensho* “is used to cover anything from a slight insight to a total spiritual transformation of character and personality” (Hori 1994, 31). Self-realization is the goal. “Zen is something you experience intuitively. ... Now that you’ve spent your life trying to hone your logical, rational mind you will have to quiet it and put it to rest to find your true nature” (Sach 2003, 160). As such, creativity is highly valued in Zen education (Loori 2004).

The Role of the Teacher

In Zen, the teacher (*roshi*) is not the absolute authority because he is not on a higher level of consciousness than the pupil (Fowler 2005, 138). On the contrary, Zen masters are frequently found working alongside disciples in farms and gardens, thus serving as living examples to and fellow laborers with their students (Cheng 1985, 211). Zen educators believe that teaching happens when it happens and cannot be reduced to “learned technique or accumulated experience” (Götz 1988, 134) as if those are enough to guarantee learning. A good teacher in Zen, then, is one who is able to help students experience *kensho* on their own. There are no panaceas, no prescribed formulas (though there are some standard practices that Zen teachers employ; these are discussed later). The teacher, then, must be skilled at employing the proper learning device at the proper time. Victor Kobayashi expresses well the frustration that many teachers feel (1963, 219–20): “An educator, frequently, if not primarily, wishes to communicate ideas, experiences, or insights which cannot be reduced to the form of a textbook, a lecture, or an educational film. ... You can memorize, ace an exam, and still miss the point.” Zen

teachers understand this inability of (typical Western) pedagogical tools to bring about true and meaningful learning.

The Role of the Learner

While competent teachers are necessary in Zen education, they are insufficient without students who are eager and determined to learn. Education in Zen begins with the student. As Hori says (1994, 16), “the key factor in successful teaching and learning is not so much the ability of the teacher. It is whether or not the student is strongly motivated and has initiative.” In Zen there is a tremendous emphasis placed on learners learning on their own. When a student enters a Zen monastery the first step “is to forget about all [prior] understanding and knowledge and concentrate on one idea” (Cheng 1959, 110). Focusing on this single idea will help the student achieve *kensho*. To that end, Zen practitioners prize what Shunryu Suzuki labels “the beginner’s mind” (1970); that is, “Having no preconceived notions, and the willingness to be open to new experiences” (Sach 2003, 160).

While the prerogative for learning is learner-centered, Zen masters recognize “that monks left on their own will [not] spontaneously teach themselves in a burst of creative self-elucidation” (Hori 1994, 18). Some need more motivation than others and for this reason Zen monasteries practice “mutual polishing” where “monks constantly push each other to learn ... [where] every person is charged with the responsibility of being teacher” (Hori 1994, 18). This sort of community (*sangha*) is extremely important for learning in Zen. Remember that in Zen Buddhism (unlike the Theravada school) *kensho* can be achieved through both internal and external means, thus, being part of a community, encouraging one another and receiving encouragement, is integral to personal awakening.

The Relationship between Teacher and Learner

Zen scholar, Masao Abe (1985, 77), says the relationship between teacher and pupil may be compared to that of a midwife and a pregnant woman: “It is ridiculous if a midwife gives her own baby to an expectant mother. The role of midwife lies in helping an expectant mother give birth to her own baby.” Or, consider two other analogies from Merv Fowler (2005, 37–38):

The role of the master has been likened to that of the helper who gives his arm in support of the novice swimmer. As soon as the pupil is an able swimmer, it is the master’s *duty* to withdraw his support, lest it becomes a crutch. No matter how skilled the driving instructor, and how inexperienced the pupil, once the pupil has passed the driving test, the skills of the instructor are seen as superfluous, leaving the pupil free to continue to drive the road of experience.

Zen teachers are, thus, more akin to spiritual guides than a classroom instructors (Abe 1985, 76; Fowler 2005, 141–42). They have a direct responsibility for helping students achieve *kensho*, but this is not a business transaction. It involves a deep, personal investment in the life and progress of the students.

