

Teaching Preaching where Cultures Cross:

Historical, Theological, Cultural and Pastoral Reflections on the Pedagogy of
Homiletics, with Some Particular References to the Catholic Church in Anglophone
Africa.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary, is my own original work.
It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Christopher Chatteris S.J.
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Abstract

Christian preaching is much like the liturgy of the Church in that we have been practising its arts it for some two thousand years and yet the impression is often given that we only began yesterday. Like the conversion to which preaching is a vital call, preaching needs to be re-learned in every generation. Furthermore, as the Church's missionary outreach stretches to the ends of the earth, preaching is done in an ever increasing number of tongues and cultures and must adapt to these new contexts.

This is not a new situation: it was ever thus. From the moment the Word was spoken in its ultimate form in flesh in a particular time and place, it has enfleshed itself in the tongues, accents, mentalities and customs of people in all times and places. This central theological fact is underlined, highlighted and celebrated in the Pentecost event, in which it was impossible for the Word of God to be confined to a single mode of expression, but rather it had to overflow prodigally into every language and culture represented at that crucial happening.

In a sense the history of preaching is the history of the Church and therefore can be used as a measure with which to judge the faithfulness of the Church to Christ in any particular period of history. Revivals in the life of the Church are led by and associated with revivals in preaching. Decline is associated with poverty in the pulpit. Hence we can learn the central lessons of our history by returning to the Church's history under this particular aspect of the state of its preaching.

Today there appears to be a modern revival of preaching taking place in some of the countries of the developed world, most notably in the United States which must have the greatest concentration of educated and theologically educated laypeople in the universal Church. Catholic schools and universities have been the primary instrument of evangelisation in this part of the Church and now their alumni appear to be demanding of their pastors a preaching commensurate with their professional and theological education. This phenomenon would lead one to have great hopes for the Church in a time which many would judge to be one characterised by severe and multiple crises. Might it happen that, if the Church continues to encourage such a revival, this era will be judged by history as having been a time of significant growth in piety, practice and a deepened knowledge of God powerfully contributed to by an effective breaking of the Word?

In the developing world, and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, history will certainly look back to this time as one of phenomenal numerical growth. It would be tragic if its backward regard also detected a failure to participate, *in its own appropriately inculturated way*, in such a revival of preaching. For what could be more important in a young and growing

ecclesial community than that its preaching should mirror and promote its dynamism, enthusiasm, power and growth? Such an aim raises many considerations in many areas ranging from pedagogy and spiritual formation to the more prosaic ones of the availability of human and material resources. These and a number of related issues are broached in the following pages. Taking the traditional and rather Catholic phenomenological approach to the subject is divided into two parts - Preaching in General and Preaching in Africa - and an attempt is made to follow the see, judge and act process as we progressively narrow down the focus, finally coming to the very practical business of the teaching of homiletics, with all its imperfections and challenges, in 'English-speaking' Africa.

In the final analysis, however, the standard of preaching will be determined by the attitude to it of pastors and their congregations, especially the leaders. It will rise or fall according to how seriously the Church, and not just the leadership, takes it. This work is one attempt to encourage the Church to rise to the challenge of making our preaching a high if not the highest pastoral priority in the universal and the African Church.

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PART I PREACHING IN GENERAL

Introduction and Methodology

a) Terrain

'In some cases, the preaching is dull, irrelevant and unrelated to the practical and pressing issues of life or the needs of the people', asserts Emmanuel Obeng (In Waruta D & Kinoti H (eds) 1994:13) in a paper on *Ministerial Formation for an Effective Church in Africa* in which his criticism of the formation of Christian ministers in East Africa is little short of scathing.

The entry requirements are low - placing an emphasis on vocation rather than on intellectual ability. People with mediocre intellect therefore have found and are still finding their way into the ministry of the church. This situation confirms the often expressed notion that, only second rate persons and those who would not quite make it in prestigious jobs, enter the Christian ordained ministry (1994:15).

This is the first reason for attempting this project - the sense that all is not well in the teaching of preaching in the church in Africa. Not that this is a problem particular to Africa. As this thesis will show, preaching has had, and continues to have, its problems elsewhere, even in places endowed with far greater resources than Africa. The master-communicator Dorothy Sayers took preachers to task in Britain in the following prophetic terms:

Not Herod, not Caiphas, not Pilate, not Judas ever contrived to fasten upon Jesus Christ the reproach of insipidity; that fictional indignity was left for pious hands to inflict...Let me tell you, Christian people, an honest writer would be ashamed to treat a nursery tale as you have treated the greatest drama in history. (In Lischer 1995:108).

A second reason for this project is a particularly Roman Catholic one. The assumption here is that, at least in the developed world, the influence of Catholic schools as agents of catechesis and evangelisation is on the wane. Whereas for older generations of Roman Catholics, the instruction in the Christian faith happened at school and the ideal was for pupils to emerge with solid knowledge and a firm faith, this can no longer be guaranteed, if it ever could, even in a

minority. The result is that for many Roman Catholics the only occasion for instruction and encouragement is at the Sunday eucharist when they should normally receive a homily.

Hence the importance of this homily, these few minutes, cannot be understated. For the vast majority, the only nourishment to their life of faith is the Sunday eucharist and the preaching which takes place within it. Most Catholics have neither the time nor inclination to practise beyond Sunday attendance (and many by no means every Sunday). The homily we hear on Sunday is, then, at least a single lifeline linking believer with belief and at most something which enables us to live a fuller Christian life. Therefore the training of Catholic homelists needs to be taken more seriously than in the past.

In an essay on inculturation and communication George De Napoli quotes Nida to the effect that 'It is not primarily the message but the messenger of Christianity who provides the greatest problem for the average non-Christian' (De Napoli 1978:76). In other words one key to any improvement lies also in the psychological and spiritual formation of those responsible for preaching. Hence a third reason for this project is that it is an opportunity to reflect upon the effectiveness of the present system of personal as well as intellectual formation of preachers and suggest possible improvements.

Therefore the training of homelists is the ultimate focus of this thesis. Hence this is a thesis on pedagogy, an investigation into the processes by which we 'produce' our preachers in our 'English-speaking' African context. No doubt similar consideration could be given to the French-speaking areas of the continent, but the writer lacks the information, and the terrain is already broad enough.

Although much of the focus of this work is the 'homily', or preaching done in a eucharistic context, it does not confine itself to this but will frequently treat of preaching in the more general sense to include other types of preaching.

A fourth and important reason for this project is that preaching seems to the present writer a neglected area in the

inculturation of African Christianity. Part of the neglect springs from structure. Preaching is taught in seminaries and these have their obvious limitations. This is a complaint of Kwesi Dickson's in his *Theology in Africa*. On seminaries he says that 'the seminaries may, with considerable justification, be described as bastions of western orthodoxy, their systems usually modelled after western systems with respect to the kinds of courses offered and content' (1984:210). On the specific topic of preaching he observes that, 'No study has yet been made of sermons preached by those who have not received training in western-type seminaries such as are operated by the churches in Africa.' (115).

Dickson's claim is not completely accurate but almost so. In 1983, one Walter Jackson submitted a master's thesis in missiology to the University of South Africa entitled *The Communication of the Message of Salvation to Young Urban Xhosa: An Empirical Study in the Eastern Cape*, in which he looks at precisely the area Dickson mentions - the lay preaching of Independent Churches, comparing it with the preaching of the 'mainline' churches. Given the state of academic contact between South Africa and the rest of the world in the 1980s, it is not surprising that Jackson never came to Dickson's attention. But Jackson's work appears to be a somewhat isolated academic event. In concluding his work, Dickson takes up again the question of preaching in Africa and specifically the vital pedagogical one of passing the skill on in inculturated fashion:

In the seminaries known to us students are expected, as part of their training in preaching, to compose sermons in English (or French). Regrettably, no work has been done, as far as we know, regarding what a sermon should consist in. The preacher has the task of relating the Bible message to the circumstances of his audience; thus the question arises of the form which a sermon to an African (my italics) audience should take to achieve this goal most effectively. Whatever steps are taken to achieve this - and our purpose is not to give detailed instructions - serious consideration should be given to employing the indigenous languages in the preparation of sermons since most African clergy preach mostly in one or other of these media (219).

The present writer has had his students make use of indigenous languages in their homiletics course for the

fundamental reasons stated by Dickson. Although this gives them much greater scope and freedom of expression than if they practise in English, the impression gained here is that students' preaching models ultimately go back to the missionaries who first introduced the Christian faith to their communities. Teachers tend to teach as their teachers taught. The same appears to be true of preachers.

The same students have reflected on many areas of inculturation, including areas of pastoral theology - the administration of the sacraments for example. However, what it means to preach as an *African*, does not appear to have been an area of serious thought and study. My theory as to why this is so is that the teachers of pastoral or practical theology have been taking it that because the students are fluent in their native languages, all will somehow be well once they return as priests to their communities.

This is perhaps an assumption which needs to be questioned. One of the writer's South African students, having preached to the class in his mother tongue, Afrikaans, mentioned that this was the *first time* he had given any public religious discourse in that language. An East African student almost decided to preach in English because he said he was struggling to find appropriate vocabulary in Luganda. What we witness in these cases is the result of an education conducted almost entirely in English.

Fifthly, in the developing world, a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the developed world is sometimes accepted almost as fate. 'Why not aim to do better than the First World?' the writer has sometimes provocatively asked while attending meetings concerned with the formation of young people training for religious life and/or the priesthood. Added to this question is the argument that in the church of the developing world we have the people, substantial numbers of them, young and energetic, often eager for education, in contrast to a rather tired and ageing developed world where the youth often seem cynical, bored, and few. This 'human capital' has significant potential waiting to be maximised, Obeng's observation notwithstanding. If, as Obeng says, the kind of candidate we are attracting is rather second class,

this is perhaps partly because what we turn out is second class. The way to attract first class candidates is to form first class exemplars.

That the question, 'Why not aim to do better than the First World?', is worthwhile asking is strengthened when teaching classes of (mostly) young men and women from ten African countries, mostly members of religious orders, in the practicalities of homiletics. Energy, openness, optimism and talent are the strong impressions in carrying out such a task. One's optimistic sense was that most of the members of the class could become the first class communicators of the Gospel that Obeng desires, given the right kind of training and formation.

Hence the issues which this thesis tries to address are ultimately pedagogical ones, or related to pedagogical issues in a particular cultural context. Can preaching be taught/learned in the formation system as it is at present organised, particularly in the Catholic church in Anglophone Africa? Can the eloquence which seems to be an African birthright be successfully inculturated in preaching in Africa, given the limitations of pedagogues and the necessity of conducting much of the training in a foreign tongue? In order to approach this question, some considerable clearing of the ground will be necessary which will be done in Part 1 of the thesis, *Preaching in General*.

Firstly there is the nature of the 'art' of preaching itself. The inverted commas are necessary because it is by no means agreed that preaching is an art. There seems about as much agreement here as whether economics and sociology are sciences or not. What then is preaching? To have some reasonably clear idea is necessary and helpful to the one whose task it is to teach it. What precisely is the homiletic teacher trying to teach? In order to lay the ground for the distilling out such a working definition, Chapter 1 *History*, will obviously look at the history of preaching and take us, by a somewhat selective route, up to the present. This will be written with particular reference to the Catholic tradition where it will be suggested that there is a revival of interest in preaching taking place in the developed world,

particularly the United States, and an attempt will be made to describe this revival and, later, assess its relevance for Africa.

Another avenue of approach will be the theology of preaching in Chapter 2. A theology is implicit in the *modus operandi* of every individual preacher. Questions such as: What is the preacher doing? will help us to determine what is 'happening theologically' when preaching takes place and thereby give us more clues as to what preaching actually is and how it may be understood today. Theology impacts upon practice and pedagogy. In the chapter on theology the attempt is made to identify some theologies of preaching and how they affect underlying attitudes to preaching, a 'doing' of theology in a very obvious sense. The theology adopted is also an important factor in the preacher's attitude to secular rhetoric or eloquence and whether or not the preacher believes this should be inculturated into sacred eloquence or pulpit rhetoric. This question already appears in the historical chapter where the issue of the relationship between preaching and rhetoric is first reflected upon in some depth by St Augustine.

This leads to Chapter 3 *Descriptions and Definitions*, where the processes involved in preaching are described, yielding some conclusions as to what preaching actually is. We will argue that one of the most important is the relationship between rhetoric and preaching and between the rhetorician and the preacher and how secular eloquence influences its sacred counterpart. Even more fundamental linguistic questions are explored in sections on models of communication, religious language and the building blocks of effective preaching.

Chapter 4 *Challenges*, situates the perennial challenges in the contemporary world and church. A fundamental universal quest in the art of public speaking or rhetoric is simply to have the attention of the hearers. In preaching the importance of the focusing of the attention is paramount because of the conviction that what is being offered is the Word of life. The caricature exists of the preacher who is a notorious bore or as Walter Burghardt puts it for dramatic

effect (successfully - he was attacked in the US Catholic press), 'so God-damned dull'.¹ The caricature is so persistent, the anecdotal evidence so available, that this seems to be a problem worthy of the serious attention of the pedagogues of preaching. Is it universal? Does it affect preaching in Africa? Can it be avoided and what can pedagogues do in the present context to avoid inculturating what we might call 'missionary inadequacies'?

A corollary is why dullness is so easily tolerated in church but not in other speakers. Dullness indicates a fundamental incompetence in a professional communicator of the kind that could not be tolerated in other professions, as in, for example, a surgeon who routinely lost patients' lives. But preachers routinely lose their hearers' attention and this can be viewed as amusing rather than a catastrophe. At some level there appears to be a basic failure to take the task seriously if this kind of attitude is tolerated.

An assumption, then, is that the church has a problem with the simple yet not so simple matter of getting the attention of the congregation and hence an important focus is on eliciting and directing the attention of the hearers of the Word. On the face of it African preachers appear to have the advantage here, but this assumption, too, needs to be probed.

Much of Chapter 4 reflects developments in the West such as a growing sense of need for professional standards and accountability in ministry, including preaching. In a milieu where everything is questioned, the authority of the preacher is another important issue. An early conclusion here is that the authority of the preacher both in Africa and in the West will in future depend more and more on competence, rather than just the formal authority of ordination. A structure for judging this competence is suggested. In the course of this section we also look at the opinions of both congregations and teachers of homiletics on the current state of preaching in the church in the West.

The reader in the African context might question the relevance of developments in the western world for Africa.

¹ Conversation with W. Burghardt S. J. in Annapolis, Maryland in 1992.

What will be proposed here is not slavish colonial imitation. The fundamental challenge is that of tapping into rich spiritual and cultural African resources in the pedagogical task of forming preachers. However it seems worth noting what the West is doing and the significance of the growing institutional resources it is putting into the teaching of preaching and asking what equivalent efforts are being made in Africa. North American Christians are using their enormous financial and human resources to provide professionally conducted training of preachers. Mimicry of this approach is both undesirable and impractical. The challenge here is to 'drink from our own wells' and at the same time not to be afraid to take note of appropriate lessons (their mistakes and their successes) emanating from the West.

We move, then, to the second part of the thesis, shifting the focus to Africa. An already adumbrated theme pertinent to our subject is what can be described as a 'historical dance', with preaching and rhetoric as partners. Is preaching a form of rhetoric? Can some types of rhetoric approximate to preaching? The questions are interesting in themselves but become particularly appropriate in a setting where inculturation is a *sine qua non*. If the preaching is to be inculturated into Namib speaking culture, for example, then what place does the rhetoric of the Namib peoples have in this process? Hence the title of Chapter 5 - *Culture*. Here the picture is not one of stasis but rather of rapid and radical changes in culture due to westernisation and we emphasise the speed and power of this in order to sound a strong warning about the folly of underestimating the leverage of modernity and post-modernity and overestimating the resilience of traditional culture. For if the culture itself is in danger of being submerged, what hope is there of salvaging its eloquence or rhetoric which is part and parcel of that culture?

In a time in which African, and particularly South African Christianity is attempting seriously to inculturate itself, the question of culture is key. Much is written and said about the inculturation of theology, the liturgy and church structures, but preaching seems to receive scant

attention. However in a globalising world the influence of western culture in its modern and post-modern manifestations must necessarily be taken into account.

Again, this impacts, or ought to, upon pedagogy. The present writer is aware of forming preachers who will be trying to evangelise a highly westernised and even post-modern younger generation. Jackson's 'young urban Xhosa' of 1983 are no longer the same young urban Xhosa. The political, social and cultural landscapes have changed dramatically since then. It is not even obvious that it will, in the future, always be possible to communicate the Good News to these young people in indigenous African tongues, so pervasive is the influence of that vehicle of modern and post-modern culture, American English.

The theme of culture is narrowed down in Chapter 6 *Communication*, where the all important questions of orality and literacy and the use of language in Africa are broached. This chapter is an attempt to identify the characteristics which make up what might be called the *négritude* of African eloquence and hence preaching. We shall look at the specialists, the griots and imbongis, those exponents of the craft. We shall also consider proverbs and folk tales which are so characteristic of African speech, and investigate their functions. The issue of the age of the public speaker will also be raised.

In Chapter 7 *Pedagogy*, we come to pedagogical questions, including the central one of whether the preaching 'art' or 'craft' can be taught at all and taught in the classroom in a rather traditional western-style academic setting, often by westerners. There are those who will say that preachers, like teachers or rhetoricians, are born and not made. Others might take an opposing view and say that anyone who is reasonably fluent in their native tongue, has something to say and is able to learn a few basic techniques of public speaking can acquire the tools to become a preacher. Others might agree but wonder whether the classroom is the appropriate setting for such training. Is it possible to help young African students become effective practitioners of the Word within a traditional, western ecclesiastical structure which is

somewhere between a seminary and a university? Can we teach preaching in the lecture room? If so, to what extent? What are the limits? How might these limits be transcended? We look at responses from some local teachers of preaching and their students. Once again we consider the question of inculturation - the inculturation of the local pedagogy of preaching.

Asking students to learn to preach in what is for them a second, third or even fourth language poses very obvious and very considerable problems. For example there is the 'self' that the preacher properly reveals while preaching, which while avoiding self-referring egotism, makes the discourse personal and thus appealing, a sharing of faith. This is harder to do the further one moves away from 'home'. Given that language is closely tied up with culture which is so intimately connected to self-identity, the question here is to what extent can a preacher make preaching truly personal in the process of learning it in a foreign tongue? How can he share himself and be himself, she herself?

Chapter 8 *Formation*, goes into the question of personal growth. Formation and age are inseparable. Hence a cultural-pedagogical question which this writer has pondered and sometimes asked his students who are preparing homilies is: 'Are you old enough to say this?' This question has particular resonance in African society where age, maturity and seniority still count. There is something particularly odd, from any cultural point of view, of a young, newly-ordained person of twenty-five advising or even mildly suggesting to a congregation old enough to be their grandparents how to live their lives. Apart from those who hold an extreme inspirational version of the call to preaching, few would fail to argue that a certain maturity and satisfactory level of psychological and spiritual development is necessary. Therefore it is necessary to ask another pedagogical question: to what extent are other formative processes involved in the 'production' of a preacher and how important these are. The method implied here is an analysis of the structures of initiation into preaching.

Chapter 9 *Conclusions*, reviews and sums up the material covered in the thesis.

b) Methodology

Some indications as to the methods used in the present work now follow. These questions on preaching and its teaching have certainly been asked before. However the rather particular contemporary African situation is what the writer hopes will yield some new insights on this ancient subject, especially since the social function of public speaking *prendre la parole* (taking hold of/grasping the word), as the French more muscularly put it, still seems imbued with far greater social significance in African society, closer to its oral roots, than the contemporary print and visual-dominated Western world.

The thesis is divided into two parts, the first treating of preaching in general and the second focusing more narrowly on preaching in Africa. Generally, the movement of the thesis is from the universal to the particular and the practical. The methodology followed in this thesis is fundamentally phenomenological. According to Bate, 1998:) it would seem almost impossible to avoid the use of this methodology when treating of a theme in contextual theology, precisely the present aim. According to Bate, 'This SEE, JUDGE, ACT (sic) methodology has become central to all contextual, local and liberation theologies during the twentieth century' (153).

See, judge and act comprise a kind of hermeneutical circle. We observe what is actually happening, make a judgement about it and finally decide on a course of action, usually a new or modified one. As Bate puts it, 'Using the methodology of contextual theology we reflect on this praxis in order to determine what is going on and why, so that we may come to some decisions regarding what we are called to do next' (153). Bate situates the method within the Medieval theological tradition of Anselm's 'Faith seeking understanding' (153). But it goes further than understanding, for understanding is meant to lead to decisions and action.

Lest the notion of the circle denote an idea of movement without progress we can, with Bate, use the image of a spiral (174), which we often visualise as a circular but upward

movement. Hence implicit in the notion of 'act', at the end of the circle, is acting in a manner which represents progress on what went before. Without the hindsight of history one can never be certain that any new way of proceeding does in fact represent an advance, but clearly implicit in the concept of 'judge' is the idea that it is possible to make a judgement between bad and good as well as good and better. Insofar as the hermeneutic circle spirals upwards in the direction of the better we can regard it as going somewhere and making theological and pastoral progress.

Hence in this thesis we shall do similarly. We will look at the phenomenon of preaching in the church and how it is taught, then attempt to make a judgement about the state of preaching and its pedagogy, and finally put forward some recommendations about new or modified courses of action.

The method of the use of phenomenological lenses is supplemented by a lesser use of an empirical approach. This is done in Chapter 7 when we consider the practical issues of pedagogy. Here the method of the interview is employed. Interviews with experienced teachers in the field, inside and outside Africa, is a small but important window on the world of the pedagogy of preaching and the state of preaching generally. Interviews with foreign teachers of preaching working abroad, included in Chapter 4, Challenges, should provide a useful contrast to those done with local pedagogues.

Observation of, working with and conducting a survey of a class of students from various Anglophone African countries by questionnaires, provides further empirical data. The class was a random sample in the sense that its members come from all over English-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time it is rather specific in the sense of being predominantly male, Roman Catholic, young and comprising mainly of members of religious orders. In this sense it is a not untypical group of future Roman Catholic religious cleric-preachers and the responses to the questionnaires can be assumed to be more or less what their peers in other similar institutions would have provided.

The movement through the process of judgement to the goal of action takes place in Chapters 7 and 8, Pedagogy and Formation. As Bate puts it:

Judgement takes the form of a theological model which is constructed from the dialectic between the description we have obtained and the culture text which is the faith experience of the believing community of which we are part (166).

The judgements focus particularly on what is lacking and what is needful in the training of preachers in the African context. From this point on some practical recommendations are made, and we finally come to suggested action. These recommendations are ultimately pastoral-theological choices - practical courses of action for the betterment of the service of the Word. Concretely this means suggestions for improving the formation of preachers within the Catholic seminary system, though some of the suggestion, it is hoped, will be of relevance to those not sharing the Catholic tradition.

c) Methodological Difficulties

Space does not permit an exposition of a theory of the interaction of the observer and that which is observed. Suffice to say that we should be aware that ever since Einstein and the theory of relativity, 'objective' scientific method has given way to an understanding that observer and observed are inseparable, participating in a kind of epistemological duet. This is particularly the case with the present writer who observes his own tradition from within that tradition. Understanding must be from some particular standpoint. If one is to 'stand under' something, one must needs stand somewhere and the writer stands in the Catholic tradition. For someone outside that tradition, what emerges may seem distorted, or lacking in 'objectivity', but such a criticism also labours under the difficulty of the 'distortions' of its own standpoint. It is important here not to succumb to a theory of absolute relativity, but rather hold to one of what we might call 'relative relativity' and maintain that our experience tells us that in fact new light can be shed on the subject for all concerned if an observer is careful to survey the problem from a number of standpoints

and use a number of what Bate calls 'epistemological lenses' (164). In this thesis these lenses are history and theology (Chapters 1 & 2), contemporary challenges (Chapter 4) and culture and communication (Chapters 5 & 6). The intention is that a synthesis of the views through these lenses will contribute to a clearer understanding of preaching in the Catholic Church, particularly in Anglophone Africa in the present challenging historical and cultural context.

A few further methodological difficulties should be mentioned. A striking one is the paucity of resources about preaching in Africa. It seems significant, for example, that in the index of most histories of the church in Africa, the words 'preaching', 'sermons' or 'homily' rarely even appear. However there exists, in the areas of the study of language and literature, much useful material on orality, and the components of African eloquence, themes which can help us suggest some outlines for a genuinely inculturated sacred eloquence for Africa. The method of surveying this field of literature, therefore has the limitations of the limitations of the literature itself. However, the fact that this has forced the writer to look to the more 'secular' sources dealing with African public speaking, such as oral poets and their poetry, may have the effect of turning a weakness into a strength and rooting the consideration of African preaching and its teaching, more firmly in the traditional culture.

All points of view limit and, despite the experience mentioned, the present writer should acknowledge his own. To write on an African theme as a 'Euro-African', i.e. born in Africa but brought up partly in Europe and with a mainly European culture in a European language and mindset, involves obvious limitations in terms of access to cultural codes, mentality and historical and linguistic background. Nonetheless, there may be some advantages in the straddling of two worlds especially at a time when those two worlds are coming together in a critical and dynamic cultural encounter in contemporary South Africa. The assumption contained in the chapter on the contemporary situation and its challenges is that many of the difficulties now faced by the Church of the developed world are likely eventually to become those of the

developing world in some form or another. To consider what is happening there may help us to anticipate what is over our horizon. In addition, some of the developments taking place in preaching in the developed world, while not all appropriate or viable in our situation, might be worth looking at with a view to judicious adaptation.

It is a commonplace that the academic dissertation itself involves a point of view or a standpoint. It is a Western academic tool modelled on a somewhat dated Cartesian-Newtonian scientific view of reality in which distance, objectivity and logical structure are paramount. Such a tool may or may not be the ideal approach for the task at hand, namely for this work of contextual theology, but it is the convention within which the researcher must operate, exceptions such as S.Bhengu's prophetic *Chasing Gods Not Our Own* (UND: 1995) notwithstanding².

Finally therefore, despite the methodological and other difficulties, the present writer hopes that this offering will be accessible not just to academics but also to thinking members of the Church who have an interest in the ever-important subject of preaching. This is a text for the Church in Africa.

² Bhengu rather breaks the mould of the rational approach to his subject by consciously and without apology, including what can only be described as much anger and 'fire in the belly' in his dissertation. This unusual approach was presumably judged to be appropriate in view of his subject matter, the cultural and religious despoliation of Africans by Western religion. This exception raises the interesting question of what would be an appropriate genre for the present work on teaching preaching in Africa, for example whether an oral and visual exposition on videotape might serve the theme more aptly.

Chapter 1 History - An Overview

1.1 Introduction - Rationale of Selection

This Chapter charts the history of preaching from the cultural and inculturation perspectives of the relationship between sacred eloquence or rhetoric and preaching. A great deal of preaching has taken place during the history of Israel and the Christian church. We must therefore necessarily be selective. Certain periods and certain persons, because of their eminence, cannot be omitted. Apart from that the principle of selection is to look at that which enables us to illustrate and explore the all-important relationship between secular and sacred eloquence.

1.2 Jewish Tradition - Priests

In Deuteronomy 33:10 the charge is laid on the Levites to teach and instruct the people. 'They will teach your customs to Jacob, and your law to Israel'. According to de Vaux (1961:354),

The *tôrah* was originally a short instruction on a particular topic, a rule of practical conduct, more especially how to perform cultic worship, in which the priest was a specialist; he had to decide what was sacred and what was profane, what was clean or unclean, and to instruct the faithful on the point.

These instructions were delivered in the sanctuary where people came on pilgrimage. De Vaux goes on to remark that casuistry was not the only teaching function of the priests and that the 'priestly *tôrah* became the Torah, the Law, a collection of precepts governing the relations of man with God, and the priests were recognised as its interpreters' (354). As a result, and because people became more concerned with having the right inner dispositions 'the priests became the teachers of morality and religion' (354).

1.2.1 Prophets

The prophets were also people whose concern was to interpret and help others with the Law and the right practice of their faith. However they did this in a different way to the priests. 'A prophet was a man of the *dabar*, of the Word, a spokesman of God...who was directly inspired by God to give a

particular message in definite circumstances; he was an instrument through whom God actually revealed himself' (354).

1.2.2 *The Exile and After*

The Exile saw the Levites taken away from the exclusively priestly functions and they 'became preachers and catechists' (1961:355). Teaching and worship tended to become separated and eventually, with the synagogue, a new group came into prominence, that of the scribes and teachers of the law who appear in the Gospels. De Vaux maintains that 'This class was open to all, priests and Levites and layfolk alike, and eventually it displaced the priestly caste in the work of teaching' (355). This would explain how Jesus of Nazareth, as a layman, was able to teach and preach.

One of the few detailed descriptions, albeit perhaps idealised, of post-exilic preaching is given in Nehemiah 8. Here the priest-scribe Ezra reads the book of the Law at great length standing on a wooden dais to all those people old enough to understand. A group of Levites present had the function of explaining the Law that Ezra read out. At the end of the teaching Nehemiah and Ezra proclaim to the people, who were moved to tears by the event apparently, that the sacredness and importance of this day is to be marked by joyful celebration and feasting.

1.2.3 *The Sages and Wisdom Literature*

A group of teachers which does not fit very comfortably into any of the above mentioned categories is the sages, the voices emanating from the Wisdom literature. These wise persons did not seem to have the same preoccupations with the liturgy or with prophecy. Their ideal is Solomon and his particular brand of practical wisdom. In other words their reflections are based on experience and are directed at the problems of practical living and secular affairs³. The

³ E.g. 'The proverbs of Solomon son of David, King of Israel: for learning what wisdom and discipline are, for understanding deep meaning, for acquiring a disciplined insight, uprightness, justice and fair dealing; for teaching sound judgement to the simple, and knowledge and reflection to the young... The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; fools spurn wisdom and discipline (Book of Proverbs 1:1-7)'.

question they tried to answer was how Jewish people could live the good life. The literature has parallels throughout the ancient Middle East. In the tradition of Israel it has a religious dimension. So Ben Sira eventually identifies wisdom with the law (Si 24:23-24). From the point of view of African preaching the captivating aspect of the wisdom literature is the genre in which much of it is expressed, namely the proverb.

1.3 Preaching in the Apostolic Tradition

According to P.T. Forsyth: 'The Christian preacher is not the successor of the Greek orator, but of the Hebrew prophet' (Lischer R 1987:75). In the New Testament the words *euangelizesthai* and *keryssein* are normally rendered by the English verb to preach. David Stanley tells us that 'In the Septuagint both words are used to describe the activity of the Old Testament prophets' (1966:200). *Euangelizesthai* means to bring good news while *keryssein* is about proclaiming a message in the name of another. Hence John the Baptist is a bridge between the Jewish and Christian scriptures, being a prophet who proclaims, on behalf of God, the good news of the coming Messiah and his kingdom.

1.3.1 Jesus of Nazareth (c4BCE-30CE) and his Companions

Jesus of Nazareth was nothing if not a teacher in Israel. He is addressed as *rabbi* and speaks in the synagogue. Stanley (201) maintains that the Evangelists make a distinction between the preaching of John and the teaching of Jesus. Jesus preached and sent his disciples out to preach, both during and after his life on earth and his message is similar to that of John. However, Stanley maintains that Jesus is depicted in the Gospels more as a teacher than a prophet. He does not go around dressed in camel skins and consuming locusts and wild honey (Matt 3:4), for example. It is a question of emphasis and style rather than a radical difference of kind. Jesus certainly taught small groups and individuals (Matt 13:36, Lk 18:18), but he also preached to

large crowds (Lk 12:1), and it is not always easy to make a distinction between his teaching and his preaching.

It is tempting to think that it would be helpful for the present work if his disciples in addition to asking him to teach them to pray (Lk 11:1), had made a similar request with regard to preaching and that he had replied to the effect: 'When you preach say this...!' But parroting the words of another is rarely an effective form of preaching. Perhaps it is not really preaching at all.

However we can surmise that his disciples listened intently and observed him closely as he preached and taught and frequently questioned him about what he said in private. He preached and taught incessantly and counselled the disciples to do the same. He also sent them out in twos to preach the kingdom of God, (Mk 6:7, Lk 10:17, Mt 10:9-14). He spoke indoors (Lk 10:38) and out (Matt 13:1), to large crowds (Matt 13:1) and small groups (Matt 13:10), in his home town (Lk 4:14) and in places where he was a complete stranger (Jn 4:3).

For a description of the formal elements of the synagogue address we need only turn to Luke 4:16-21 where he opens the scroll, reads, hands it to the attendant and sits down to speak. Here is a man who comes out of a tradition of lay preaching and exposition of religious matters. It is a tradition nurtured of necessity in exile, once the people were cut off from the centralised temple cult with its priestly ministry.

Like all great preachers he brings something groundbreaking to the craft. In whatever way the Sermon on the Mount is presented by the evangelists, and whether one thinks that his hearers were enthralled or dismayed⁴, it is clear that here there is something new. The newness is ironically contrasted to the old preaching of the scribes by the statement that Jesus preached 'with authority, unlike their own scribes' (Matt 7:29). The freshness of the teaching of Jesus is highlighted by the use of the image of the new

⁴ Thornton, J F & Washburn K 1999. *Tongues of Angels, Tongues of Men, a Book of Sermons*. New York: Doubleday. 7. Quoting Shusako Endo's rather fanciful interpretation in his *A Life of Jesus* 1973).

Characteristics of Preacher

wineskins (Mk 2:22). This image *is* what it illustrates - a new image illustrating newness.

The irony in Jesus' teaching ministry lies in the glaring fact that on the one hand, those who have the formal authority, preach without it, while this man who lacks that formal authority manifestly preaches with it, that is with the authority of wisdom, integrity and greatness of soul. And so Jesus' situation announces one of the great tensions of the history of the church - that of the authority to preach and who has it. In his own person we also note another of the great questions about preaching, alluded to later in the summary of Augustine, namely the '*Good man, skilled in speaking*' (my italics) (Thornton & Washburn 1999:4).

When Jesus of Nazareth preaches to his own people in his home town his goodness is implicitly acknowledged by the invitation to speak, but the mystery of how he acquired the necessary skills is what leads to the drama of his rejection. 'They said, "Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted to him, and these miracles that are worked through him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?" And they would not accept him (Mk 6:2-4)'.

In a sense my question about how a student 'learns' to preach is the same question the people of Nazareth ask about their most famous son which can be paraphrased usefully thus: 'Where does the would-be preacher get all this?' (If at all)!

'Where did the man get all this?' From the point of view of the believer who holds that Jesus of Nazareth is the incarnate word of God, the question might teeter on blasphemy. Does the *logos* have to acquire words? And yet the *logos* became fully human minus sin and therefore was obliged to develop the capacity for speech like any other child. Happily this is not a thesis on Christology. However it is perhaps just worth noting that the Gospels do not answer the question of 'where he got all this'. The passage about the finding in the temple indicates a perhaps midrashic tradition of oral precocity and a wisdom beyond his years. There may have been an association with the preacher John the Baptist,

but the lack of evidence leaves us, probably on purpose, in the realm of mystery.

However if some preachers, like public speakers or artists, are 'born', then we might be happy with that possibility coupled with the contemporary custom of lay preaching and the fact that the Jews of the day were among the most literate peoples in the Middle East. Of course, in a prosaic sense, where Jesus 'got all this' was from his world. As Angela West remarks in the introduction to one of Sarah Maitland's books, 'The sources of Christianity are largely without abstractions. We have a collection of stories, sayings, parables, letters and poems arising out of living experience' (Maitland 1995:IX).

Returning to the Twelve and the wider circle of disciples we are on firmer ground. There is a relationship of apprenticeship between Jesus and these followers. They are clearly fascinated by this man, spend more and more time with him, take every opportunity to observe and question him. The Gospels portray them as extremely poor students who consistently fail to understand his message, method and who he is. They come across as bumbling, uncomprehending, incompetent, faithless and even in league with the enemy (Mk 7:18, Matt 16:23). Had not the Holy Spirit come upon them at Pentecost (Acts 2) we fear they might have sunk without trace and never been heard of again.

1.3.2 The Apostolic Era

When the day of Pentecost does arrive and these enthused preachers unleash themselves upon the polyglot population (Acts 2:5) there is an echo of the question, 'where did he get all this?' in the astonishment of the hearers, and even in the suggestion that they may have been drunk: 'Everyone was amazed and perplexed; they asked one another what it all meant. Some, however, laughed it off. 'They have been drinking too much wine,' they said (Acts 2:12-13). Luke goes on to report Peter's first sermon of the Pentecost era and it is a huge success, netting some three thousand converts. What Peter preached, as reported by Luke, is the *kerygma* tailored to people with a Jewish background. Given the spectacular

intervention of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the exceedingly dis-spirited disciples, people who were previously such dull students of the Master's preaching, the implication is that these sudden preaching skills are indeed the direct result of this fortuitous intervention. The picture which emerges from the New Testament of the formation in preaching received by the disciples of Jesus is of a not too successful apprenticeship under Jesus himself which suddenly comes to massively effective fruition under the influence of the Spirit. With this flowering of preaching and its effects comes the founding and spreading of the church.

1.3.3 Paul of Tarsus (d. c. 65CE)

In the case of Paul we have someone who was not an alumnus in this distinguished Galilean and Pentecostal school, and seems to have felt it. In Galatians and elsewhere in his epistles he feels it necessary to state his credentials in terms which the *Jerusalem Bible* appropriately entitles Paul's Apologia. In a way he too wants to be seen to have been instructed and called personally by the Master, if not with the others during the public ministry, by a miraculous, post-resurrection revelation. Intermediaries have no part in his reception of the commission. In this sense, despite being a latecomer, he is on a par with the other apostles. 'Now I want to make it quite clear to you brothers, about the Gospel that was preached by me, that it was no human message. It was not from any human being that I received it, and I was not taught it, but it came to me through a revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12)'.

The context here is orthodoxy and authority. There is a need, he feels, to explain why at times he finds himself at odds with Peter over the question of the Gentiles and what Jewish practices should or should not be imposed upon them. While claiming a special preaching mission to the Gentiles and therefore the need to make pastoral adjustments to the message for their sake, he is anxious to claim that his Gospel is the same Gospel which Peter preached and which both received from the same source.

With the Gentiles comes the vexed but vital issue of culture. The controversy over circumcision is evidence of this. In the context of preaching we have Paul's various attempts to inculturate the message for groups of Gentiles, such as the cynical intellectuals of Athens in Acts 17:22-18:1, who said that they would like to hear more about the resurrection of the dead but said it in a way that suggest they are humouring a lunatic they hope not to see again. A deeper issue is perhaps the culture out of which the preaching comes. Jesus himself is depicted as someone who knows the cultural 'form' when it comes to being asked to preach in the synagogue. Paul's background is Jewish and rabbinical and therefore is by no means lacking in overlap with the religious background of the men of Galilee. On the other hand he must have known far more than them given their own humble academic origins. As well as knowing more about Judaism he comes across as being much more familiar with the Gentile culture of the Graeco-Roman world. It is an assumption, but a reasonable one, that he was linguistically more competent in this world than these rough fishermen, a handicap which might have been a factor at work in the strategy of confining them to the Jewish communities while Paul was encouraged to preach to those outside it.

We can conclude this section on the preaching in the New Testament by noting the school of biblical criticism known as 'rhetorical criticism'. Its thesis is that what we read in these Christian scriptures is itself deeply influenced by rhetoric, both sacred and profane. As Thomas Brodie puts it, 'What is now becoming clear is that the NT has considerable affinity with ancient rhetoric, and thus with (Greco-Roman) literature' (1993:8). A particular example would be Galatians, sometimes simply considered to be an emotional Pauline outburst, but according to Brodie it 'turns out, on close inspection, to involve the use of several rhetorical procedures' (9).

Brodie's commentary on the Gospel of St John argues that the evangelist has in the forefront of his mind the urgent need to convince us of this truth. The Gospel is written 'That you may believe' (John 20:31). Hence he will use

rhetoric to do so on the assumption that the Gospel will be read out loud, normally to a group, not silently by individuals as we might do today. Furthermore, the building blocks which the evangelists have at their disposal when sitting down to their task of writing, the stories about Jesus, his parables, his healings, his death and resurrection, are already rhetorical in a sense that they are the preaching of the early church, the earliest homilies in fact. Wilder is another example of this approach.⁵

Paul, although he moves away from narratives and the events in the life of Jesus and into the conceptual arguments and theological problems, is rhetorical in the sense that he too would have been read out to gatherings with the rhetorical aim of eliciting concurrence and commitment. The epistles also claim the same authority that would have been exercised as if Paul had actually been present and speaking himself.

As far as Walter Ong is concerned there is no escaping rhetoric in the Ancient World since it was the intellectual air that one breathed. It 'encapsulated the most ancient, and pervasive tradition of verbalization and of thought known to mankind at least in the West (1977:214).

1.4 *Preaching in the Church Tradition.*

The church tradition of preaching begins with the era of the Fathers, a time which is difficult for us to imagine today. It is a time of violent persecutions when preaching openly was exceedingly dangerous and a disdainful pagan political and intellectual establishment. On the other hand it was a time of living memory of the apostles, of spectacular vitality and expansion of the church, a time of courageous martyrs and saintly scholars. In many ways it is a golden age, not least in the task of preaching, both to the converted, to the neophyte and the pagan.

⁵ Wilder, A 1964. *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric*. New York: Harper & Row.

1.4.1 First Reflections - Augustine

We begin the consideration of the church tradition of preaching by leaping ahead slightly to the first Christian thinker to attempt to explore this question with any depth or in any extended manner, Augustine of Hippo (354-430), in his treatise *On Christian Teaching (De Doctrina Christiana, Book Four)*, completed in A.D. 427. Augustine had studied and practised and excelled in rhetoric (Harmless 1995:82), sometimes defined then and in later times as, 'established oral ways of persuasive speech' (Wilson 1992:17). It is not surprising that he makes reference to this formation. Christianity was young by comparison to the Graeco-Roman tradition of rhetoric which boasted a long pedigree, so it was natural that he should want preaching to be able to stand up to this respected institution which was so important to contemporary public life touching as it did, the law, politics and philosophy. A sense of his veneration for this tradition is indicated by the fact that he had read and committed to memory many of the great writers on the subject, men such as Cicero (c. 106-43BCE) and Quintillian (c. 35-96CE). The fundamental notion of the public speaker he received from Cato (c. 234-149BCE), the much quoted 'Good man, skilled in speaking' (Thornton & Washburn 1999:4). In addition, while still an unbeliever, he had listened to the sermons of St Ambrose who eventually received him into the church. At first he listened as a professional, judging Ambrose's style, and was contemptuous of his subject matter. In the end he found he could not separate the two.