Zen Critique of Modern Western Education

Perhaps the primary critique that Zen Buddhism has of Western education is that it is too competitive and “has become an occupational training program to promote financial interest” (Mitsuda). Masato Mitsuda observes that contemporary students are skilled at criticizing others, finding fault with society, but seemingly unable to do any serious self-reflection and self-evaluation: “In effect, modern education has become a mere process rather than a transformation of one’s humanity.”

For Zen practitioners, the traditional school is simply another means of learning. It is education in a formal setting, but in no way is it superior to less formal education (which takes place outside the classroom). In fact, one could well argue that informal education in Zen is superior because there is no concern for grades, hence, the motivation for learning is to learn rather than to please a professor. This is not to suggest that Zen Buddhists dismiss the value of formal education. They do, in fact, recognize its importance and necessity. Mitsuda again reminds us that “centuries ago monks translated and studied sutras, and the monks and nuns received religious education that was rigorously prescribed.”

Educational Methodologies

Zen education is equal parts theory and practice. Sutras (scriptures) are read, but they are always practiced. As one Zen master told his student, “He who recites the Sutra with the tongue and puts its teaching into actual practice with his mind ‘turns round’ the Sutra. He who recites it without putting it into practice is ‘turned round’ by the Sutra” (Cheng 1985, 210). Practice refers not to the performance of religious rituals or the observance of spiritual asceticism, but the routine work done in daily life.

The reason why Zen Buddhists value the importance of rice-planting, farming, wood-cutting and other manual work are not only economical and ethical, but also metaphysical and epistemological. Metaphysically, work can stimulate one’s nature and save him from mental inactivity. Epistemologically, truth must be tested by its practical application. No truth can be apprehended and appreciated without experience, the actual practice of what one learns” (Cheng 1985, 210).

The three most widely used pedagogical devices in Zen Buddhism are the *koan* (short, unconnected dialogues between ancient masters and students), *zazen* (meditation), and *dokusan* (formal, private meetings between teacher and student). Each of these devices is meant to help students achieve *kensho*. But, because Zen Buddhists believe students to have polluted minds, unorthodox teaching measures are often employed. The Zen canons are filled with stories of teachers beating, kicking, and shouting at disciples.

A monk asked Ma-Tsu ... a great Zen Master ... ‘What is the meaning of Bodhidharma’s coming from the West?’ Ma-Tsu said, ‘Bow down to me, first.’ As the monk was bowing down, the master gave him a vigorous kick in the chest. The monk was at once enlightened. He stood

up, clapped his hands, and, laughing loudly, cried, 'Oh, how wonderful this is, how marvelous this is! Hundreds and thousands of Samadhis and infinite wonders of the Truth are now easily realized on the tip of a single hair.' The monk later told others, 'Since I received that kick from Ma-Tsu, I have always been cheerful and laughing (Cheng 1985, 208).

The point is simply that awakening cannot be canned. Each student will ultimately achieve *kensho* in a different way, at a different time, through different processes. One cannot predict when and how (or even if) it will happen.

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

Our critique of the underlying theoretical foundations of the typical introductory homiletics course, coupled with our study of Zen Buddhism, suggests several strategies that teachers of introductory preaching may effectively appropriate for use in the classroom. Here are seven ideas for consideration.

1. *Spend more time on foundational matters.* Our introductory preaching courses move too quickly from theory and theology to matters of praxis, typically spending only one week a semester (and sometimes even less than that) on foundational issues. The motivation behind this division of time is rooted in the goal of forming skilled orators and rhetoricians, competent in biblical exegesis and sermon development. Our Western conception of the preaching course is clearly that of occupational training program. Zen critiques this exact facet of Western education.