For although I did not trouble to take what Ambrose said to heart, but only to listen to the manner in which he said it...nevertheless his meaning, which I tried to ignore, found its way into my mind together with his words, which I admired so much. I could not keep the two apart, and while I was all ears to seize upon the eloquence, I also began to sense the truth of what he said, though only gradually (In Harmless 195:84).

Using classical rhetoric as a respectable basis of inculturation, if he will allow me the anachronism, he depicts the Christian preacher as someone who is equally deserving of respect as his pagan rhetorician counterpart. The words 'good' and 'skilled' are particularly germane and can be helpfully developed theologically for his purpose.

This writer has found that they are still an excellent starting point for a discussion with a class of aspiring preachers for opening up the topic of the nature of the preacher and the preaching role. Goodness, it should be noted in the classical and pagan definition, comes before skill or technique and Augustine ranges widely on what this goodness means - of good character, prayerful, wise. On technique he has much to say about the classical rules of the art and how these are used in order to woo the audience or rather the congregation or assembly. In one passage he asks the question whether we would want the Christian orator to speak for the truth in a dreary and off-putting manner while the pagan sophist pursues the propagation of falsehoods in a pleasing and convincing manner. Why give the opposition all the advantages? A good question: 'Now, the art of rhetoric being available for the enforcing either of truth or falsehood, who will dare to say that truth in the person of its defenders is to take its stand unarmed against falsehood?' (Lischer 1998:210).

Therefore he is concerned to describe the preacher as someone who is competent according to the understanding of competence of the rhetorical culture of his time, but at the same time, and perhaps more importantly, who is a person of integrity, whose life mirrors the message and serves and gives witness to it. From this position it is a small step to the further one that in some important sense, the messenger embodies or even is the message.

Augustine's 'problem' with rhetoric, and it is a problem not just for him but for the church of his day, is that the art was a product of the paganism that Christians were in the process of rejecting. On the other hand paganism could not simply be ignored because it was such a powerful force in the society of the time. It was a cultural imperative that public speech had to be conducted in a way which was credible, comprehensible and persuasive. So Augustine tried to solve the problem by invoking the authority of scripture, the church and God. If all truth is in God's hands and is revealed through the scriptures in the church, then this 'ownership' can encompass and employ those aspects of pagan

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culture which are noble and true. It is the process familiar to Catholics of cultural and intellectual appropriation.

His is a subtle view of rhetoric or eloquence. For example Augustine's classic work *De Doctrina Christiana* indicates that while training has its place, it is a mistake to become obsessed with rules of eloquence. He felt that 'those with eager minds more readily learn eloquence by reading and hearing the eloquent than by the rules of eloquence' (In Harmless 1995:174). In the end he seems to understand rhetoric, despite its pagan pedigree, as in itself neutral but with the potential to serve both good and evil. (174).

In a modern world and a church in which verbal communication can tend to the didactic and the appeal of the mind, Augustine's agreement with his culture's notion of eloquence give us greater scope and colour. His vision of eloquence is more holistic. So, like Cicero, he insists that 'the one who is eloquent should speak so as to teach, delight and to motivate' (1995:176). His own sacred eloquence was clearly a virtuoso performance which frequently elicited robust appreciation from the congregation. The rhetorical event of his preaching was infused with a rich sense of the dramatic and the congregations loved to respond with applause or expressions of the emotions he was evoking in them.

Despite this heady rhetorical atmosphere we feel that Augustine always keeps his feet on the ground. '...(People) do not show (a sermon's success) through applause but rather through their groans, sometimes through their tears, and finally through a change in their way of life' (In Harmless 1995:179). He also understood that substance was ultimately more persuasive than style insisting that 'the life of the speaker has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of eloquence' (179).

1.4.2 *Chrysostom and the Fathers of the Church*

The era of the Fathers of the church is looked upon as the Golden Age of preaching in both East and west, so much so that in later times the practice arose of reading out the sermons of the Fathers in lieu of the preacher producing his

or her own. Even today the Office of Readings of the Roman Catholic breviary is well spiced with sermons, often abridged, of these remarkable figures. Teachers of the art of preaching have always urged their students at least to dip into the works of Chrysostom (c. 347-407), Origen (c. 185-c. 254), Augustine, Romanos the Melodist (fl. C. 540) and many others. The Christian religion was new and vigorous; the thirst for knowledge about it among the adherents was keen. In addition there were burning issues still to be sorted out; major doctrinal questions like the nature of Christ and the Trinity, really do appear to have been the concern of quite ordinary people, perhaps in the way that some moral problems thrown up by contemporary modern life have become passionate concerns of ordinary Christians today.

Augustine was consciously working out of a culture that prized highly the art of classical rhetoric. Polycarp (c. 69 - c. 155), the Bishop of Smyrna, had the distinction and the consequent authority of having known the disciples themselves. We mention Polycarp because interestingly enough Holland (1980:24) remarks that being so early does not mean he is primitive in the sense of unsophisticated or unaware of the demands of scholarship, or eloquence. Origen too shows his cultivated cultural background and refutes the barbed quip of Celsus 'that the Church had no message for any but the illiterate' (Hughes Vol. 1 1948:124) turning it against him saying "'The disciples of the philosophers say that Geometry, Music, Grammar, Rhetoric, Astronomy are the born companions of Philosophy. We say the same thing of philosophy itself with regard to Christianity'" (1948:124).

Chrysostom (c. 347-407) on the other hand, held that there is no truth in the non-Christian sources and he approaches the scriptures, including the Old Testament, with the proprietorial sense born of longer familiarity and greater security. However according to Walter Maat, he was still a rhetorician, indeed 'one of the greatest masters of rhetoric' (1944:81) for 'in spite of his repeated denunciations of profane rhetoric and all that it stood for, he was unconsciously perhaps, profoundly influenced, for his early training could not so easily be ruled out of his life

(81). However he 'uses the devices of the Sophistic rhetors moderately enough to derive the full benefit from them, though at the same time he does not fall into any of their excesses' (81). His interpretation of scripture is or tries to be, literal and common sense. Chrysostom is a populist and tries, and succeeds by all accounts, to respond to the real questions, fears and preoccupations of the ordinary people of the time and he includes what we would call social themes - justice, charity, wealth and poverty.

A Father of the Eastern church who illustrates strikingly the importance of the cultural vehicle is Romanos the Melodist (c.490-c.560) who actually sang his sermons in metrical, rhyming stanzas, often at the morning office. Taking an already existing musical and poetical tradition he adapted it to create a highly attractive, and even entertaining, vehicle for the communication of the Christian message. There is much exploration of the theological issues which were currently in the wind, but his subjects are far-ranging, going from the intellectual question of the two natures of Christ to a devotional imagining of the thoughts of the Blessed Virgin at the Presentation.

Culture is inescapable of course, as Augustine's wrestling with pagan rhetoric suggests. There is no presentation of the Gospel in a 'pure' form, uncouched in a language, style of speaking, idiom which is relevant to the hearers. Without this, incomprehension would be inevitable. The New Testament itself is a work of a particular culture. Christians do not believe, as many Muslims do, that the words of scripture are pre-existent, having been spoken by God in eternity and then revealed verbatim and unmediated. To do so leads to the contradictions of fundamentalism where we have to hold that Arabic or Koine Greek or Hebrew are spoken in heaven.

However there is a need to be discerning about culture and those aspects of a culture that can be appropriately 'incarnated'. In one sense the history of the Patristic era is about this and it is a debate which continues. How much 'congregation participation' is permissible in the sermon seems to have been an early issue, and particularly whether

applause was appropriate for this particular genre of public speaking. Chrysostom seems to have tried to discourage it. Forms of participation by the congregation of course persist to this day, mostly in African or African-derived cultures such as African-American preaching. In contrast to a rather thoroughgoing entry into culture like that of Romanos the Melodist, whose work was sometimes criticised for being theatrical, we have the tendency of men like Cyprian (d. 258) who insisted on 'chaste simplicity' (Wilson 1992:18). He was certainly working out of a rhetorical tradition but not uncritically, and his main point of criticism was the florid style of the law courts where he noted that style rather than substance could often win the day. For preaching, he insisted that truth is what really convinces, 'not clever but weighty words, not decked up to charm a popular audience with cultivated rhetoric, but simple and fitted by their unvarnished truthfulness for the proclamation of divine mercy' (Wilson 1992:19). It is a rhetoric of *gravitas*, a *gravitas* which springs from truth. It is a forerunner of the 'plain style' of later centuries and is associated with a Puritan cast of mind and approach to one's religion.

Did the Fathers teach preaching? The fact that some of them expressed their thoughts and theories about it in their writings is in itself pedagogical. Augustine's care for the formation of his clergy is also strongly suggestive that he at least did. In addition there was the accumulation in the church of a large body of sermon literature, the recording of the efforts of those considered worth recording. One presumes these were kept not just for archival and historical purposes although they certainly have served the church well in this respect, but also to be useful pedagogical tools for aspirant preachers.

A theme which touches the present subject is the age at which the aspirant should actually begin to preach. Both Gregory of Nazianzus (329-289) and Augustine were not young men by the standards of the day when they began. In a way Augustine was a trained rhetorician who would happily have continued in this profession had not his heart experienced

the oft-quoted restlessness which eventually found it resting in God.

1.4.3 The Middle Ages

Coming then to the Middle Ages there is a hint that the Patristic period is almost too daunting for medieval preachers to live up to. It is hard to be the children of heroes and live out one's life in their shadow.

Pope Gregory the Great (540-604)...gave strong prominence to preaching, being himself a notable pulpit figure. Nonetheless, the tradition of strong, original preaching so characteristic of the Fathers now began to dry up. In its place there arose the common practice of reading past sermons instead of preaching new ones. A type of collection known as the homiliarium became the increasingly popular way to give encouragement and instruction...These sermon books were gathered out of the sermons and writings of the Fathers, in the west especially from Augustine, and copies and still more copies were made (Thornton & Washburn 1999:15).

However, the missionary imperative provided new vitality as it so often does in the history of the church. Charlemagne (c. 742-814) charged Alcuin (735-804) with the revival of preaching for the evangelisation of the Germanic tribes and he too put together a homiliary. Revivals in preaching, schools of preaching, instruction in the art and the ^{vernacular} production of such homilaries are associated with missionary endeavour and the perceived need to get the Gospel message to common folk in their own tongue and in words they understand. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) felt it necessary to say that Bishops should preach in the vernacular: 'Similarly, during mass or the celebration of office on every feast or solemnity they should explain the divine commandments and precepts of salvation in the vernacular' (Tanner & Alberigo 1990: 764). The idea of bishops preaching to Celts or Huns in Latin sounds astonishing but not necessarily to anyone with experience of a missionary church where bishops and clergy might well be unable to master the local language and fall back on the more dominant international medium, e.g. English in ex-British colonies. Most people with an experience of the African missionary church would know of examples of pastors dependent on translators.

However, despite the decline of original preaching and the dependency on second hand material it appears that

preaching was popular, probably because it was one of the few forms of public entertainment available to the populace. According to the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* of 1910: 'so popular was preaching and so deep the interest taken in it, that preachers commonly found it necessary to travel by night, lest their departure should be prevented' (Thornton & Washburn 1999:16). One wonders. However a colleague is engaged in a study of one such manual of sermons, a 12th Century English collection known as the *Ormulum* (The Little Worm), written by a single individual. The focus of the study is linguistic but the researcher has remarked that to the modern reader the sermons themselves appear extraordinarily boring. It is certainly difficult for us today to become excited about the idea of a preacher reading out another person's sermon or homily. There was a time when the fact that someone could read was in itself something to be admired and to be able to listen to the words of some great person was taken as tantamount to hearing that person in person. But this is not true today, at least not in western society.

It is a cliché of course to compare our era of the visual with the benighted past where the only entertainment was from the preacher or his secular equivalent the *jongleur*, or *troubadour*, the wandering entertainer of the South of France. Certainly people had less to choose from but they were probably also quite sophisticated listeners, as one finds in oral cultures today, for example in 'missionary' territories. The ingenuity and catechetical creativity of the mystery play, not to mention stained glass and sculpture, also indicate that the communicators of the time were not entirely unaware of the importance of engaging the visual. And of course the texts we have are only texts and unfortunately we have no videotapes of the actual delivery of these. Given the dramatic flair one finds in contemporary oral cultures, one can imagine medieval preachers being somewhat more lively in the flesh than the cold text of something like the *Ormulum*. In a later section we will discuss the subject of orality and literacy.

One particular brand of medieval preaching could be said to be highly effective, at least in the sense of motivating a

mass movement. The preaching of the crusades by Urban II (c. 1042-1099), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Peter the Hermit (c. 1050-1115) and others were at the very least effective linguistic triggers setting off the explosions of military and religious energy they entailed summed up in the cry 'Deus le volt!' (Thornton & Washburn 1999:17). A propos, the towering figure of Bernard of Clairvaux not only preached crusades but also founded some seventy-five monasteries during his life apart from being deeply involved in all the important political and religious affairs of the time. The potential for preaching to impact on 'secular' affairs is here aptly demonstrated.

Monasticism, by its stable presence among people, had a great apostolic influence but the main responsibility for preaching always lay with the Bishop and diocesan clergy. There was no mass-movement of monastic preaching in the Middle Ages. New impetus was supplied in the mendicant friars, most notably the Franciscans and Dominicans. Not that itinerant preachers were unknown. Individual monks themselves were not always models of stability and Bernard of Clairvaux's energetic journeying can remind us of a Paul rather than a Benedict. There was also the phenomenon of the 'gyrovagus', the 'unlicensed' preacher, a kind of monastic misfit who wandered from village to village. Like the wandering minstrel or Provençal jongleur the services he rendered earned him his daily bread.

St Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) must have resembled such a figure when he first set out with only 'lady poverty' as his companion. The movement he started was a kind of inculturation of the jongleur or troubadour of secular courtly culture (Dawson 1958. 158-159). Looking at the mendicant movement theologically rather than sociologically, like other new religious orders, it was consciously patterned closely on the life of Christ and the disciples who travelled from place to place, preaching the Gospel in poverty with nowhere to lay their heads. This almost mimetic side of Francis with regard to Jesus is his abiding appeal.

Francis of Assisi and Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221) both founded orders of mobile mendicants who made their lasting

mark on the Western Church and its tradition of preaching reaching down into our own day. The focus of this movement, at least in its early stages, was preaching to the common folk in their own languages and dialects and with stories and illustrations which they could understand. If the mystery plays are an indication of this popular approach we can venture the opinion that they understood the need to use entertainment to obtain and hold the attention of people. The contemporary revival of the mystery plays in modern theatres⁶ bears witness to the Franciscan inculturation even of the entertainment factor, very much including *hilaritas*, the cheerful and humorous. The vital importance of having and holding the attention of hearers of the Word is a theme to which we shall return.

It is interesting to note that these street-wise orders still felt the need to educate and form their members to their task of preaching and soon participated in the rise of the universities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It perhaps instructive for a church on a missionary continent to note, therefore, that a solid theological foundation at the feet of an Abelard (1079-1142), an Albert the Great (c. 1200-1280) and an Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), was considered important for this task of communication with the poor and unlettered. However, Humbert of Romans (1200-1277), a distinguished Master General of the Dominicans, who wrote a treatise on the art of preaching insisted that it was for the spiritually mature only and therefore positively dangerous to begin at too tender an age. Apart from the technical difficulties, the spiritual pitfalls are many - vainglory, competition and ambition, not to mention the lack of anything real to say. Quoting St Bernard he says: 'If you wish to act with discernment, take trouble first to become a reservoir before you become a canal' (Humbert of Romans 1955:54).

⁶ Harrison, T, 1985. *The Mysteries: The Nativity, The Passion, Doomsday*. Faber & Faber: London. This is a modern version of the York cycle of Mystery Plays (attended by the present writer in London in 1984).

1.4.4 The Reformation

Inevitably the exciting freshness of the new scholastic theology growing out of Aristotelian philosophy (brought to Europe by the crusades from the Islamic world) itself eventually became rigid, over-complex and tired in a church ready for reform. The Protestant Reformation is identified with a revival in preaching: 'Even today in Germany, the cradle of the Reformation, the adjective used for "Protestant" is "Evangelical"' (Thornton & Washburn 1999:20).

The first voices of dissent included such remarkable pulpit orators as Savonarola (1452-1498), the fiery Dominican puritan. Erasmus (1469-1536), who held out the possibility of reform from within the church, believed in the need to train teachers, which he expressed in his manual entitled *Ecclesiastes*. Good humanist as he was with a belief in the power of education, he was convinced that preaching could be taught and stated this in the vivid phrase: 'If elephants can be trained to dance, lions to play, and leopards to hunt, surely preachers can be taught to preach' (20). Is there a hint of tongue in cheek here? The clergy were in such poor shape that some must have seemed lost causes, sunk in ignorance and vice, more interested in peddling indulgences than honing their preaching. A break was probably inevitable.

Once the internal reform had failed, and the battle lines had been set, one of the main weapons used by both sides was the formidable combination of pulpit, printing press and pamphlet. These tracts were often sermons or commentaries upon them which could be read with approval in church or alternatively denounced and denigrated. This powerful technological advance, which enhanced the power of the pulpit, was mirrored theologically by the centrality given to the proclamation of the Word. Sacraments and sacramentals were either downgraded or discarded altogether while the Word, proclaimed in the vernacular and preached with passion, was exalted. The vast wooden pulpit supported by two alarmingly fierce carved lions in the *Groote Kerk* in Cape Town is a central and elaborate focus and an unmistakable and uncompromising theological statement. The

word was central and therefore the preaching of it was the central activity of the Christian minister. The extent of the reaction against the model of minister as a cultic Massing priest is evident in the following statistic: 'John Calvin preached some three hundred sermons a year, and a thousand can still be read' (22). Martin Luther also preached with the frequency and manner which illustrated his belief that 'the ears alone are the organ of the Christian man' (22).

Meanwhile the Counter Reformation ('Catholic Reformation' is perhaps a more ecumenical description) also prized preaching and pamphlets. Ignatius of Loyola's (1491-1556) followers were first noticed in public as they preached in bad Italian in the churches and squares of Venice and Rome. The Jesuit Edmund Campion (1540-1581) penned his *Brag* which became a celebrated theological broadside in pamphlet form directed at the divines of English Protestantism which was no doubt read out at secret gatherings of recusant Catholics. Later, Alphonsus Ligouri (1696-1787) would make the preaching of missions into a charism, and a vehicle not just for religious polemic but for its original purpose of metanoia. He was not averse to using fear (*di terrore*) systematically though this was balanced by preaching the love of God, nor did he neglect the use of chilling visual aids such as the skull and the scourge. He forbade a mannered style and insisted on the vernacular for the sake of communicating with the uneducated.

The task of giving an overview of the post-Reformation of preaching is massively complicated by the fact that the irons in the fire are ever-multiplying - the large number of Christian denominations resulting from the Reformation as well as the increasing number of lands where the Gospel is preached as these are 'discovered' and colonised.

1.4.4.1 *The Council of Trent (1545-1563)*

The reform from within represented by the Council of Trent gave birth to many new religious orders founded by remarkable leaders who were concerned about the state of preaching and made a contribution to its revival. Such figures as Philip Neri (1515-1595), Francis de Sales (1567-

1622) , Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), John of the Cross (1542-1591) and Ignatius of Loyola would be among the most significant. The Jesuits firmly turned their backs on what they considered to be dry and unattractive scholasticism and made a bold marriage of their spirituality and humanistic scholarship to give birth to a new charismatic sacred oratory.⁷ Other distinguished Catholic names of the time were the Dominican Luis de Granada and the Franciscan Diego de Estella who both published classics on preaching in 1576.

Churches, such as the Jesuit church of the Gesu in Rome, reflected the heightened awareness of the importance of the Word, with fine, visible pulpits and attention to acoustics. Whereas the Protestant reformers aimed for plainness in the visual aspect of their churches, the Catholics in the Baroque period both obtained and consumed their cake, building visually spectacular churches in which the Word could be heard and the preacher noticed.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) itself made a major contribution to Catholic preaching by establishing the enduring institution of seminary training which fostered learning and discipline in the clergy. However it was perhaps unfortunate that it did not give the ministry of the Word all the emphasis it needed, reacting out of a sense of necessity of countering the emphases of the Reformers. As Echlin puts it:

Trent reasserted the visible, hierarchical, permanent and sacrificial nature of the priesthood - which continental reformers denied. The Council acknowledged but did not emphasise the priest's ministry of the Word (1973:69).

However the Council did issue a decree on preaching which attempted to tackle some blatant abuses, the most obvious of which was that preaching was not being done. The authorities are instructed to ensure that those who are neglecting this duty should be persuaded 'even by a reduction of their income' (Tanner & Alberigo 1990:668) to change. There

⁷ 'when Jesuits preached or delivered "sacred lectures" they were not to do so "in the scholastic manner". This prescription was a direct repudiation of the *Artes praedicandi* of the Middle Ages and an indirect commendation of new theories being advanced by humanists like Erasmus' (Moloney 1993:98).

is an awareness of the need for education in scripture. Sorting out the relationship between diocesan and religious structures is also a preoccupation. For example Bishops are not to charge a fee if religious ask permission to preach in churches which do not belong to them (Tanner & Alberigo Eds 1990:670). When such abuses have crept in and Bishops have to be reminded of their very duty to preach, it is unsurprising if the Council remains on the level of cleaning up the disedifying situation and does not rise to inspirational heights. Its final injunction is: 'Those soliciting alms (also commonly called fortune-hunters), whatever their status, may in no way claim the right to preach either personally or through another' (670).

1.4.5 Missionary Outreach

Other influences were at work than church Councils. In a world whose horizons were widening all the time it is an era of being all things to all. While the likes of Jacques Benigné Bossuet (1627-1704), François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon (1651-1715) were, in Louis XIV's (1638-1715) France, delivering arguably some of the greatest and certainly some of the most cultured and rhetorically enthralling sermons ever preached, armies of long-forgotten but heroic missionaries were struggling with immensely complex languages in Africa, the Orient and the New World in order just to be able to give basic catechesis.

One such man, from the previous century, well known in his own time but lost from sight until relatively recently was the Jesuit José de Acosta (1540 - 1600), who is acknowledged as the second most important missionary to Latin America in the 16th Century after the great Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas (c.1475-1566) . Catholic missionary preaching in the Americas is normally dismissed as the religious arm of the Conquistadors. However de Acosta's eclectic 'Jesuit theological humanism' and the ideal of *eloquentia perfecta*, his Ignatian spirituality, his training as a teacher and his natural linguistic ability suited him well to the task of genuine evangelisation and he emphasised a preaching adapted to the indigenous peoples and appealing

to the heart. At the same time he insisted on much repetition of the basic doctrinal points of the faith for a people for whom it was a new message. (Burgaleta 1999: 104). He would have understood the modern term *inculturation*.

In the New World and the Orient Xavier (1506-1552) and Las Casas were the memorable and honourable representatives of a missionary movement which, under the basilisk eye of history, is revealed as wittingly or unwittingly associated with colonialism, both political and cultural. The effects of that history are felt even today and the response of the post Vatican II church has been liberation theology and inculturation, attempts to deal with the former and latter respectively. These movements have had their effect on preaching, particularly where it finds its inspiration and its need to be rooted in the culture, situation and aspirations of ordinary people.

1.4.6 The Baroque and Reactions

We must necessarily be selective in this infinitely wide field and so favour the English-speaking world. John Donne (1571/2-1631) has come into vogue again recently. He merits more than a mention as a preacher, not just for his 'diamond dust brilliancies of rhetoric' (Thornton & Washburn 1999:269), but also for his ecumenical theology (he was an Anglican convert from Catholicism) and the fact that he straddles the 16th and 17th Centuries. He dominated the pulpit of St Paul's from 1621 until his death in 1631 and preached both to royalty and the ordinary Londoner. In Donne wordsmith, character and confessor of faith made him a matchless mover of minds and hearts. Elements of his style have been called baroque and he can be held up as a good example of someone who thoroughly Christianised (inculturated) the linguistic culture of his day to great effect, yet making his erudition and eloquence accessible to all by, for example, translating or paraphrasing all Latin quotations.

Donne is a most interesting study in Christian rhetoric. His final sermon was preached in 1630 when he was ill and close to death. Entitled *Death's Duel or, a Consolation to*

the *Soul, against the Dying Life, and Living Death of the Body*, this frightening yet powerfully hopeful sermon delivered before the King was dubbed 'the Doctor's own funeral sermon' (271).

The Baroque style is an easy target and it has been fashionable to debunk it for its more mannered manifestations. However, Donne did prove that Baroque was more than just style; his substance made a difference in the lives of many Londoners of his day.

A reaction to the Baroque style can be detected in the 18th Century in, for example, the sacred oratory of John Tillotson (1630 -1694), and it was replaced by clearness and what passed in that age for brevity. Much of the preaching of this era must be seen against the background of a world undergoing the profoundest of social changes, most notably massive urbanisation, as the Industrial Revolution began to affect whole populations in England and elsewhere.

One can see the Wesleys and the Methodist movement in this light. John Wesley (1703-1791) cannot be categorised as someone simply produced by the contemporary social forces. His powerful conversion experience in Georgia in the New World, his political conservatism, his Oxford education, his populist appeal and most of all his powerful will and boundless energy make him a moulder of history rather than a product of it. And most interestingly for a time of rapid urbanisation, he did not make the classic missionary mistake of neglecting the countryside.

The preachers of the Reformation and post Reformation periods are some of the most astonishing homiletical athletes. Their output was prodigious and they covered a monumental amount of ground. John Wesley, the exponent of 'practical divinity' in some years, delivered over 1000 sermons in the course of the twelve months. Here we are in the presence of people who are not just effective because of effective techniques, but because of a remarkably powerful spiritual motivation whose worth is proven by their lasting impression and institutions that have stood the test of time.

1.5 The Modern Era

In the English-speaking world of the 19th Century there is a divergence in style of preaching in Protestantism which can still be noted today and which is perhaps widening. On the one hand there is the mainline Protestant style of prepared and polished pulpit oratory while on the other the style associated with Methodists and Baptists, a simpler style which

Show, Act, pretend

would increasingly depend on shouting, repetition, emotional manipulation, calls for audience (sic) participation, musical accompaniment, a colourful *mise-en-scène*, and sometimes a fretful pacing about instead of delivery from the pulpit - all aimed at heightening emotions to precipitate conversions among the congregation (Thornton & Washburn 375).

Clearly the writers of the above are taking a theological position here. Its ecclesiological basis is clarified when they observe that this kind of preacher tends to be an itinerant who can leave the converted unsupported, and conclude that: 'The peculiarly American search for religious freedom had produced the colourful figure of the Preacher, but somewhere along the way it may have discarded the church' (Thornton & Washburn 1999:35). The heavy tones of the establishment ring somewhat in these statements. However the question is not just one of the institution being defensive. The deeper problem is the age old one of who is 'licensed' to preach and modern comments on wandering preachers echo those directed at the *gyrovagi* of the Middle Ages. At the present time many in the 'mainline' churches would probably say the same of the new generation of televangelists in the United States or of the Zionist churches in Africa.

1.5.1 Living Memory

It would be an unfortunate to conclude that at the beginning of the 21st Century and in a supposed era of ecumenism the noble tradition of preaching is marked by naked competition. However a case can be made for this analysis. In Latin America fundamentalist Christian missionaries, often funded by the religious right in the United States, compete with Catholics. In Eastern Europe, most notably in Russia,

there is tension between an increasingly state and culture-obsessed Orthodox church and awkward minorities such as Anabaptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Roman Catholics and many others. In Africa the friction is often between preachers of the Christian message and preachers of Islam as well. Neither does this Christian-Islamic friction seem necessarily to blunt continuing *odium theologicum* between African Christians, particularly between the churches of European origin and those springing whole or partly from the indigenous culture.

1.5.2 Roman Catholic Experience

We focus briefly on the Roman Catholic church pre and post Vatican II (1962-1965). With regard to preaching Catholics sometimes believe that the grass is greener on the other [Protestant] side of the fence. This is not necessarily so according to David Buttrick (1987:483), Professor of homiletics and worship at Vanderbilt Divinity School, who wrote in the 80's: 'In the past fifteen years, there have been many books deploring the state of the pulpit or proposing fad solutions (visual aids, dialogue sermons, "telling my story", etc), but few substantial new proposals'.

1.5.2.1 Preaching Before Vatican II

The Copernican revolution which the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) brought about was most concretely manifested in the changes in the liturgy, especially the eucharist. The writer's experience of the Latin Mass of yesteryear was of a private religious ceremony conducted by the priest with the assistance of the altar boy(s). Neither black nor white worshippers understood the liturgical language. In practice the ceremony was a mysterious backdrop for the private devotions of the congregation who would say the rosary or pray personal prayers in silence. It was a kind of 'sacred theatre' with minimal audience participation. It was possible for literate believers to access the readings of the Mass through their missals and in some churches it became customary to have a reader render them in the vernacular simultaneously with the priestly Latin. In other words the

Latin liturgy was in a very real sense a kind of loosely guided meditation and there is no doubt that many people prayed very deeply in this setting. When the liturgy changed many felt that their prayer life was destroyed, as perhaps it had been.

Therefore for many people in the pews the sermon in such a setting was experienced as an interruption to their prayer, a break or 'time out' during the liturgy. As we shall see again in a later section on the renewal of preaching, preaching during the eucharist was not necessarily connected at all with the readings or liturgy of the day. In many places sermon topics were prescribed by the Bishop, if not on a weekly basis, on the basis of topics which had to be covered in the course of a year. There was a distinct emphasis on moralising and dogma. So the experience of preaching was something of a catechetical break. If the priest broached a devotional theme he was probably closer to where his congregation actually was since that was the atmosphere the liturgy attempted to create and in which many pious Catholics felt comfortable and prayerful.

The attitude to the Word of God entailed in the Tridentine liturgy was one of clerical proprietorship. Indeed, Tridentine Catholics were not encouraged to read the Bible at all as they might become Protestants, and the Protestant versions of the Bible were thought to be inaccurate and incomplete. Four centuries later we were still uneasy with the memory of how a loss of authority over interpretation of the Word could lead to schism and heresy. In many ways Vatican II is the Catholic church recovering its confidence after having been badly shaken by the Reformation and in particular Martin Luther and his watchword: 'The Word, I say, and the Word alone is the bearer of God's grace' (Buttrick 1987:483) The message of the Tridentine liturgy and catechism that one knew as a child was certainly that grace came not from hearing the Word but from obedience to the church, reception of the sacraments and personal piety.

Catholic preaching was probably redeemed by parish missions, those events when the 'specialists' such as the Redemptorists were brought in to revitalise the spiritual and

ecclesial life of the community. It is the usual Catholic response to a problem - specialise. These preaching events seem to be the ones most remembered when people cast their minds back to that period. They were special events which stood by themselves and were not necessarily linked to the eucharist, but perhaps to the sacrament of penance. They were often quite theatrical and included the 'emotional manipulation' criticised in more fundamentalist circles, but people attended them in considerable numbers and their practice produced some remarkably strong and holy characters. They were clearly answering a need for personal and parish renewal and their entertainment value in the pre-TV age was their appeal.

One concrete aim of these mission was to bring the hearers to 'make a good confession', which would have been the Catholic equivalent of 'conversion' or 'bearing witness' or 'coming forward' among the 'Bible' Churches - an experience of one's sin leading to repentance, confession, absolution and re-commitment. If the confessors who attended upon the faithful during such missions were skilful, they would use the opportunity to help penitents on a deeper level than that of a mechanical dispensing of absolution. In other words, some personal spiritual counselling could take place and in fact this was probably the only personal counsel most people received.

1.5.2.2 The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)

The Second Vatican Council rediscovered the importance of the Word of God and put it firmly in the vernacular and in the eucharist. '... the Council affirms that the priest's mission is to preach, sanctify and lead, in that order' (Echlin 1973.73). In its introduction to the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* the Council says: 'Through the sacred ordination and mission which they receive from the bishops priests are promoted to the service of Christ the Teacher, Priest and King'... (P.O. Para. 1). The council also underlined the responsibility of the bishop as the 'chief preacher' of the diocese. According to the *Constitution on the Church*, 'Among the more important duties of bishops that

of preaching of the Gospel has pride of place' (L.G. Para. 25). It re-connected preaching with the liturgy and re-discovered the homily underlining the fact that preaching's pride of place was once again in the Mass and that it was part and parcel of the same. 'The homily, therefore, is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself (S.C. Para. 52). This is taken up by the United States Bishops in *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*: 'The very meaning and function of the homily is determined by its relation to the liturgical action of which it is a part' (1982:17). As Echlin puts it, focusing on the role of the priest: 'In the quieter atmosphere of the ecumenical age the Fathers (of the Council) felt free to state unambiguously that preaching was central to the priest's mission, a mission which derived from and reached its apex in the eucharist' (1973:75).

However one can argue that the Roman Catholic church is still working to implement this change, and in some places has a considerable distance to travel. Meanwhile some Protestant Churches, unencumbered by the painful task of moving from a sacred liturgical language to the vernacular, were able to put more of their energies into their first love, the preaching of the Word. Taking the cue from studies on communication in secular fields, the US teacher of homiletics at Candler School of Divinity, Fred Craddock focused on the hearers and developed a style which began with their experience and led it to the illumination of the scriptures. In other words it is an inductive rather than deductive method, outlined in the arrestingly entitled work, *As One Without Authority*. The work is written with an acute awareness of the democratic culture of dialogue of the time, and those of us who were there can testify that nothing went unquestioned. Of the younger generation of ministers Craddock says: 'He seriously asks himself whether he should continue to serve up a monologue in a dialogical world' (Craddock 1981:16). Not that this implies abandonment of the classic form of the sermon, for as Craddock points out, a monologue⁸ may still be governed by the principles of dialogue.

⁸ For a fuller discussion on the problems of the monologue form of the sermon see Pieterse p 99.

In Roman Catholic circles, some venerable practises fell into disuse. The preached mission fell into disuse. The seminarians that stayed at a time of an exodus which someone called 'the great haemorrhage' were given a good grounding in the scriptures but very little practical training in the techniques of homiletics and no reflection on preaching either. I was of that generation and consider myself lucky to have done two brief optional courses. The scene was clouded by some controversies which in retrospect probably missed the point entirely. It might have been far more fruitful had we been fighting about the standard of preaching rather than the standard of church music, *pace* the musicians and choir masters. Blood was still being spilled about the use of the vernacular and the use of Latin vestments and church decoration. Priests faced with militant Latinists would remark sarcastically that they felt tempted to preach in Latin. There was a great deal of missing of points and a great deal of wasted energy. That scripture was well taught to seminarians was the redemption in it all.

1.6. Preaching in Pre-colonial Africa

It is important to look briefly at the history of preaching in Africa. Traditional African religion, being part of the whole rich woven fabric of life, saw little reason to preach in the proselytising fashion of Christianity or Islam. However care was taken to pass on the tenets, values and behaviour proper to the religion to the younger generation. In this sense there was preaching which was, and is still, analogous to the catechesis of children and young people which takes place in Christian societies and is the natural passing on of a religious way of life from one generation to the next.

There is an analogy with the Jewish faith here, where the family is the focus of worship and teaching. Prof. M P Moila talks of the 'family religious leader' and 'patriarchal priests' (SANTEC Workshop 1998:8) who presided at 'all important rites' (8) including the all-important rites of initiation of adolescents. Therefore preaching came from within the community and was done in the community for the

sake of the community. It would focus on all things important for the good of the community, from God through the ancestors, spiritual forces, how to live well and relate correctly to these, to fellow humans and to the natural world.

John Mbiti's insights on African proverbs help us understand one of the principal rhetorical vehicles for the above-mentioned 'catechetical' process. In his paper on *Death in African Proverbs as an Area of Interreligious dialogue*, he demonstrates how proverbs broach and teach about the subject of the end of life. He says that 'Proverbs have shaped the thinking and worldview of the people for generations and continue to do so' (2000:19). They serve important functions such as bringing out 'the question of immortality, by virtue of people being god's property, or deriving from God' (19) and they 'indicate that even under severe suffering, relative salvation is possible' (19). In his conclusion he maintains that when it comes to proverbs the Bible and traditional African religion 'speak a fairly common language, on many and different themes of life' (20). The important theme of proverbs in African preaching is one to which we shall return and Mbiti's observation about the similarity between biblical and traditional African proverbs constitutes an important foundation for inculturation.

1.6.1 Preaching in Colonial Africa

The full history of preaching in Africa is yet to be written. Some might despair of it ever being written. The nature of the topic (homilies and sermons) means much written material has disappeared and oral tradition becomes disrupted by historical events while memory is enfeebled by literacy. However, no doubt one of the judgements of such a history will be that the message of Christian preaching was severely compromised by colonial expansion, economic exploitation, slavery and denominational competition and that these forces, so passionately attacked in S Bhengu's *Chasing Gods not our Own* (1995:105ff), damaged with brutal insouciance the pre-Christian faith. With Christianity came western imperial culture, western commerce and western individualism.

The general experience of early missionary preaching seems to have been that it divided African people. The ~~scramble~~ was not just for Africa's territory and natural resources, but also for her soul, and here the different denominations presented a disedifying spectacle as they vied for influence and advantage. The churches may have been aggressively divided in an unecumenical age but their basic theologies of sin and personal redemption were not in the end as different as they thought. However it was the new doctrines themselves which really divided Africans from one another, into Christians and pagans, and, more importantly, from themselves. The division was sometimes physical in the establishment of Christian villages or mission stations (Moila 2000:10). This arose out of the felt need of the missionaries to protect the new converts from the 'pagan' traditional culture and from the other Christian denominations in Christian laagers. As Kwesi Dickson laconically remarks, 'Christian evangelism as it was carried out by European missionaries in the early days of missions in Africa, and also by those African preachers whom the missionaries had trained as their co-workers, tended to assume the destructiveness of African religion and culture' (1984:90). This was symbolically expressed by the missionaries' insistence of the adoption of western dress once they had been converted (Setiloane 1975:97).

The physical and symbolic divisions reflected the quasi-dualistic theological universe to which Africans had been introduced through the introduction to Satan and his associates. The present writer remembers being startled in 1988 by the statement of a young Catholic Tswana seminarian who declared that as far as he was concerned the ancestors were 'demons'. And in his pastoral work in Elandskop in KwaZulu-Natal it was said that the first missionaries had forbidden the custom of *ukubuyisa*, the slaughtering of a cow a year after the death of a person to bring the shade home. What had happened was that the people assured the missionaries that, as Christians, they would never do such a thing, but in practice they did practice *ukubuyisa* on the quiet. The custom was too powerful and the anxiety about not

doing the right thing by the dead was simply too strong, Christianity or no Christianity. The cost was a divided cultural self, being despised and rejected by one's own people and being referred to as *amakhafula* (those who have been spat out).

However, at the same time it is hoped that history will record the stories of redeeming heroes, the rugged explorer-missionaries and their faithful local companions, the unsung scholars wrestling with unfamiliar concepts labouring at translations of the scriptures into complex tongues. The enlightened were few and far between, men such as Bishop Colenso (1814-1843) who attempted to understand the Zulu people, or Vincent Donovan who became captivated by the Maasai people and made pioneering attempts to do practical inculturation before the word was coined and expressed them as follows: 'As I began to ponder the evangelization of the Maasai, I had to realise that God enables a people, any people, to reach salvation through their culture, tribal, racial customs and traditions' (In Sanneh 1993:161). The message is heard, as Moila puts it, by going from 'the known to the unknown' (1998:11).

Some of the truly heroic 'Africanist' preachers were those who placed themselves on the side of the struggle for political liberation. Colenso, in his opposition to the invasion of Zululand, is an early example in South Africa, but the preaching of liberation theology properly belongs to African preachers themselves as they worked to develop a black African theology, often inspired by the American black consciousness movement and South American liberation theology.⁹

The Catholic church's evangelising strength will probably be identified as lying in its institutions, especially its schools. The African Independent churches and their non-institutional and culturally appropriate forms of organisation might be held up as a contrast to the Catholics. Comparisons will also be made between Christianity and that other great evangelising religion, Islam.

⁹ For a discussion of this topic, including distinctions such as that between 'black' and 'African' theology, see Dickson 1984: 124ff.

1.6.2 *Preaching in Post-Colonial Africa*

It is a moot point as to whether the colonial era is indeed over in Africa. Few would argue that all the problems associated with that time have been solved or will be solved soon. In many ways Africa finds itself in a deeper crisis, facing the age-old scourges of war, disease and poverty. With a tenth of the world's population, it currently boasts two thirds of the world's wars. Preaching needs to address the real situation.

Hence Moila argues that post-colonial Africa requires a 'life-situation' preaching (12) which will include the emphases of inculturation and liberation. With political emancipation liberation did not follow automatically, either politically or economically. Neither did the church become truly African with independence. Dependence continues in the church, often, in the last analysis, because of continuing financial dependence.

1.7. *Summary and Conclusion*

We have attempted to plot the historical course of preaching in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, in the early, medieval and modern church, including in Africa. In addition we considered the pre-Christian 'preaching' which took place in African society through in the sense of the passing on of traditional wisdom, mores and religious belief.

In order to pursue the phenomenological approach to our subject it will now be necessary to consider some approaches to the theology of preaching. We will focus in particular on the 'sacramental Imagination' theology of Catherine Mary Hilkert (1997:48) since in many ways it appears to represent the approach of the Catholic tradition.

Chapter 2 Theology - A Sacramental Approach

2.1 Introduction

Some aspects of the theology of preaching have been touched upon in the course of the foregoing chapter on its history. Here we will concentrate on preaching as the enfleshment of theology, as putting theology into pastoral practice or 'doing' theology. The main focus of this section is a fundamentally Catholic 'sacramental' one.

2.2 Preaching as 'Doing Theology'

'The preaching of the good news is like one beggar telling another where to find food'. This is an arresting aphoristic definition of unknown origin likely to give pause to an aspiring Bossuet. Such a definition well illustrates Mary Catherine Hilkert's fundamental point that 'Every preacher has a theology even if that theology remains implicit' (1997:48). Such one-liner theological definitions abound. Alan of Lille's (1128-1202) is equally short but sounds as if it comes from the scholar's study: 'Preaching is an open and public instruction in faith and behaviour, whose purpose is the forming of men (sic)' (Lischer R 1987:10). Philip Brooks insists on the personality of the preacher as perhaps the most important element thus: 'Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men (sic). It has two elements, truth and personality' (Lischer R 1987:14). Hilkert continues in the above vein:

Underlying convictions about where God's word is to be heard and by whom and how it is meant to be proclaimed, will affect very practical decisions about homily preparation...Reflection on how one goes about creating and proclaiming a homily can disclose one's beliefs about the locus of revelation and the goal of preaching (1997:48).