Instead, introductory preaching courses ought to spend more time on first-level issues like the nature of the gospel, the purpose of preaching, the relationship between preaching and Scripture, the relationship between Testaments, the nature and purpose of faith communities, preaching and liturgy, racial orientation and cross-cultural studies, and preaching and language studies. (These categories are suggested by Bond 2000, 5–33). Other related questions like, What is a sermon? What makes a sermon Christian? What makes a sermon a good sermon? How is the Bible the Word of God? How is the Bible inspired? and others like these also deserve significantly more attention than they are currently given. Preaching is a theological task before it is a rhetorical one; as such, we must give theology considerably more attention in our classrooms.

By necessity, then, less time would be available for more practical matters like finding the Big Idea of a text, or determining a passage's Fallen Condition Focus, or plotting a narrative sermon. But, such a meta-cognitive approach would transform the introductory course from objective-driven to inquiry-driven, and (the hope is) lead to true and lasting learning. Students will have the requisite theological foundations from which a lifetime of methodological exploration and experimentation can emerge.

2. *Teach multiple methods, many approaches to sermon form, rather than simply one.* Beginning preaching students need to find a style that best fits their gifts, that is best suited to their unique context. They need to experiment widely, exercise their creative

muscles, and find their own voice. They need to be exposed to a variety of sermon forms and understand the theological foundations that give birth to them.

So, why not teach multiple approaches? Students who (will) preach in an Asian American-context, for instance, may find Eunjoo Kim's homiletic more relevant to their congregation (1999), or at the very least, be challenged by some of her insights. (In fact, Todd LaBute suggests [2006, 411], "If the theological training and development of Eastern thinkers takes place primarily in and under the influence of Western theological categories, one may not be surprised to find some level of struggle in Asians who are attempting to mirror Western theological methods and at the same time be relevant to the Eastern lay people under their charge.")

We should not be too quick to discount the beginning preacher's ability to synthesize a large amount of (even disparate) information. We do not know ahead of time which particular method will most appeal to or resonate with any given student.

3. *Students need to preach much more frequently.* "Adult educators point to a dimension of preaching know-how that cannot be separated from the action of preaching itself" (Demond 2002, 2). Yet, most of our introductory courses only give students two opportunities to preach. In Zen education, practice is pivotal to true learning. Why not have our students preach many shorter sermons to hone particular skills. We might have them craft a narrative sermon for children or youth, for instance, or develop one or two of Wilson's "pages" (1999a) or a couple of phenomenological sermon "moves" (Buttrick 1987). Such an approach will allow more immediate opportunity for improvement and exploration.

4. *Use a spiral rather than linear methodology to teaching.* Rather than teach all the theological foundations before moving to practical considerations of form and delivery (the way it is typically done), why not introduce both theory and practice from the beginning? Students will have opportunities to preach throughout the semester so as their thinking on the foundational questions is sharpened and refined, their preaching will reflect their on-going learning. (This is why I call it a spiral methodology.) Each class should feature elements from three different components relevant to preaching. There should, first of all, be time given to discussion of foundational matters (see Pedagogical Strategy #1, above). Next, there should be time for students to learn the methodological approach of a different homiletician each week; for instance, Lowry's homiletical plot one week (2001), Wilson's four page sermon another week (1999a), and so on (see Pedagogical Strategy #2, above). Finally, there should be opportunity for students to preach and put into practice what they are learning in the classroom (see Pedagogical Strategy #3, above). If the sermons are all fairly short (less than ten minutes) and a few minutes are given for feedback (with additional feedback given in other ways—peer evaluation forms, or electronically via the Internet), all of these things can be accomplished in a typical three-hour-a-week class. Such an approach to the introductory preaching course takes seriously the "cyclical and labyrinthine" (McCloud 1993, 81) way that Asians tend to learn and the dialectical rhythms that are reflected in Zen.

5. *Teach using both lecture and seminar formats, where students share responsibility in leading class discussions.* Rather than having the professor lecture on both foundational matters and various homiletical methodologies, students should be given the responsibility of leading a short (twenty minute) seminar each week. Students could research the methodology of a particular homiletician and present that scholar's homiletic in the seminar portion of class. If the professor aims to lecture for a similar amount of time on a foundational topic each week, and another twenty minutes are allotted for questions and answers, approximately one hour each week will be given to these two components of the class, still leaving ample time for six-to-eight student sermons (including feedback). If planned well, the sermons in a particular week can be developed using the methodology of the homiletician presented in that same week (or the previous week). Having multiple points of contact ought to help students learn better. Those leading seminars can be encouraged to provide handouts for class reading one week ahead of time. Particularly at the Master-degree level, this should not be too demanding a task. Such a strategy takes seriously the Zen value of *sangha*. As students teach each other, they learn more profoundly the subject they are teaching.

6. *View the introductory preaching course as an opportunity for spiritual formation, not only occupational/vocational training.* The relationship between Zen master and pupil is an important one that extends beyond the walls of the monastery. How might beginning preachers benefit from a similar lifetime mentorship relationship with their homiletics instructors? Beyond simply befriending students, however, preaching professors also need to care for the spiritual formation of their students, in the same way that Zen teachers are spiritual guides for their pupils. Professors teach students, not subjects, and anytime this calling is forgotten or neglected, students suffer. Professors must also not be afraid to suggest to some students that they may not be called to vocational preaching ministry. Thomas Long suggests that just as "it would make little sense to say that each of us has within us already the effective neurosurgeon or torts litigator God wants us to become" (2008, 5) so also it is wrong to believe that all students of preaching have within them what they need to become effective preachers. In Zen, all people have what is needed within themselves to achieve *kensho*. But not everyone in our preaching classes should become preachers. It takes a spiritually-sensitive professor to discern which students those are and what to say to them. And it takes more than one three-hour-a-week course to really know and engage students at a level where such discernment may be made. We should not be content to pass the buck to local congregations or other Bible college and seminary departments; that is neither healthy for the church nor the student.

7. *Rethink assessment tools.* The motivation of grades leads to inauthentic learning in Zen education theory. The danger is that students only learn what they need to in order to perform well in the course. But dismissing grades altogether is neither feasible nor necessarily effective. Liz Mandrell (1997, 28), a high school English teacher, suggests that despite teachers' attempts to use diverse means of evaluation, "grades, by any other name, have and always will play a major role in education and in life." She recounts an experiment she conducted with one of her classes, which she describes as "scholarship obsessed" and bound in "slavery to the A" (29). She gave each student in her class 98% for six weeks, had them sign contracts "that stated that they would learn for the sake of

curiosity and learning, and that, at intervals, they would turn in proof, products of some sort, that they were actually learning” (29). The results of her experiment were less than encouraging. Half of the students did not submit a thing, while the submissions of the other half were far below standard. She concludes, “Learning must somehow be linked to a product. That product must be measured or graded to gauge the worth of the product according to the merit it deserves” (31). Grades, then, are likely a necessary evil. The question is how much weight we put on different assignments. Instead of making two sermons worth 20-25% each, what if students preached six-to-eight sermons worth no more than 5% each (or graded on a pass-fail scale), with the rest of the overall grade based on and distributed evenly for personal journal entries and short reflection papers (both of which foster and encourage critical self-examination), class participation, and seminar leading (see Pedagogical Strategy #5, above)? Might such a (radical) rethink of the way we grade our students lead to greater learning?

CONCLUSION

Training preachers is an important calling and those engaged in it should be lauded for their continuing efforts to hone their craft. Just as we might expect preachers, themselves, to seek ways to freshen up their preaching as their careers progress, so also should we encourage those who teach preaching to regularly examine their teaching strategies as they refine their understandings of how students learn and what pedagogical devices are most conducive to learning. This paper has argued that Asian education theory in general, and Zen Buddhist pedagogy in particular, offers one potentially helpful conversation partner for those who teach preaching. The Zen understanding of education has much to teach those who teach and who are willing to learn.

NOTES

* In some of the literature *kensho* (awakening) and *satori* (enlightenment) are used interchangeably. While there is considerable overlap between the terms, *satori* is more accurately understood as a permanent state, while *kensho* is conceptually closer to one's initial awakening.

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