The point is an important, down to earth one - practical pastoral approaches are not without theological foundations and hence it is not a matter of 'mere academic' importance to identify and clarify what these are. Or, as a colleague, following Jungman puts it, what we should be aware of is what the preacher is *doing* up there. This is especially so if we are the preacher. If the preacher habitually gives a lesson in systematic theology, this is revelatory of a certain

theological stance on preaching. The same is true for moralising, pious exhortation and social analysis; the list goes on. The action occurring in the pulpit implies an underlying theology. Fred Craddock is, if anything, more insistent on the bonds between preaching and theology, saying that 'separation of preaching from theology is a *violation*, (my italics) leaving not one but two orphans' (1981:52).

He is of course writing in the context of a theological college and the formation of preachers. Hence his approach has major pedagogical ramifications which can be summed up crudely by the classic warning about style without substance. And for Craddock the substance of a preacher's theology will always shape the preacher's style and therefore he considers the separation of the teaching of theology and the teaching of homiletics to be a fundamental pedagogical error. In theory at least, the holding of them together as part and parcel of the pedagogical process should enable students to reflect theologically on what they are doing when they prepare to preach and actually preach. One could add that since preaching is one of those activities which calls on many, if not all, of the levels of a person, then to compartmentalise it from the development and formation of psyche and spirit are also inadvisable. It is not just a question of integrating preaching and theological intellectual development. If the medium is the message, so also is the messenger. But this is a topic for the section on formation.

Even more than the student, should teachers of homiletics have a theological self-awareness since they will pass on to the students an implicit and explicit theology of the Word of God and its proclamation. It is also important for someone exploring the processes involved in that passing on of the 'art' and craft of homiletics to know what it is that is being passed on. In other words, this is a theological way of looking at the questions: what is preaching and what is a preacher?

2.3 Divine Message and Human Medium

An aim of the chapter on the history of preaching was to show that the early church was aware that this new form of discourse may have had cultural similarities with contemporary modes of public speech, but that it broke new ground in the field of eloquence. This proclamation was a divine initiative, a Spirit-filled event with world-shaking consequences and therefore there had to be a sense in which the message could transcend the medium. We have a sense of this in the Acts of the Apostles. Ernest Fuchs' concept of the *sprachereignis*¹ or speech-event captures this sense. The preaching of the Gospel comes across as a new departure in human history which will have a profound effect upon that history through a new relationship between God and humanity. It opens up a new dimension in human awareness which enables us to see things in a completely fresh way. There is therefore a dramatic element in it, by comparison to which all previous and future speech, no matter how new, dramatic and arresting, is *passé*. This is a sweeping claim but even severe critics would have to admit that the preaching of the Christian message, despite obvious human limitations, has had a remarkable and unique effect upon the course of history.

A literary analogy given by Amos N. Wilder (Lischer R 1987: 238) is the seismic event in European literature of the writing of the symbolist poem *Le Bateau Ivre* by Rimbaud. The writing of French poetry, perhaps the very writing of French itself, would never be quite the same. A rather different type of analogy would be that of a man who gets up when a state of panic is spreading in a theatre, or a riot in the streets and brings people back to their senses by a 'compelling word of authority' (Lischer R 1987:238). It is a 'speech phenomenon' which has not been experienced before and which changes things dramatically and the change lasts. "Primitive Christianity", says Wilder quoting Fuchs, "is itself a speech-phenomenon. It is for that reason that it

¹In David Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order* the *sprachereignis* is rendered as the e-vent and described thus: 'These sayings actually bestow on us the e-vent of an authentic time: time as the e-vent, the happening, the disclosure of God's gracious and trustworthy action to happen now' (1978:134).

established a monument in the new style-form which we call Gospel"" (Lischer R 1987:238).

There is, then, a tradition more associated with Protestantism than Catholicism, which argues that the Christian discourse we call preaching stands by itself and owes little or even nothing to the rhetoric of the Graeco-Roman world with all its alluring paganism and religious syncretism. If there is a debt to the past, it asserts, this is to be paid to the world of the Old Testament and to the God who is revealed through the Word which speaks through its own power, not a power given to it by any pagan technical skills. By comparison to this God the gods of the ancient world are dumb. Their images may be visually striking or terrifying and their mysteries might appear to convey benefits, their spokesmen cleverly eloquent, but neither the word of truth nor the power of truth comes forth from their mouths of stone or metal.

Therefore the preacher is cast more in the mould of the Old Testament prophet rather than the Roman rhetorician. Wilder continues by saying that although Christianity may have appropriated to itself all the arts, 'the thesis still holds good that the faith identifies itself fundamentally with the art of hearing as against those of sight and touch' (Lischer R 1987:239).

The Protestant tradition would also hold more strongly than Catholicism that Christianity is identified as a religion of the book, but it is not a religion of cold print rather a religion of the spoken word. As Wilder reminds us, Jesus, as far as we know, did not communicate by writing but by speaking. This *viva voce* communication is: 'more malleable, more personal, more searching' (Lischer R 1987:240).

The picture of Jesus that emerges from the Gospels does bear this out. We see him in various types of converse, with huge crowds, with individuals, with small groups of disciples and in many different settings from synagogue to temple, from family house to mountain. The discourses have an effect which is sometimes immediately felt as a healing or a liberation from sin or a great deepening of faith. They are

'performative utterances', to paraphrase one philosophical view of language. What he says is 'fulfilled in the hearing' (Lk 4:21) of those present and those present acknowledge this fact by paying compliments to his 'authority'.

The tradition of Christian preaching being 'interactive' continues, it is argued, even in the letters of Paul where the genre of the letter underlines the very personal nature of the human relationship. When Paul is separated from his communities of faith either by distance, prison or other circumstances, he writes in a way that makes it clear that he yearns to see them face to face and speak to them in person. A colleague of the writer reports a time when he was obliged to leave his mission station to do a course overseas for an extended period. The mission was run by the lay leaders. The colleague would periodically write letters of encouragement and assurance of continuing concern as well as prayers to the community which were read out at the services. Another colleague who celebrates a televised Mass regularly finds the letters he receives in response to his homilies very moving and replies to them personally.

A further aspect of this *sprachereignis* or speech-phenomenon is that it can create a remarkable 'freedom of speech' in the one proclaiming the message and a sense of liberation in the hearer, the freshness expressed by the disciples in the Gospel (Mk 1:22). Again in Acts this is illustrated by the assertion that the disciples preached fearlessly in the face of determined and sometimes brutal opposition from the representatives of entrenched religious and political interests. An example is the witness of Stephen (Acts 6:8-60).

2.4 A Sacramental Perspective

What we might loosely term the 'Protestant' approach to the theology of the Word has been characterised as being somewhat 'top-down', or as a Catholic lecturer, Robert Butterworth, once put it mischievously 'Rather like a great Monty Python foot, coming down out of heaven and crushing

man' (sic).² There is nothing to be done but to bow down, obey and perhaps to point it out humbly to others. From this perspective to put the Word of God into human or earthly terms might seem blasphemous or redundant, but of course that is what, what we might loosely term the 'Catholic' tradition, has tried to do. The incarnate word of God comes in the flesh speaking a human language. When he uses this language it is a 'speech-event' marked off from others by its message and its effects but it is still a form of Aramaic and might also have been Greek, Hungarian, Kirwandan or Tswana. Hence there is no unique sacred language for the religion of the incarnation since all have become sacred.

Hilkert argues that this extraordinary 'speech-event' is out of the ordinary precisely because it comes among us as human, i.e. is incarnational. Therefore everything that is flesh, and paradoxically ordinary, is potentially helpful for the proclaiming of it.

Whether it is experienced in the preacher's own life or in attending to the stories of others, nothing that is human should remain foreign to preachers if they are to grasp what it means to proclaim that all of humanity has been taken into God and redeemed in Christ (Hilkert 1997:50).

Once again the preaching of Jesus himself makes the point. It is extraordinary speech expressed in 'ordinary', that is concrete, everyday and comprehensible language.

The attitude that this theology then presupposes in the preacher is what Hilkert refers to as the 'contemplative embrace of life'. This is the essential stance of the creative writer and any other serious artist and therefore when it comes to the preacher it is 'all the more necessary for the preacher who is called to enflesh the Word of God' (Hilkert 1997:51).

This, then, is what Hilkert calls 'naming grace' or the use of 'sacramental imagination' (1997:30). As I understand her, for 'imagination' one can read 'creative reflection', a pondering of 'creaturely' and earthly reality in the Spirit, within the community of the church, and discerning the grace which is there and which cries out to be proclaimed in

² Butterworth, R. In a theology lecture attended by the writer at Heythrop, London, c. 1971.

preaching. As Buttrick puts it: 'Pulpits will gain usefulness as preachers venture to name unseen patterns of grace in a fully human world' (1987:18). The approach is in the tradition of Barth's famous remark about preaching with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

However the facts are not always friendly; some would say they rarely are. Therefore the obvious objection to this approach is of course the problem of pain, and the difficulty is therefore 'naming grace in a broken world from which God seems absent' (Hilkert 1997:55). A helpful support of her position is Edward Schillebeeckx who suggests that rather than staring dumbly into the horror and violence around us we look carefully at the best of human responses to suffering, the hope, the protest, the solidarity, and hear there some of the profoundest echoes of the Gospel. He proposes the idea of 'new memories of Jesus' (1997:38,55) as a theological way through the difficulty of a world of great suffering in the two thousand years *anno domini*. Rather than despair we are to look at the situation confronting us and see that:

'Contemporary human experience can disclose new dimensions in the story of Jesus' (1997:55). Of course these 'new memories' of Jesus have to be rooted in the story of Jesus as we have it handed down to us in the texts of the Gospel.³ Unless we do this we run the danger of creating a random Jesus or even a Jesus in our own sinful image and likeness, a 'Rorschach Jesus' as someone once put it. This theological balance is summarised by both the word as read in the text and by reading the book of the world as we know it, especially those passages where the echoes of what we read in the text of the Gospels, as it were, leap at us from the page. And so Hilkert's stripped down definition of preaching is:

'Preaching is the re-telling (my italics) of the story in word and deed' (56).

This theology is phenomenological in the obvious sense that it takes to heart the circumstances of our world,

³ Hilkert's hermeneutic for interpreting what she calls 'texts of terror' (73) is a 'hermeneutics of transformation' (77) and is derived from Ricoeur's approach of finding the meaning not so much behind the text but good news lying 'ahead of the text' (78).

including that which is unpalatable and does not fit easily into a blithe and simple-minded vision of a world cheaply redeemed. But it is not so phenomenological in the sense of allowing us simply to sit back and watch in distant detachment. The naming of grace and the use of the sacramental imagination are to a purpose, the primary one of which is to find and pass on hope, like our friend the beggar finding bread and passing on the hopeful information to one's fellow beggars.

We perhaps live in a time of modest theologies, a reaction perhaps to some disappointment with liberation theology. Every generation learns that it cannot change the world. We do not envisage, Francis Xavier-like converting the globe entire to Christianity any time soon, nor do we necessarily think that would be according to the mind of a God who has seen fit to sanction and favour a world of rich religious diversity. However Christians carry the hope born of experience that when the Word of God enters the consciousness of a committed Christian community, there will be palpable change. The theological question about two Christian villages is relevant here. One celebrates the eucharist for thirty years but without any preaching and the other has preaching for thirty years without the eucharist. Which is the more Christian at the end of that time? The question itself assumes an improvement in the standard of Christian behaviour as well as the level of faith. One of the criteria of judgement of 'Christian' is virtue. Lip service by itself will certainly not do. Modest theologies do not imply that we envisage no change at all.

Hilkert's approach to the Word of God, sees both the world and the text as sacramental or potentially so, for the finding of the Good news is by no means automatic, either in a broken world or a text liberally sprinkled with sentiments racist, anti-women and plain violent. Indeed parts of the scriptures themselves may sprinkles with these sentiments. We require here a 'hermeneutics of transformation' (77). How we use the Gospel and scripture in general will depend on the extent to which we can discern 'fragments of salvation' (107) in this shattered, soiled human habitat called the world. If

we stress sin and humanity sunk in sin, then we will tend to the top-down interpretation. If we retain faith in the fundamental goodness of God's creation, human and the rest, we will adopt a more complex approach, perceiving grace in and around us.

The Good News is therefore located in the community of the church in humble *dialogue* with the text, not in a fundamentalist genuflection. More graphically the church is likened by Hilkert to Jacob wrestling with the angel (73). This is neither a simple nor cost-free hermeneutic though ultimately, as Ricoeur remarks, the anchor of it is good news and the meaning 'lies ahead of the text' (78) to where it is leading us in the fulfilment of the Kingdom. It is therefore a hermeneutic of healing and of liberation and preaching is part and parcel of the liberating process or it is not there at all: 'The power of preaching is rooted in the power of the Spirit of God to bring life out of death, to undo the power of sin, to liberate and to heal' (1997:98). Emmaus (Lk 24) is an ideal scriptural illustration of the process, a passage inviting reflection on the part of the preacher of the Word. The apparently appalling situation is in fact infused with grace but eyes have to be opened to see this so in order that mouths may be opened to proclaim it.

A theology which is able to embrace a world deeply hurt, traumatised and sinful, but still created fundamentally good and still displaying that goodness and a continuing hope for goodness, can certainly embrace human culture and indeed must do so. One manifestation of human culture is obviously language and the rhetorical and eloquent use of it. If we agree with Georges Bernanos in the *Diary of a Country Priest* that in the end 'Tout est grâce' (*All is grace*),⁴ then rhetoric, as found in the manifold cultural traditions of our globe, can argue strongly for a place at the table of preaching, if only as one who waits there, as a servant.

⁴ Bernanos, G. Conclusion to his novel, *The Diary of a Country Priest*. Translated 'Grace is ...everywhere' in the 1937 English translation by Pamela Morris. London: Boriswood. 317.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has attempted to view theological approaches to sin and grace that are relevant to preaching. Very broadly speaking the more sin abounds and requires grace 'from above', the less the preacher is likely to be inclined to make use of the 'worldly' means of the inculturation of rhetoric and vice versa. A good grasp of such theologies is therefore vital to the preacher and the teacher of preaching because preaching is theology in action and when doing such theology the importance of awareness of what one is doing cannot be over stressed. This is the challenge for the churches.

For the Roman Catholic church the issue has perhaps been even more fundamental, namely whether there is a place at all for preaching. In a church which has relied on children's catechetics and schools for evangelisation, sacraments and devotions for the sustenance of spiritual life, and which tended to keep scripture in the hands of specialists, perhaps the question is not over-stated. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) decreed the revival of the homily and thereby proposed a seamless robe of Word and sacrament in the eucharist. However decrees require time to implement and they encounter resistance from conservative social systems such as a hierarchical priesthood lacking in professional accountability. The good news for Catholics is that there is evidence that the 'trickle down' effect of renewed theological understanding is finally happening, at least in the developed world. How this might also happen more effectively in the developing world of Africa, particularly at the training level, will be further explored later in the thesis.

In the following chapter the subject of rhetoric and its relation to preaching are discussed further.

Chapter 3 Descriptions and Definitions

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 mention was made of the historical relationship between preaching and rhetoric. In this chapter we take up this theme in an attempt to come to define preaching in terms of inculturation. Rhetoric is a culture's way of speaking in public. Pulpit rhetoric is no exception. A number of important sub-themes will be broached, such as language and communication, the focusing of attention, types of modern communicators, (elements of whose art might be usefully employed as models for the contemporary preacher), elements of effective preaching and the use of metaphor as a fundamental element in Christian preaching. The chapter tries to draw out some of the most helpful insights about language and the 'art' of public speaking in the hope that, as Buttrick says: 'What a good rhetorician can do is to tell us how speakers speak and people hear in every generation. No wonder that, century after century, preachers have learned from rhetoricians' (Lischer 1995:414).

3.2 Classical Rhetoric

Classical rhetoric was, according to Aristotle 'concerned with the modes of persuasion' (In McKeon 1973:729) and he identified three: 'The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or the apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself' (1973:732). 'The use of persuasive speech is to lead to decisions' (745) and these are often political ones. Despite the insistence on the logic and coherence of the argument itself, Aristotle comments on the character of the speaker that it 'may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses' (732).

For Cicero (106-43BCE) to be a rhetorician, a *rhetor* (the Greek word is from the same root as the Latin *orator*) was part of the humanistic ideal. The highest human achievement was 'effective use of knowledge for guidance of human affairs' (Edwards 1967: 113). The statesman-philosopher

had to be able to talk about anything and do so persuasively. In this sense rhetoric is the pinnacle of education, allowing a person to take a full and active part in the affairs of society. Edwards (113) points out that the rhetorical ideal was, in the Classical world, associated with a free society since the emphasis is on persuasion rather than coercion as the instrument of political power. However, as Walter Ong points out, the underlying assumption of rhetoric is that a point has to be made in the face of opposition. 'With its antagonistic heritage, rhetorical teaching assumed that the aim of more or less all discourse was to prove or disprove a point, against some opposition' (1982:110).

On the face of it there is little here that the Christian could object to as a basic model for preaching. But as we have already seen in Chapter 1, there is a historical muddying of these limpid, classical waters. For Augustine and other Fathers of the church the very word 'rhetoric' is suspect, arriving as it does with uncomfortable Graeco-Roman pagan connotations for the collective Christian mind and memory, and that memory lingers. This is hardly surprising. Paganism was by no means dead and buried in Augustine's day. Even where it was moribund its memory was vivid and a culture which included the bloody thrills of the Roman Circus cannot have been perceived as entirely sound. However, as William Harmless (1995:123-128) demonstrates in his *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, in practice Augustine used and adapted the classical rhetorical art of persuasion in his preaching and particularly in his instruction of catechumens. There is a logic in this: in dealing with people who still have to be fully convinced, one naturally uses the available arts of persuasion.

3.2.1 Christian Reactions

We have seen that a certain Christian wariness of rhetoric is laid at the door of Augustine. However St Paul himself, rhetorical though he is, may be judged to fall illogically into it in 1 Corinthians 2:1-4, where he says that his message was not meant to convince in the ways that philosophy or human wisdom does but rather by the power of

the Spirit. Whether we should take that as a straightforward condemnation of rhetoric is dubious, but it has been understood or conveniently interpreted this way by later authorities. Cyprian (d 258), who had taught rhetoric himself, renounced the classical literature and eloquence in which he was raised. The rigorist Tatian (c 160) just attacked it along with most of Greek philosophy: 'You have invented rhetoric for injustice and calumny...' (In Kennedy 1993:14). Tertullian joins the charge. According to Rodney Kennedy in *The Creative Power of Metaphor*, the attackers of rhetoric use an interpretation of Plato, one which was seen as maintaining that it was not a true art. In the end it seems that everyone had to use pagan thought to back up their Christian theological position!

Against the over-ornate and therefore 'pagan' view of rhetoric favoured by its Christian critics is posited the 'simple Gospel' or the 'plain style'. Savonarola (1452-1498), the incendiary preacher and burner of things ornamental, argued against verbal ornamentation as would future Puritans. Kennedy takes the other side, fiercely determined to unmask what he calls the 'Platonic Rhetorical Heresy' (1993:17). He regards it as the root of any number of evils such as anti-intellectualism and fundamentalism. He argues as a Christian humanist, rejecting Christians who adopt the rationalism of Descartes with its clear and distinct ideas but which have no power to persuade except through logic. Kennedy would surely agree with Pascal (1623-1662) that the heart has its reasons that reason alone cannot comprehend.

Lest all this appear to be an obscure theological disputation confined to Christian divines, it is perhaps time to bring the debate into the present era and point out that there is also a modern and contemporary problem with the word 'rhetoric' which is summed up in the journalistic cliché; 'mere rhetoric'. This is not a theological problem as such. In other words there appears to be a contemporary distrust of words, especially fine ones, in the Anglo-Saxon world and in post-Rwanda Africa. Therefore Buttrick can make the rather unnerving point that:

When some pop sage who has skimmed Marshal McLuhan pontificates 'words are dead', people nod in mute agreement"... "About the

only people left who do believe in the power of the Word are poets and revolutionaries. We, a people of the Word, are wordless (1987:5).

Craddock speaks of a modern 'denial of the efficacy of words' (1981:5) or a 'language crisis' or even a 'word-sickness' (6).

There is a strange ambiguity here. We seem no longer to believe in the power of words and deny their efficacy, but are simultaneously in awe and in fear of them and their potential for evil. Perhaps we moderns would rather words were indeed dead. That we might wish them dead is understandable as we leave a century which produced some of the more murderous demagogues of human history and in which ingeniously crafted violent language has led to systematic genocide from Goebbels's propaganda machine which prefaced the Shoah to Radio Mille Collines (Radio ThoThousandnd Hills) in Rwanda which prepared the ground for the genocide. Sophisticated observers of language have always been aware of the wicked potential in the manipulative orchestration of language, but in an era of the mass media where this evil has been technologically magnified, we are rightly more aware and more wary: 'One other thing which I have learned in a long lifetime is that language is a two-edged weapon. It can be used as freely in the service of tyranny as of liberty. It can be used to elevate and to debase, to tell a truth or promote a lie' says Morris West in his memoirs (1996:102), and adds the words he puts into the mouth of Giordano Bruno in his play, *The Heretic*:

Ever since the Greeks, we have been drunk
with language! We have made a cage of words
And shoved our God inside, as boys confine
A cricket or a locust, to make him sing
A private song! And look what great gob-stopping
Words we use for God's simplicity,
Hypostasis and homocousion!
We burn men for these words - a baboon chatter
Of human ignorance! - we burn men! (102)

Martin Heidigger would say 'amen' to West's point, implicitly doing so in his underlining of the dangerous nature of language: 'Therefore has language, most dangerous of possessions, been given to man...so that he may affirm what he is' (In Craddock 1981:36). Nietzsche's affirmation of what

we are is different from St Francis of Assisi's. Hitler's is at terrible odds with Gandhi's. The worse the misnomer the worse the destruction caused by the misnomer. If we call people cattle slaughter often follows.

3.2.2 Africa and Rhetoric

African culture has generally tended not to buy into extreme theological notions of fallen humanity and so it is with language. God made it good and it is appreciated, certainly by the writer's students who seem positively to enjoy the experience of speaking in public. There are some splendid role-models such as Archbishop Tutu. African-American rhetoric was perhaps made widely known mostly by Martin Luther King whose 'I have a dream' speech/sermon must be one of the most reproduced discourses ever.

However this being said, it would be surprising if the shadow side of rhetoric, in particular demagoguery employed by many corrupt and self-serving leaders, should not be noticed by thoughtful African observers. For some of these bad leaders are nothing if not articulate. One of the frequently used words in the media in the South Africa of today is 'delivery', meaning the actual carrying out of political promises and the realising of the rhetoric of political campaigns. This is an indication of a growing awareness of a politically sophisticated society of the often scandalous gap between the word and the deed, the promise and the product.

On a far more serious note than the use of language to justify corruption and the clinging to power, reflection on the Rwanda horror will surely also entail consideration about the use of language in Africa. The role of the above-mentioned *Radio Mille Collines* has sinister parallels with the use that Goebbels put the then new invention of wireless to work at manipulating Germans psychologically and morally into co-operating with anti-Semitism. The reflection on Rwanda has hardly begun. The issues and indeed the conflict itself, are unresolved. I have personally heard Rwandans speak at length about what happened and effectively say nothing. The episode has struck us dumb.

3.2.3 *The Gospel and Rhetoric*

It is a commonplace to say that the corruption of the best things tends to the worst. As history illustrates, this has been all too true with regard to rhetoric or eloquence. Can the Christian then object to eloquence as such by way of reaction? Certainly some have tried, but any Christian particularly unhappy with eloquence needs to re-read and listen to the texts of the scriptures, in particular the Gospels, there to note that the Word of God is also couched in eloquence or rhetoric. This fact is consistent with the theology of the 'speech-event' already discussed. Certainly this is a new kind of discourse but it is still expressed in the common coin of a language and with a style and in a cultural context that makes it accessible and attractive. In short, it is an inculturated discourse.

One might argue that Shakespeare's influence on English is so particular and profound that he is the English language. Even if this makes the point in a hyperbolic way that Shakespeare's influence is quite beyond any other, it has to be pointed out that Shakespeare still had to communicate with Tudor English speakers. He undoubtedly stretched and developed the English language remarkably, but did so without excluding even the 'groundlings' crowding into the Globe theatre. The message may transcend the medium in a sense but not to the extent that makes it incomprehensible.

So too with Christianity which does bring something radically new but the rhetoric of which cannot be hermetically sealed from the cultural and linguistic context in which it arises without being a private language.

Thanks to witness of the written Gospels it is possible to argue that pre-eminent among the greats in the history of religious rhetoric, or eloquence, is Jesus of Nazareth himself. His story-telling has impacted on whole cultures and languages, his parables being used unconsciously in everyday speech in many languages in sayings such as 'Good Samaritan', 'Prodigal Son', 'sheep and goats' the 'eleventh hour'. Here Jesus is part of a venerable Jewish religious rhetorical tradition of the use of story, metaphor and striking, colourful, but everyday ordinary images for maximum effect

upon ordinary people. He owes much to the prophetic tradition and here it is the concrete and dramatic which we remember - the song of the vineyard (Is 5:1-7) or Nathan's story of the wealthy man who stole the poor man's only ewe (2 Sam 12:1-15). These stories or images are often deceptively familiar in the mouth of Jesus until the shock comes with the subversive twist. If being memorable is a criterion of eloquence then the parables must rate very highly. As far as C.H. Dodd is concerned the memorable quality is merely the beginning of the process which the parable can put in train. A parable is described by him as 'A metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought' (In Craddock 1981:65).

3.3 *Homo Loquens*

Rhetoric, then, or eloquence, is not a uniquely pagan art but a human art. It is also intimately connected to the traditions of evangelistic religions. For good and oftentimes for ill, we are 'homo loquens'. Even though language can lie and kill and even lead to genocide it is nonetheless and simultaneously miraculous, and it is one of the principal things that makes us distinctive as humans and in which respect we can be said to be made in the image of a God who speaks. Martin Heidegger called language, 'the world-in-consciousness' and 'the house of being' (In Buttrick 1987:7). Hence we are obliged to live with and in and through speech. The 'words are dead' school of thought, we notice, uses a slogan, a simple rhetorical technique.

3.3.1 *A Phenomenological Look at Language and Rhetoric*

The phenomenological approach to language of the theologian and preacher David Buttrick helps to restore a cool sanity to the subject. Much of his tome *Moves and Structures* is concerned with analysing how language works and what makes the difference between it being effective and ineffective. His context is North American western, scientific and literate, where the medium of print has long

influenced speech with its self-contained, linear structure, economy of expression and closure. We will discuss the subject of orality in Chapter 6. However Buttrick's is a challenging work for any verbal communicator, by no means just the preacher, but it is clear that he has no time for the latter who shirks what he considers to be the necessary homework. 'While preaching is not an art, it is artful...The odd idea that preachers whose hearts have been strangely warmed will spill out sermons instantly compelling and exquisitely formed, is, of course nonsense.' (1987:37). The implication, I take it, is that even the Wesleys of this world, who had powerful religious experiences of conversion, had to do their homiletical homework.

So much for the simple-minded inspirational school of preaching. Perhaps Buttrick would allow that some exceptional individuals can preach in this way, but his is a book for the unexceptional. Therefore on whether preachers are born or made he holds the middle view that: 'Though some preachers are unusually gifted, preachers are not born, they are trained. We learn our homiletic skills' (37). This is good news for both the student and the teacher. It affirms that the pedagogy of homiletics is an undertaking in the realm of the possible.

From this position flows the need to look at what the goal of preaching is and, focusing on that, adopt those speech strategies which most effectively achieve the desired goal. However first some notion of the nature of language itself is of use both to the thoughtful public speaker and the reflective preacher. The fact that language is routinely derided today does not mean that it is being abandoned. On the contrary, paradoxically, the greater suspicion of language the more we seem to speak. Nor is the spoken word being killed off by the moving image as has been routinely predicted since the invention of the cinema. No one is talking about a return to the silent movies but there is much talk about the quality of the screen play. The more books are serialised on television, the more copies they sell. Audio books are being discovered as a new way of 'reading'. It is a

moot point whether blindness or profound deafness is the greatest barrier to an understanding of the world.

The inescapable and abiding fact is that we live in and by language. We work, create, do, within language whose words give meaning to our life and world and make the very way we live possible. There are very few human activities we could conduct without words, from putting up a house to educating a child to engaging in commerce to organising a political party to shaping a society. Many of these areas of discourse involve persuasion and the moving of hearers through eloquence. Despite the much quoted activist credo of 'deeds, not words', in fact many of the deeds implicitly being encouraged here either involve words or actually are words. Making peace involves many words, as does a vast spectrum of other worthy human actions - thinking, inventing, intervening, leading, recognising, organising, entertaining, loving, praying. In an age of democratic consultation, the meeting is an indispensable step to achieving anything, and meetings involve many, many words.

As already observed, like all things human these activities which are intimately involved with words can be manipulated, hijacked and perverted to the service of evil. But it fails to follow that we can opt out of language and make do with 'dumb' acts. It suffices to imagine the chaos that would occur if the human race were to be suddenly struck speechless. The Babylon myth tells a deep truth - without language human activity becomes impossible, the transgressing tower cannot be built, but neither can anything else.

3.4 Models of Communication

Buttrick (1987:178) proposes two broad models purporting to explain the nature of communication which are of interest to the preacher. One is the somewhat rationalist, technological communication model - words as a code or medium of communication sent out by a 'transmitter' and picked up by a 'receiver'. Communication is, then defined as the accurate transmission and reception of a message. In preaching the model needs some nuancing since the sender is God and the transmission must pass through an intermediary, the preacher,

(a booster station perhaps!). In this model 'truth' is associated with accuracy of transmission. Problems of communication are to do with obstructions in the process of transmission, either on the part of the sender or the receiver.

The value of this model for preaching is the admirable concern for clarity and focus. Descartes would have approved. Are people actually able to hear what is being said? - a question which even experienced preachers often fail to check when preaching in a new setting. Is the language within the social 'thesaurus'? Is the message interesting enough to hold the attention? Is it effective in some definable, even quantifiable way? These are important elements of the process which this model highlights while by no means telling the whole story, since the model ultimately is built on limited rationalist foundations and reason, as Pascal observed, is not the whole story.

It can of course be complemented somewhat by the 'expressive' model of communication which stresses that words spring out of experience of the world and are often associated with deep emotions and the domain of feeling. 'Underlying language is a kind of primal wonder' says Buttrick (1987:179) and is therefore often associated with the experience of the unconscious and the numinous. These are realities beyond the observable, rational and empirical. The theory of language here could be termed 'romantic' as in the romantic poetry which led a reaction against 19th Century scientific rationalism in literature or the more recent lyricism of Sengor.

The 'expressive' model can be seductive for some preachers who are wont always to express themselves in an emotional fashion, sometimes to the detriment of thought. The romantic undertone also appeals to the creative individualist. Herein lies the weakness since language is, if anything, social and preaching is the preaching of the message of a social group. For Christians, preaching ultimately arises out of a history, not just of the personal experience of an inspired individual. 'Our Christian faith is

both social and historical' observes Buttrick (179) by way of critical summary of the shortcomings of this model.

Clearly we need an approach to language and speech which is more adequate than mere communication or self-expression. Buttrick's suggestion is the experiential notion of the 'givenness' of language. The form of communication called language is not something we invent for ourselves but something that we receive by being born into it and into a specific tongue and dialect with all their cultural and historical connotations. Thus: 'To learn a language is not merely to memorise a list of arbitrary signs, but, rather, to put on a mind, the mind of an age in fact. In learning language, we also learn to think about our world, our ways and ourselves in some particular fashion' (180).

Naturally this putting on a mind must needs be done with all the strengths and inevitable limitations this implies. This mentality and the way we think are constantly changing. Furthermore we as individuals may have a contribution to make in this process, but even a linguistic genius like Shakespeare was also a receiver of Tudor English and Tudor culture and history as a given. If language is a product of society then in that sense even Shakespeare is a product of his society.

There are manifold subtleties in this theory, for example the phenomenon of linguistic subcultures to which we all belong, perhaps simultaneously - the sports team, the Pirates' supporters club, the Cancer Association, which have developed their own codes and argot which might not be immediately understood by outsiders either by accident or design. However, the basic fact remains that language is a social given into which we come, in theological terms, a kind of grace, freely received. And yet, as Buttrick again observes:

Social language itself seems to suggest a world beyond the world constructed by language...we can only reach into our mysteries via language. How else? ..We are always *homo loquens*; our glory and our finitude. We explore the 'beyond our world' only by dancing on the edges of language(182).

When we think of the poet or the philosopher struggling to express the true, the beautiful and the enduring, perhaps

what is ultimately inexpressible, we have an idea of what Buttrick means by this dancing image. While language is undeniably a given, even a 'grace' and we therefore are constrained by its limits, at the same time it refuses to be stiff and static but rather, as it were, invites the creative individual and community to explore its outer limits in order to describe what might seem indescribable. This vision of language is one into which religious language and by extension the language of preaching can fit reasonably comfortably.

3.5 Religious Language and Christian Discourse.

If language in its serious usage is in the business of a pointing to and a bringing to consciousness of the mysteries of our existence, then the bringing to consciousness of the 'Presence-in-Absence God' is perhaps the most important task of human language. Preaching is a language which is meant to bring out, to disclose. Preaching is communication, certainly, but much more mediation. It is evocation but also invocation. This model claims the middle ground between language as, on the one hand impenetrable and perhaps narcissistic glossolalia, and on the other, the crystal-clear, distinct, rational discourses of the logical positivists of yesteryear.

Buttrick's analysis of the religious language we call preaching, however, ultimately rests on an analysis of what happens in an ordinary conversation. In conversation we make what he calls 'moves'. These are somewhat similar to points or topics and a homily, like a conversation, is an ordered series of these 'moves'. In a conversation we sometimes make several of these in quick succession and they are logically linked, as any tracing back of the course of a conversation will easily reveal. Hence our interlocutor can understand where we are going. However this cannot be done effectively in a public discourse like a homily which is not a dialogue in the same sense as a conversation and has to be taken in by a large number of people of varying degrees of concentration and mental aptitude. Hence the obvious and traditionally recognised need to make fewer 'moves' and to make them more

slowly, deliberately and in an ordered and memorable way. Buttrick's view here covers public speaking in general and preaching in particular:

Public speaking requires the formation of separate 'moves', long enough to structure in consciousness, but not so long as to strain consciousness. In a word then, public speaking involves the designing of language in modules of meaning for group consciousness (35).

The concept of 'common consciousness' is developed into 'common cultural consciousness' (36) to indicate that that rhetoric admits of different cultural expressions while having a human universality. 'After all rhetoric is an ancient wisdom that undergirds all human conversation' (40). This is a point that observers or hearers of oral cultures should have little trouble accepting.

Therefore the aim of public discourse is defined as the 'settling into consciousness' of an important message. All Christian discourse has the aim not just of settling something into the faith consciousness of the hearers, but also of forming that faith consciousness. Although based upon ordinary conversational speech this form of discourse is rather different from that which goes in one ear and out of the other. While we do not want to be ignored while making small talk, casual conversations are not supposed to 'settle into consciousness' in the way that a discourse on political or religious matters are. In other words, the much-vaunted 'conversational style' of public discourse, though based on what happens in conversation, is in fact artfully cognisant of important differences. While based on some fundamental properties of ordinary conversation, it is far more than just that.

3.6 Building Blocks of Effective Preaching.

Despite its inherent interest, space is limited in this study for a detailed exposition of Buttrick's core concept of the linguistic 'move', the building block of both conversation and formal oratory. A few points will suffice. He stresses that aim of the 'move' is the creation of images. To do otherwise is to risk making no impact: 'Ideas without depiction are apt to be abstract and oddly enough,

unconvincing' (29). Experience teaches that it is the idea concretely expressed which 'settles in consciousness' or 'sticks in the memory' as we might more concretely express it. Craddock quotes Bonhoeffer in support of the view that what works in preaching, as illustrated by Jesus of Nazareth's contributions, is the concrete: 'The church must be able to say the Word of God, the Word of authority, here and now, in the most concrete way possible, from knowledge of the situation' (1981:72). Intent as he is to break the abstract mould of the sermon of the 1970s and 80s, Craddock goes further and insists that images are not an optional extra but essential to preaching: 'Images are not, in fact, to be regarded as illustrative but rather as essential to the form and inseparable from the content of the entire sermon' (80).

The view of the very practical Bishop Kenneth Untener on this is similar. He identifies the two principal criteria for a good homily as '(1) The people remember, and (2) the memory helps' (1999:99). In other words, something of the homily sticks in the memory and remains helpful for the faith-life of the one who remembers it. The long term over against the immediate but ephemeral impact is the issue here. Untener takes the long view and the long term benefit of preaching. Not of the 'quick fix' school, he expresses a caveat about the entertaining sermon. People will always be grateful if they have enjoyed the preaching and found it stimulating, he observes. But the fact that: 'They laughed and were taken with our stories' (99) tells us nothing about the true, long-term worth of the words spoken, the extent to which they have 'settled into consciousness'. He also offers an interesting warning about the one-off, specialised performance of the itinerant preacher. 'They can be dramatic, bring tales from around the world, mesmerise with stunning stories, and everyone is taken with it. But even if the people remember, will the memory help?' (99). The question is a good if unsettling one for the travelling preacher who does the rounds and perhaps consoling for the one who opts for a more stable ministry.

The first 'move' is crucial and Buttrick believes it absolutely must begin or be introduced strongly. Hence the clever, oblique but confusing beginning he dramatically dismisses saying that 'as a general practice the convention of the oblique start is devastating' (37). In this he is again well supported by the informal research done by Bishop Untener whose respondents consistently asked preachers to get straight to the point or even begin right in the middle of the matter. No doubt both would denounce that weakest of weak beginnings which is to apologise for the poverty of what is to be presented and the unworthiness and incompetence of the presenter.

Buttrick does not believe that congregations need waking up after the scripture readings. According to the studies he reports, after the pause between the hearing of the scripture and the beginning of the homily, congregations are usually attentive, alert and expectant. This pregnant pause is the moment to capitalise upon and the speaker has but a few sentences, perhaps only three, to do so before the well-focused attention of the hearers relaxes and diminishes. These few sentences must therefore be used to establish clearly and interestingly what it is the speaker will be talking about. If the speaker fails to do this Buttrick asserts that the very first 'move' will not be taken in: 'If we do not enter a move with strength, the entire move may fail to form in consciousness and may simply delete from the overall structure of the sermon' (39). Therefore the first sentence in every point or 'move' is utterly crucial, not just the opening one. It has to establish a firm focus plus a clear, logical connection to the previous 'move' and a setting of the mood. As we peruse Buttrick's analysis it becomes apparent that to compose our preaching simply by instinct is inadequate and this applies to all public speakers.

As with the beginning, so the end: 'If strong opening statements to moves are essential, so also are firm closures...we ensure that a single understanding will form in congregational consciousness' (50). Here Buttrick is insisting on a firm 'rounding off' of a point before moving

to another. This is done by a return to the original idea with which the 'move' was opened, sometimes by such a simple device as repeating the opening statement. This signals clearly to the hearers that the speaker is about to move on and they should therefore focus their attention on what is coming and off that which has gone.

We all know the experience of not quite knowing where a speaker is. Buttrick describes the experience well and attributes it to unclear starts and finishes of points.

Fuzzy starts and finishes will produce an odd effect in the consciousness of a congregation. People will catch only occasional glimpses of meaning amid a flow of murky verbiage. They will fight to hold attention against involuntary wanderings of the mind (53).

Inattention can also be produced by making the internal structure of a 'move' too complex. Here Buttrick dares to become mathematical and claims that studies have indicated that the maximum number of sub-points, or 'developmental systems' as he calls them, per 'move' is three: 'Recent studies confirm the rule, for when human beings must juggle more than three subordinate systems, consciousness tends to "freak out"' (1987:49). Again, common sense and experience would confirm this finding. 'Too much material'; 'he tried to say too much'; 'she hadn't decided what she wanted to say', are frequent criticisms of public speakers.

Such attention to detail can appear as the assault of a syntactical logical positivist on language, or as a scholastic comeback. There may be objections from different viewpoints, for example that it is too linear and that this is not how attention works in every cultural setting. Also in an oral culture people may have a much longer attention span than in television societies, or that the oblique beginning is a well known gambit which some peoples appreciate. The pearl of great price which it seems to me is at the heart of this careful analysis is the attention of the hearers. On this Buttrick is ruthless and unforgiving towards the public speaker and asserts uncompromisingly that, 'When congregations drift off into wanderings of the mind it is always [my italics]the fault of the speaker' (39). And, 'Preachers should realise that they are in charge of focus.

With language they focus congregational consciousness on some field of meaning' (50).

This is a disarmingly simple view - no one else is able to take responsibility for attracting and holding the attention of the hearers. However whether this responsibility is widely accepted by speakers is highly dubious. The complaint of the 'short attention span' of modern congregations, particularly of young people, is an often repeated cliché. Such observations undoubtedly hold some truth, but they still do not absolve the speaker of the fundamental responsibility of getting and holding the attention or mindfulness of the hearers. Other media which use words seem quite capable of engaging the attention of people, including younger ones, for considerably longer than their 'short attention span' would lead us to suppose.

Is this a western problem only?. The writer can report having attended numerous services for African people where it was clear that the congregation was suffering from considerable 'wanderings of the mind' during lengthy discourses by representatives of the culture who, one felt, should have known better how to manage their people's mindfulness or lack of it. Similar observations were made before the democratic elections in South Africa where members of some parties frequently had to sit for hours in hot stadiums listening to interminable speeches with what can only be described as loyal stoicism.

With regard to public speaking in the political context it occurs to me that a possible explanation for the above phenomenon is non-democratic leadership which does not feel the need to woo the attention of people. The 'pontifical' and long-winded style betrays a complacent leader who is innocent of the idea of loss of office through failure to communicate. Fidel Castro's twelve hour speeches are a good if extreme example. One has either to be extremely charismatic or all-powerful or both to attract crowds to such discourses.

In the church setting a hierarchical system can insulate a preacher from the possibility of dismissal. Add to this that in the Catholic church in South Africa a certain amount of care is taken not to resemble overly the Zionist or

'indigenous' churches whose livelier speaking style with far more congregational participation is often considered to betray lack of learning and to be lower down on the social scale and you have a recipe for dullness. However the Catholic version of the lack of learning can be betrayed in an exclusively pious style with scant theological meat which certainly risks leading to 'wanderings of the mind'.

The frequency with which preaching fails to engage the attention of congregations across cultures remains a puzzle. Indeed, as mentioned in the Introduction, dull preaching is a cliché, the subject of jokes and caricatures. In literature and film the preacher is frequently portrayed as an eccentric or an innocent buffoon, hapless and ineffective, especially in the pulpit. A very recent example is in the film *Dogma*. A tentative conclusion is that preaching is simply much more difficult than it appears. The fact that such an experienced preacher and teacher of preaching as Buttrick treats of the ever so basic rhetorical strategy of summoning and keeping the attention so thoroughly indicates that he understands this.

3.7 *Developing the Homily*

Buttrick's aim of 'settling into consciousness' and Untener's concept of long term helpful memories are only a beginning, if an absolutely indispensable one. Indeed much will depend on how this hard-won attention is then used to develop the homily. Commentators agree that it can easily be squandered. For example, the telling of stories gains attention, but as McNutt (1960:83) and Untener point out (73), they vary greatly in their inherent capacity to put across the message of the Gospel, and can positively distract from that end. So once the attention has been commanded it is not merely a question of an inpouring of information. Apart from the distinct danger of this precipitating a sudden loss of attention, there are questions of theology which have already been referred to. In contradistinction to the missionary such as de Acosta, confronted with an apparent theological *tabula rasa* (in the sense of having no formal knowledge of Christianity), and wanting to impart much

information by much repetition, Buttrick speaks of 'bringing out' or 'bringing into consciousness'. Buttrick takes an explicit stand against a rationalist and didactic view of preaching: 'Thus we have deliberately bypassed the rationalist definitions of preaching in didactic homiletics. Preachers do not explicate things; they explore symbols' (1987:41). This is fundamentally because we as Christians come to the understanding of God through symbols. In addition the symbol is what engages the mind in a manner which elicits commitment. Thus Christian eloquence, as McNutt insists (79, 82), will tend to the language of imagery and employ illustration, metaphor and concrete examples. Apart from being theologically apt this insistence on images also provides the promise of the *sine qua non* of attention. McNutt (79) reminds us of the Arabian proverb which does what it recommends: "A great orator turns his listeners' ears into eyes".

The preacher creates images because this is the rhetorically and theologically appropriate way to proceed. But images are happily part of a world become accustomed to cinema and TV and Buttrick uses the world of film to illustrate a number of things about the point of view the preacher adopts. The technical term in criticism of cinema is the 'gaze' of the film maker which becomes the 'gaze' or viewpoint of the cinema audience. There was a time when films were made with a single, fixed camera which resulted in a single 'gaze'. The camera was thought of at this time as an instrument which captured images in an 'objective' fashion. The preacher who attempts to describe things in a dry, rational and didactic manner is approximating to this outmoded cinematographical method.

Film makers now understand that perception and consciousness are not like the single, fixed camera. So today multiple cameras catch the action from many angles, from above and below, from near and far, at high speed, normal speed or in slow motion. Sometimes the camera itself is moving in a car or is being carried by a running person to give the point of view of someone in flight or pursuit. The number of points of view or 'gazes' is potentially infinite.

So too with preaching. In each 'move' the preacher 'stands' somewhere, has a point of view and directs the gaze. If the 'shot' is of Jesus of Nazareth healing a sick person, it could be from the back of the crowd or close in from among the disciples or from above. Modern film uses the technique of zooming into the face to get the audience more emotionally involved. Proximity makes it personal. Thus the preacher can 'zoom in' closely to the person of Jesus or another Gospel personage in order to produce a higher degree of emotional involvement in the story.

There are wide shots and narrow shots in film and therefore the preacher can suggest that the congregation look at the whole world or at the cave in Bethlehem or into the face of a disciple or at a mustard seed.

Buttrick's point is that point of view is inescapable and therefore it is imperative for the preacher to understand what point of view she is taking up. And so he urges the preacher firstly to acknowledge the taking up of a point of view and then to do so in a conscious way which serves the message. At the very least confusion should be avoided by having too many changes of point of view or 'gazes'. His rule of thumb is one point of view per 'move'. Otherwise the sermon or homily risks becoming like a pop video where the camera cuts to another viewpoint, often brutally different from the last one, almost every second, producing a most disorientating post-modern effect of fragmentation in which meaning is not only lost but meaningless and even nihilism seem to be the desired result.

Buttrick's meticulous approach would warn us that the creation of a series of images through 'moves' must have a central focus: 'Above all, moves must be unified. They must make a single statement' (49) he says. 'Moves' are the elaboration of one single idea which can be expressed in a simple theological statement, such as 'God is love'. This advice is repeated by most modern teachers of the preaching art - preach about one central idea which you can express succinctly in a brief phrase. Untener calls it a single 'pearl' the one thing you really wish to say and can do so clearly.

Conjoining 'moves' into a satisfactory unified sequence is an area of much discussion. In the Middle Ages the tendency was to pile up point upon point so that the discourse seems to have become somewhat like a series of mighty and redoubtable blows. At a later, tidier-minded period the assumption was that there was something inherently helpful about a threefold division. Ever wary of loss of attention Buttrick disagrees bluntly any enumeration, at least for contemporary congregations, saying it

introduces time-consciousness to sermons, and thus, enlarges congregational restlessness. After ten minutes of 'First', when a preacher announces 'Second', you can almost hear the congregation groaning...Studies show that numbered sentences almost always 'delete' in consciousness (69).

The message is that the preacher should have a clear structure in mind with one point and a limited number of sub-points, but to enumerate this structure to a modern congregation is unwise. Craddock's critique of this phenomenon springs from his unhappiness with the deductive method of preaching, a model which takes the congregation through a logical series of points for the purpose of proving a main thesis which is announced at the beginning - the lecture model.

3.8 The Preacher as Rhetorician

From the vital perspective of the need to gain and hold the attention and then to cause the message to settle into consciousness, it might be useful to ask what kind of rhetorician the preacher most resembles and therefore what model the preacher might usefully study. Profane as this may sound the 'endangered' *democratic* politician may not be that far off the mark. Here are speakers who are or ought to be acutely aware that they have limited valuable opportunities to communicate to the public and hence they naturally make the most of these. They do not assume that their auditors, even loyal party members, are necessarily always razor sharp and receptive to what they have to say. If they know that television will broadcast only a sound-bite they take the trouble to craft it well and make it effective. They certainly see their rhetorical task as to convince, to move

and to inspire. In order to do this they need to find ways of causing their political message to settle into the consciousness of the members of their audience. Time and its use are crucial factors for them. They do not need to be told of the Voltarian dangers of speaking too long and fulsomely. To be boring is abhorrent to them as it brings disrepute upon their message and the party. They understand that they have to appeal not just to the reasoning faculties of their audience but also and more particularly to the feeling faculties, the emotions.

A famous example is Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech. Another is Paul Keating's Redfern speech on reconciliation between white and aboriginal Australians. More locally we have Nelson Mandela's final words from the dock at Rivonia:

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to the struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die (1994:354).

These men take ordinary words and make them work in powerful and unusual ways to move ordinary people.

Preachers are sometimes criticised for being too theatrical, but Michael Moynahan¹ defends the virtue and utility of the theatrical persona and how amateur dramatics can play an important place in formation as a preacher. An actor is not strictly speaking a rhetorician but many a rhetorician has studied the actor's technique with some envy. Preacher as actor - the model sounds shaky. But some aspects of the actor's craft are helpful. The first is professionalism - the actor's thorough competence. The actor may have to take a part he does not like, but he does it, not just for the money, but for the professional challenge. An actress may be ill, but she performs anyway and the truly professional does it without the audience noticing. Another might have played the part a hundred, boring times but still performs with freshness and verve. Having control of the script is another

¹ Moynahan, Michael SJ. Melbourne, Australia. 8/5/2000 (Interview).

¹ Moynahan, Michael SJ. Melbourne, Australia. 8/5/2000 (Interview).

impressive aspect of the actor and it is precisely by knowing the lines by heart that the actor then has the mental and emotional 'room' to interpret them and invest them with emotional power.

But it is perhaps the donning of the persona where the theatre may have the most important message for the preacher. The actor becomes believable as someone he or she is decidedly not by truly understanding the character and entering into that character. And when the character's lines are spoken the actor understands what those lines are supposed to effect. The actor understands what the action is - persuasion, manipulation, edification, obfuscation; the list is endless.

The Christian preacher is putting across the Word of God as spoken in Jesus Christ. Being truly privy to the mind and mentality of Jesus and understanding what he attempted and still attempts to do in the speaking of his word, is therefore of the utmost importance. In this sense, the putting on of the persona or mask is revelatory, revealing rather than hiding the truth. The preacher who penetrates the mind and mentality of Jesus Christ will show forth the message with authority and the one who does not will be revealed as a charlatan. In either case the mask or persona, paradoxically, reveals the truth.

A final model which the aspirant preacher might do well to consider is that of the newspaper columnist, someone who is striving to put across an opinion and to stimulate thought and reflection in the readers. The sheer discipline of producing a weekly offering for a readership which must be wooed makes the model extremely apposite. The need to achieve a consistently high standard and to do so by doing one's homework are also apropos as are the needs to be well-informed by being well-read. An attractive command of the language is another obvious parallel, in this case written rather than spoken. The historian-journalist Paul Johnson illustrates some of these points elegantly in an article on the art of writing a column. Attracting and holding attention is also his preoccupation:.

Remember it is the easiest thing in the world for (your readers) to stop reading your article after the first

paragraph, or half-way through, or at any stage. They do not even need to take a conscious decision. Their eye simply slips off the page. Or the piece is put down because the phone rings and never taken up again. And if your column is not finished one week, it may not even be begun the next. Remember: you are always the suppliant, it is the reader who is the haughty beloved. Woo him or her in every paragraph, in every sentence, with every word - and the hardest thing to do, never seem to do so. Never grab him by the lapels ...or bellow into an indifferent ear (1996:xviii).

The following salty pieces of advice could well be transferred lock stock and barrel to the aspirant preacher.

No columnist will survive long without being to some extent a man or woman of the world... Every good columnist carries a library around in his head... never exploit your power as a columnist for personal ends... No showing off. No erudition for its own sake. Poetry to be quoted only on rare occasions - and be certain the reader wants to hear it. No Greek, ever. No Latin either, unless you are absolutely sure of yourself and your readers... All the same, be yourself. An impersonal column is a contradiction in terms, like a discreet diary... One last point. Life is sad for most people. It is doubtless sad for you too...By all means use your column to criticise the great, and right abuses and shake governments and bring low the proud. But make the point, from time to time, that we live in an infinitely beautiful world, surprisingly full of fascinating people, and heart-warming happenings, and laughter, and that God is in his heaven (1996:xv-xx).

It seems even the columnist feels the need to deliver some occasional good news.

In conclusion to this section then, we can say that we cannot avoid rhetoric even if we can avoid the use of the word 'rhetoric' itself. Since speech, including public and hortatory speech, is so much part and parcel of how our world works, opting out is not an option either for the Christian or anyone else. We cannot move out of the 'house of language' and remain human. That this house has been and will continue to be a home of corruption is a reflection of the human condition. Engagement, rather than futile disengagement is more likely to bring forth the good and keep the corruption in check.

For a model of language for preaching we need go no further than the idea of linguistic 'grace', the easily understood notion that we receive language and in this receiving become conscious of the world. With maturity we can become givers as well as receivers, channels of grace as well as vessels. Preaching is not just the imparting of clear information, nor is it just the moving of hearts by hot

words. Rather it is the enabling of people to become conscious in a Christian way of the world with all its mysteries. The process is most striking in the child but in fact lasts a lifetime and discourse is the catalyst for this continuing sounding of the mystery of our existence. The process always takes place within a linguistic community. Even the internet is such a community.

Eloquence and therefore perhaps sacred eloquence can be taught, other things being equal. This requires a close analysis of what is and is not effective in public discourse. The getting and the keeping of attention is a *sine qua non* and the 'move' or point and the careful ordering of moves are pivotal concerns. The responsibility of focusing the attention and preventing 'wanderings of the mind' is no one else but the speaker's. African preachers may not have such a challenge as their western counterparts but in the end it is a universal. And modernity and post-modernity are on the march.

The techniques of film can be highly instructive. In addition all preachers might do well to look to the effective democratic politician whose brief is to persuade rather than coerce as a helpful secular model. The rant and cant of the un-elected leader is inappropriate and ineffective. The virtues, talents and disciplines of the consistently readable weekly columnist are admirable qualities which can be profitably studied and emulated, *mutatis mutandis*.

3.8.1 Towards a Definition of Preaching

'Preaching is the re-telling of the story in word and deed' is Hilker's definition (1997:56) which self-effacingly leaves out the teller. 'A man speaking to men' (sic) was Wordsworth's crisp, democratic definition of the poet's art. Wordsworth is provocative in his self-conscious egalitarianism. Whether moved by the Muse or inspired the Spirit of God, it is certainly advisable for the wordsmith to foster the virtue of humility. The God-like power of speech is exercised by people who are all too human. Nonetheless, poets and preachers seem destined to do so on behalf of others and to verbalise visions which have consequences in

the ideas and actions they engender. Hence presiding at the podium or in the pulpit tends to be viewed as a gift and a vocation.

For believers the Word of God is creative and so, interestingly, the existential phenomenologist Georges Gusdorf strikes a recognisable chord here, saying that 'whoever finds and speaks *the right word* is involved in creation out of chaos, and whoever *keeps his word* creates value in the world' (Craddock 1981:34). This is not democratic in the same sense that everyone has the vote or that every person may write poetry if they wish or that every Christian has the duty to communicate the Good News. Some have the vocation to engage in particular and peculiar forms of discourse and preaching is one of these. From the point of view of a high theology of the Word of God this is a vocation not to be taken lightly for: 'Preaching the Word of God is the Word of God' (Craddock 1981:39), as the Later *Helvetic Confession* confesses.

Having considered the theology of preaching and also examined preaching in its historical dialectic with secular eloquence (rhetoric) as well as looking at the contemporary revival of preaching, we are now in a position to attempt to define what this particular form of communication called preaching actually is.

Preaching, in the sense of effective preaching, is one of those things like goodness or beauty, that we recognise when we see or hear it, but find it slippery to describe. Hence the feminist theologian and broadcaster Sarah Maitland's (1995: XII) work with words is well named as 'artistic theology'. Judgements about art are notoriously difficult to make. On the other extremity of the scale we know when something is not preaching despite the best intentions of the priest or minister.

Moving to the diametrical end of the scale there is the poor speaker who somehow contrives to preach effectively or at least to some people. In one extreme case the person is rarely known to complete a sentence but some hold him up as an inspiring example of the struggle all of us wage against

inarticulateness in the face of mystery. The worth of the messenger is the message in these cases.

What, then, is this kind of discourse that is engaged in by these specially designated people to be delivered in these carefully designated places at moments of particular significance? Must preaching be different at all from other forms of public speech? Should it, for example, as it often does, have an intonation, inflexion, vocabulary and set of gestures which are unique to it? The answers to these questions will be affected by what we think is the heart of the matter of preaching.

We should now look briefly at the terms we use and have been using in this thesis. The word *homily* is generally preferred these days to the portentous sounding *sermon*. However, as the doyen of 19th North American preaching John Broadus points out, the two have similar and quite humble etymologies.

The Greek word *homilia* signifies conversation, mutual talk, and so, familiar discourse...The Latin word *sermo* (from which we get *sermon*) has the same sense, of conversation, talk and discussion. It is instructive to observe that the early Christians did not apply to their public teachings the name given to the orations of Demosthenes and Cicero, but called them talks or familiar discourses. From this word *homily* has been derived the term *homiletics*, as denoting the science or art of Christian discourse...(Lischer R 1987:234).

It seems they were content to employ a modest medium to propagate their extraordinary message. Or perhaps they felt they simply could not compete with pagan rhetorical method, apart from being affronted by its distasteful origins.

However words change and their meanings shift with time, and by the Middle Ages the homily appears to have become a kind of line by line commentary on a text of scripture, and anchored in a liturgical setting, normally the eucharist. The sermon tended to be preaching on a single line of the text at greater length according to the directions of the prevailing ideas about preaching summed up in what was known as the *ars praedicandi*, or manuals on how to preach (Thornton & Washburn 1999:16). This sounds rather like a kind of catechesis. Here again simplicity is the keynote, but this has to be contrasted to the obviously more entertaining offerings of the wandering preachers of the day.

It may also be instructive, by contrast to the early and Medieval churches, to look ahead to the France of the 17th Century and the funeral orations of Bossuet and note that when the Prince of Condé or a similar dignitary is being laid to rest, not only is the term used for this particular type of sacred oratory very definitely an *oration* but it is of the grand and classical style that would have been recognised by Demosthenes and Cicero. This was definitely rhetoric even if claiming to be sacred by taking place in venues like Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Some would doubt whether such orations were preaching in the sense of preaching the Gospel in humility and simplicity with directness. Rather they would see these as glittering entertainment for the pampered elite of French society, frills, wigs and all. The etymology that Broadus invokes suggests that the high style or the grand manner were avoided by the early church but Kennedy (1993:15) hints that Broadus may have an axe to grind here. Even if Broadus is broadly correct, it does not mean that the early church preachers lacked eloquence in some sense of the word even if they did not all employ Ciceronian style.

At this point the preaching revival may help us out somewhat. The history of preaching, as we have seen, suggests that preaching revivals involved a return to a certain effective directness, a rhetoric or eloquence that can be understood and appreciated by the uneducated and the poor. This does not necessarily mean that such speech lacks sophistication or art. Simplicity is often the hardest of effects to achieve and it is a commonplace that the simplest of homilies can take the longest to prepare. Augustine points out that Christian 'simplicity' does not mean a total rejection of rhetoric, but preaching is not just rhetoric. 'Of what use is a gold key if it will not open what we wish?' (In Harmless 1995:173) he asks, referring to eloquence. Harmless (173) adds that 'This does not mean that he was careless; nor did he, as a rule, resort to street Latin. Instead he retained the elegant Latin of the elite but pruned it down to such simplicity that even the least educated could follow him with ease'. Brown's (1967:268) view of it is that this 'superbly unaffected Christian style was in reality a

simplicity achieved on the other side of vast sophistication'.

It seems that the unease with the over-elaborate may not just be linguistic Puritanism. The criterion of accessibility is a key one which comes out of the original preaching of the Gospel message itself. The vocabulary of the Koiné Greek of the New Testament is not much more than 5000 words and it is generally simple, direct and related to the everyday existence of the common people.

It might be objected that things have moved on since Jesus; we are no longer the peasants of the Middle East of 2000 years ago. Not as much as we might think, it appears. Apart from the fact that the Jews of the day were among some of the most literate people in the Roman Empire, it would seem that the statistics have not changed all that much. According to Buttrick, graduates from a good theological school will have a vocabulary of about 12,000 words, but an average American congregation will have about 7,500 (Buttrick 1987:187). Much technical theological language such as 'soteriology', 'redaction criticism' and the like needs to be avoided in preaching in the way a computer scientist or motor mechanic has to try to translate words like 'byte' or 'big ends' to the uninitiated.

The common shared vocabulary of the preacher and the congregation then apparently comes down to a pleasing biblical 5000 in an average North American congregation, a group which is well educated by world standards. We are talking about a core common coin of language. In fact it can be argued that the more traditional a society the more familiar it is with the language of the Gospel. For one thing such societies understand perfectly the pastoral setting of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. In areas like kinship and human relations, emotions, virtues and vices, spiritual terms, healing language, not to mention the importance of eloquence itself, these societies are linguistically rich. A young Zulu-speaking IT expert brought up in the city may have a whole technological vocabulary of which his cousins in the country are ignorant, but he knows that their 'deep Zulu' is far more expressive of the things of human life than his will

ever be. Buttrick touches this point with the shrewd phrases: 'The Sophisticated, Simple Language of Preaching' (1987:189) and 'an ordinary language outstretching itself' (193). The point is not so much the number of words preachers have at our disposal but how they choose and use them. However, it is by no means obvious that the North American congregation will have a larger theological vocabulary than a congregation in rural Africa. Moreover, every good public speaker knows that the use of the limited vocabulary of the people does not mean baby-talk or a string of clichés. It means rather an eloquent or rhetorical use of ordinary words in the way as in Paul Keating's Redfern speech. 'To cry like a baby' is better than 'to cry' plain and simple and 'to cry like a left-alone child' is better than both. 'Barking mad' is better than just 'mad' and 'as mad as a cut snake', in my opinion, beats both and is perfectly, indeed better understood by the unsophisticated. According to Buttrick again: 'The trick of preaching is to use an ordinary vocabulary in the extraordinary service of the Gospel, dancing on the edge of mystery, reaching into depth...We can take and use a simple vocabulary with subtlety and imagination for the sake of the Gospel' (Buttrick 1987:189).

To make an extraordinary use of the ordinary is not so much a 'trick' of course; it is a great labour requiring some skill, much analysis and long practise. It will involve searching for the language which is effective for our purposes, for example the metaphors which we constantly use, and which can still have such impact and sometimes as power.

3.8.2 *The Use of Metaphor*

Metaphor is an area that Kennedy (Kennedy:1993.1ff) emphasises in his attack upon a Cartesian or literalist approach to preaching. One feels that both Buttrick and Hilbert would be sympathetic. Metaphor rather than simple minded literalism is more likely to help us to 'dance on the edge of mystery' and to enable us to express a 'contemplative embrace of life'. This is hardly surprising since much of what is written in the Jewish and Christians scriptures is in metaphorical form. It is prominent in the Gospels in the form

of parable. This underlines the fact that it does not require academic education to grasp a metaphor. Far from metaphor excluding the poor, the well-selected one can communicate more effectively than the academic lecture, even when the listeners are academics!

From the point of view of preaching in African culture excluding metaphor would be unthinkable since much of African folklore and myth involves it. 'The chickens roost not because they have had their fill but because night has come' (Azuh, in Chiedza Vol. 1:108); 'If growing beards were a sign of wisdom, the billy-goat would be the wisest creature on earth'; 'The crab says that going backwards is also a form of walking'; 'Your enemy will never give you a good haircut' (Agbonkhianmeghe in Chiedza Vol.1:136). Many if not most sayings are metaphors and there is a whole body of 'oral literature' centred on the animal kingdom which puts across ethical teachings in the manner of an African Aesop.

The positivists may have previously claimed that in the end metaphor is non-sense or ultimately meaningless since it is not 'earthed' in what is visible, tangible and quantifiable. However, even positive science is nowadays apt to use 'models' to explain certain phenomena. Like the scientists the preacher (or indeed the poet) who employs a metaphor is not a raving romantic or an unhinged glossalalian, but rather someone attempting to point to the truth. When Zulu people use the simply metaphorical adage 'hands wash each other', they are telling us something about human community, something real and something true. The preacher who talks about the body of Christ or the marriage feast does no less on the theological level. Kennedy may be exaggerating for effect here but he makes his point in characteristically lapidary fashion when he says that 'all knowledge is metaphorical' (1993:94).

The power of metaphor is not confined to the conveying of truths. Fables about animals are meant to put across lessons about right human behaviour. And for the Greeks metaphor had the power to create 'ethos' or character. This gives it a community dimension as it influences individuals. A shared metaphor (such as the body of Christ) creates a bond

of understanding among the Christian community, a shared intimacy and can be an invitation to others to partake in this unity.

Is it an art? For example, is the creation and use of metaphors an art? Buttrick is adamant that preaching is not an art and preachers are not essentially verbal artists. Some may of course, be just that, and use their innate ability to good effect in the pulpit and good luck to them. However for the rest of us the 'art' is more a 'considered craft' in which effect is pursued not for the sake of effect (as in the court preaching of 17th Century France) but for the sake of being theologically apt and enabling the message to strike home and stay there. In a time when languages, through the influence of the electronic media, are changing rapidly, it is a constant search amid the language of ordinary discourse for that which will faithfully serve the preacher's purpose.

The image that comes to mind, then, in contrast to the artist of high culture is that of the thoroughly trained artisan. The fine work of the artisan can be appreciated by all while the exponent of high culture is for the few. The image fits in another way for while few can become artists without being born artists, most can learn a basic skill. Few people can become racing drivers; most can learn to drive. Computer designers and programmers are artists and skilled way beyond the norm but the average literate person can normally operate a computer.

Metaphor harmonises well with the artisan notion of the preacher since the use of metaphor is of great practical value in the task at hand. For one thing it enables the preacher to avoid falling into the trap of paraphrase of the scripture. Secondly the well chosen metaphor can command, focus and hold attention in a way that bald explanation fails to. Thirdly, metaphor can be highly challenging, including intellectually, since it can involve a completely new way of looking at something. As Kennedy puts it: 'Metaphor creates a new organisation among our concepts by bringing together what has not previously been associated' (1993:94). So the well-formed artisan seeking out, organising, using and even

creating helpful metaphors, might be a way of encapsulating our preacher.

3.8 3 To Define Preaching

Preaching as a discourse does not appear to be exactly like anything else, although it resembles many elements in human discourse and will have flashes of many a genre in its delivery. What is its purpose? The usual approach here is to give an exhaustive list starting from the strengthening of the moral fibre of society through to manufacturing mystics. The consideration of the theology of Hilbert has hopefully kept the discussion down to earth. For her, preaching is about the use of the sacramental imagination in the sense of finding God at work in our world and in some way putting that across. Hence, though 'earthed', the approach is truly centred on God, the God who is conceived as involved, is Emmanuel in our world.

But preaching is done, in one bald sense, simply that people may know God and the nature of God's relationship with the world, and knowing it change appropriately. A fundamental message that the Markan accounts give us of the ministry of Jesus are 'Repent and believe in the good news'. Harry Emerson Fosdick says that: 'A preacher's task is to create in his congregation the thing he (sic) is talking about' (Lischer 1995:415). These would normally be understood as faith and conversion. Faith and conversion are responses to the proclamation of the Gospel or the Good News.

However, mere repetition is not enough, as anyone who has sat through a paraphrase of the readings will know. The hearers hope for a fresh presentation of a message with which most are familiar. Borrowing Lonergan's concept of Insight Henri Nouwen defines the purpose of preaching as leading the hearers to insight 'in their own condition and the condition of their world' (1978:23). Such insights should create the freedom to live life as authentically as Jesus lived his. Nouwen suggests that this desire for insight is the reason why preachers still preach and hearers still listen, despite the obvious shortcomings of preachers and preaching.

A fulsome definition of effective preaching will include rather too many elements to coin in a single phrase. 'One beggar showing another beggar where to find bread' or 'preaching is good news' are both definitions appealing to intuition and heart rather than the intellect. 'Preaching is sharing ultimate meaning' might appeal more to the mind and touches Nouwen's definition. Preaching must itself also appeal to these functions, both of them. Preaching, effective Christian preaching, could therefore be summed up in a wide-net definition as, 'Authoritative, scripture-based, contextualised discourse, proclaimed by a believer striving to live the message, in appropriate cultural eloquence such as image and metaphor, on Christian faith, carefully crafted to hold the hearer's attention and settle into consciousness the good news of Christian truths that lead to Christian living'. In short, and taking up Sanneh's² basic insight about the vital compatibility between local indigenous languages and Christianity: 'Preaching is the inculturation of the Word of God which follows translation of the scriptures'.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has endeavoured to come to a definition of preaching via the route of description. Preaching has been described from the point of view of its links with rhetoric. With the insightful help of Buttrick its very practical side has been looked at and what goes into a technically effective sermon or homily. These descriptions have assumed the doing of 'contextual theology' which is inculturation, and hence inculturation emerges as a key process in the study and development of preaching and is highlighted in the definition finally arrived at. We therefore now need to investigate more

²Sanneh (1993: 118) points out that Christianity is practically alone as a religion for which the place of origin and the mother tongue of the founder are peripheral. Right from the beginning it moves, geographically and linguistically, translating the teaching of Jesus into Koiné Greek and continuing to translate it into the other languages it encounters. Other religions, he points out (1993: 119) tend to make a virtue of elitist secrecy, while Christianity insists on making understanding central, especially for the ordinary people. In so doing it makes a vital cultural and linguistic as well as religious contribution to a culture.

deeply the notion of culture, which we will endeavour to do in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 Challenges

4.1 Introduction

The first focus of this chapter is those things which make for and indicate the vigour or feebleness of preaching, its renewal and its decline.

The word 'authority' has been much used in the history of preaching. This chapter we will also explore contemporary challenges in preaching, focusing on the age-old tension between formal and personal authority. Whence does authority to preach come and how can it be determined that a particular individual is in fact possessed of it?

The history of Julie Billiart (1751-1816), the foundress of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur contains an anecdote concerning a group of preachers known as the 'Fathers of the Faith' (Murphy 1980:51-56). According to the account these 18th Century ecclesiastics were noted for their fine preaching. However the sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, apparently, were required to attend the preaching of these men in order to 'translate' simultaneously their splendid words into an ordinary language that the ordinary people could comprehend. The 'Fathers of the Faith' were the suppressed Jesuits of the region today called Belgium.

This tale underlines the fact that the history of preaching suggests that one of the characteristics of preaching decadence is a loss of touch with the majority while renewal involves a return to being in touch and understood by ordinary people. Some would argue that this must necessarily mean a certain simplicity and directness, a greater dependence on a scripture-based message to carry itself rather than it needing much ornamentation or many artificial rhetorical props. 'Neither the New Testament evangelists, nor Augustine, Luther or Wesley created new forms of preaching for *rhetorically* (my italics) motivated reasons' (Lischer R 1987:5).

However this conveniently begs the question about what we mean by 'rhetorical'. The Fathers of the Faith preached with a 'rhetoric' which was accessible to the cultivated.

Jesus of Nazareth spoke in a way which was understood by the uncultivated. Was he therefore un-rhetorical?

Certainly from a scriptural point of view one of the obviously true characteristics of a revival of preaching is taken to be that it can be understood by the uneducated and the poor, so that 'the poor have the Gospel preached to them' (Luke 7:22). Does this necessarily mean simpler language? Congregations have at one time or another been struck by the fact that it is the homily or sermon of the apparently simpler kind which so often strikes home and which is instinctively recognised as true coin. This would appear to imply a rejection of the skills of eloquence and a broadside against those who favour what has been called the 'plain style' (Auksi 1995: title). But again, we can ask whether simplicity requires preparation or not? Is there no artifice at all in the so-called simple homily? Is simplicity or the plain style itself artful in some rhetorical sense? The question can also be asked of simplicity opposite - complexity. Does it betoken artifice or ill-preparedness?

As we have seen Augustine argues against a rejection of rhetoric, but he also distances himself from a simple-minded equating of preaching with rhetoric. 'What do the rules of schoolmasters matter to us? Better you should understand...than be left high and dry on the heights of eloquence' (In Harmless 1995:173). Whether some form of eloquence or rhetoric and simple, direct speech are mutually exclusive is a question for further discussion.

It is time for a modern voice since the present is our theme here: 'Most homilists can do better, and this book gives them the hands-on help they need to make it happen. *Preaching Better* is a compendium of practical advice by a bishop who preaches and who teaches the art of preaching' (Untener 1999: Cover).

This is Bishop Kenneth Untener of Saginaw, Michigan, in the United States. Clearly Untener believes that the revival of preaching begins with the preacher and with characteristic northern New World optimism he sets about showing how this is possible. Bishop Untener does not only write on preaching, he also workshops real live homilies with his clergy. The Bishop

is supposed to be the principal preacher in a diocese. Archbishop Carlo Martini of Milan preaches to his diocese on local radio. So given that the primary duty of a bishop is to preach in his diocese and ensure that preaching is taking place and is satisfactory, perhaps the strange thing is that the examples of Bishop Untener and Archbishop Martini appear exceptional. However Untener's book and his example constitute an interesting sign of the times that indicates that the Catholic church in the developed world may be in the gathering phase of a revival in the ancient, yet ever new work of preaching.

The betterment of preaching, therefore, appears to be at least fashionable, in the United States at present, in all Christian denominations. This view is brought by word of mouth and by the internet. Here one can parade many new titles of books on the subject, preaching for every occasion and for every conceivable type of congregation, matter to help in preaching, from funny stories to pious tales. There is an explosion of literature on the subject. William H Graham, co-founder of the Word of God Institute, was writing of this revival as long ago as 1986. In an article entitled *Practising the Art of Preaching* (Graham Spring 1986:8-12) identifies a key event as the US Bishops' writing of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*,¹ commenting that, 'The proof of its value is evident in the fact that it is in its seventh printing; over 50,000 copies have been purchased since its publication in 1982' (9). He goes on to mention the planning of doctoral programmes and the availability of workshops in the US Catholic church.

The United States is not an infallible indicator of the promptings of the Holy Spirit. However if the church in that country is saying anything about where we are going in the art of preaching then some encouragement might be taken from this. Non-Americans might smile condescendingly at the notion of an award called 'Great Preacher of the Year', but such an award says something of the priorities of the U.S. church. At

¹United States Bishops, 1982. *Pastoral Letter: Fulfilled in your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*. Washington DC: US Catholic Conference.

the presentation of the 1999 Great Preacher award, the President of the Aquinas Institute made a comment touching on the vision of those concerned about Catholic preaching in the United States: 'We are convinced that good preaching is key to a future vitality of the church, especially as Catholics in some parts of the country are migrating to more evangelical Protestant churches that make preaching a high priority' (Aquinas Institute Public Relations 2000:4). There is nothing like loss of numbers and revenue to galvanise the troops! The Aquinas Institute, in St Louis, which specialises in training preachers, including laypeople, and offers courses up to doctorate level, reports in a recent bulletin a steady increase in student numbers between 1995 and 1999.²

According to Michael Moynahan,³ the American Catholic document *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* was written in response to the perception of generally poor preaching in the Catholic church in the U.S. The appearance itself of the document is further evidence of a revival in preaching or at least an attempt to foster one. When the official church produces such a fine document in response to an obvious need, then it is clear that something interesting is occurring.

Another indication of renewal is that the subject is taken much more seriously in the seminaries in the United States. The concept of 'pastoral training', a subject to which we will return, has taken as its model the professional in-service training of the medical and other caring disciplines, is becoming established as part of the seminary curriculum. Part of this pastoral training is a hands-on training in homiletics in a real pastoral setting and with the possibility of input by the community. This may indicate that some of the impetus is coming from outside the church and is in response to the call to accountability that other professions are demanding of their members. To be a responsible professional today involves the idea of assessment, not just when taking the examinations to gain the basic qualification, but further supervised training and even beyond that, periodic evaluation and upgrading of skills. In

² Aquinas News Vol 18 No.1 Fall 1999. 2.

³ Interview with Michael Moynahan, SJ. Melbourne, Australia. 8/5/2000

this case the 'way of the world' offers a healthy and vigorous challenge. The Roman Catholic church in Anglophone Africa is not, in the writer's experience, noted for the kind of resources and professional approach to preaching and pastoral work described above.

Some within the church jibe at the notion of 'professionalism' in ministry, with connotations of 'professional' (read 'expensive') scales of charges for services rendered and all the affectations which can be attendant on certain types of sheltered, bureaucratic employment. This is a reasonable anxiety within a tradition in which the message is ideally preached in poverty and made available to the poor. Will the poor be 'priced out' of the market? is the underlying question and anxiety, and there is some anecdotal evidence that a younger generation of Catholic clergy have been influenced by the market economics of the eighties and nineties to make their pastoral service more profitable.

The reply to this question is analogous to Augustine on rhetoric. As we will remember, while he understands the need to be wary of the pagan background from which rhetoric springs, he asks the question whether the Christian will be content to witness the pagan putting his position across in a competent and convincing manner while the Christian is what we would call today a bumbling incompetent. So for 'rhetoric' substitute 'professional' and ask whether the modern preacher can afford to fail to be subject to the professional standards of peers in other disciplines, especially the analogous ones dealing with communication.

4.2 *Preaching Renewal and Church Attendance*

Karl Rahner wryly observed in *Theological Reflections on the Priestly Image* that: 'People still come to church when we preach badly' (1974:56). However Rahner presciently foretold a time when this might not necessarily still be the case. 'To put the matter crudely the priest of the future will "earn" as much as he himself provides in terms of religion' (57). Perhaps the American church is attempting to take Rahner's advice as the cultural imperative to practice one's faith

weakens in the face of the awesome power of a western culture of individualism and the consequent supreme value of personal choice. Our discussions on the effect of westernisation on African culture will indicate that a similar process might not be too far down the road in Africa and would therefore be worth anticipating.

Not long before he died the English Catholic Archbishop, Basil Hume remarked that he thought that one of the greatest shifts that has taken place in his lifetime was that the practice of faith is now more and more a question of inner, personal conviction and less and less one of socialisation or received culture. Whereas there was a time when people practised because they were 'tribal Christians', today they practise because they are personally convinced Christians or they do not practise at all. It is almost a cliché of journalistic surveys of 'generation X' that they are no more or less religious than previous generations but that they are more interested in a spiritual message which carries personal conviction than an organised institutional church. Does 'generation X' have representatives among the young of Africa? is the kind of question we will need to explore in our chapter on culture.

The United States is a country where the separation of church and state is an almost sacred dogma. Ireland, however, is a Catholic country whose constitution begins in the name of the holy and undivided Trinity. Here the flight from 'tribal Catholicism' has been dramatic in recent years, hastened on latterly by shocking revelations of child-abuse by clergy and religious. It is twenty years since Pope John Paul's historic and triumphal visit to Ireland. Much has changed and perhaps the inevitable process of secularisation has taken hold in a society which has transformed itself dramatically from a peasant society into a modern knowledge-based Celtic economic 'tiger'.

The Irish commentators seem agreed that the 'cultural imperative to practise' is no longer what it was, for good or for ill. One positive effect is noted by a priest, Martin Tierney thus:

My own observation from people who come (to church) on Sundays is that they are there because they want to be there. I detect

that in the attention people pay to sermons, that they are looking for a preacher who will preach the full Gospel with power' (*amgd Magazine* 1999:11).

It is interesting that the personal choice to come to church is now seen as being influenced by the preacher. For Protestants this might seem normal but for Catholics, apart from the dramatic delights of occasional preached missions, this does not seem to have been the main reason for attending church. To pray and receive communion; yes. To obtain grace; certainly. To avoid sin; absolutely. In addition there was the opinion of others, custom and respect, even fear of the powerful figure of the priest.

Today, then, among Catholics in western society, especially in the US, there is some evidence that preaching is featuring as a prominent reason for attendance at particular churches or for attendance at all. Fr Patrick Negri,⁴ a teacher of homiletics in Melbourne in Australia, confirms that there is a great longing for good preaching among the middle-class, congregations to which he ministers in Australia. The writer attended one of Masses and it was difficult to find a seat.

It may be that the present revival in preaching in the US church is partly attributable to as banal a factor as the growth of ownership of the motor car and the consequent breakdown of the geographical parish, increase in mobility and spirit of individuality. Are people voting with their feet, or rather with their wheels if they find that the preaching in their local parish is poor? This clearly has economic consequences for pastors, even if the other consequences escape them.

How relevant this phenomenon is to the African Catholic church is an issue that the writer hardly hears discussed. On the contrary, the attitude can sometimes appear rather complacent as numbers increase faster than in the rest of the universal church, vocations to the priesthood and religious life are as they were in Europe in the 50s and issues such as atheism and the separation of the sacred and the secular do not appear even to be on the horizon. Africa is seen as the

⁴ Negri, Patrick SSS. Melbourne, Australia 17/2/2000 (Interview)

future of the church, and clearly, from a statistical point of view, this view cannot be gainsaid, at least for the foreseeable future. More reflective minds are not so sanguine. If the Irish or Spanish churches can be taken by surprise by the suddenness of change, why should this not occur in Africa? Even without western affluence the globalisation of western culture through television impacts upon culture in the developing world.

Furthermore there is the consideration of the depth of evangelisation that has taken place and how strong this is if it is to stand up to the inevitable storms to come. The Irish and Spanish Churches have been preaching the Gospel to their people for many centuries longer than the African Church. In a generation Christianity has arguably been radically marginalised in these societies whose culture was essentially Catholic Christian. One highly critical description the writer has heard of Christian faith in South Africa is that it is 'syncretistic, pietistic and mixed with a mentality of sympathetic magic' (Lewis 1999: Interview). Tinyiko Maluleke, while agreeing with the historical analysis that there is a shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity from the West to Africa, also seems to want to analyse this phenomenon more deeply remarking 'Reality seems to point out that both the Bible and Christianity in Africa...are aspects of a thickly syncretistic mix of beliefs, rites, rituals and a whole range of survival and resistance strategies' (In Okure 2000:97). If this, rather pessimistic view is the case, it will be interesting to see how Christianity copes in this most westernised of African countries.

4.3 *Theological Developments*

Let us now consider the theological motivation for change as suggested by Richard Lischer in his introduction to *Theories of Preaching*. The criticism of preaching in the church is not new of course and he observes that: 'From every era of the church's history we hear voices decrying the corruption of preaching and calling for its reformation' (1987:5). However he adds: 'But in no case did the re-design work precede the theological earthquake that made it

necessary' (1987:5). In the case of the Roman Catholic church that theological earthquake has to be the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

As mentioned, the most visible and audible reform promulgated by the Council was in the liturgy of the eucharist where the vernacular was adopted in the place of the sacred language of Latin. However the use of the vernacular, the rearrangement of the sanctuary, processions and enthronement of the Word, were all meant to 'upgrade' the proclamation aspect of the eucharist which had got rather lost in a liturgy of mystery and sacrifice which had all but become a private Mass attended from afar by a congregation.

How has the emphasis on preaching been responded to? Fr Patrick Negri, (Negri 2000: Interview), an Australian teacher of homiletics who had been ordained before the Council, is of the opinion that the strong emphasis on preaching was felt at the time of the Council, and that there was considerable experimentation with the inevitable mistakes. For example some preachers nailed their colours to the stories-only mast. However the main shift in both theology and mentality, according to Fr Negri, was of a much more fundamental nature. Before Vatican II the homily was 'time out' of the liturgy while afterwards it was very firmly part of the liturgy. Whereas before it could have and often was about almost anything, afterwards it was not only on the theme of the day but also something which was seen as 'moving people into the action of the liturgy' (Negri 2000: Interview).

Therefore what has been going on since the Council is not just the struggle to find a preaching 'voice' that 'works' for this modern world. The deeper, under the surface struggle, has been for preaching to find a theological locus, a place in Catholicism, or more precisely, its proper place. If the homily was 'time out' or an interval in the real business of the eucharistic part of the Mass, then it was probably not possible to take it seriously enough until this had been rectified and had recovered pride of place as the homily.

It may be of course that Roman Catholics tend to judge themselves more severely than others here. The Protestant

writer David James Randolph writing in 1969 says this about preaching in the post Conciliar Roman Catholic church of the time:

Another source of creative interest in preaching is the Roman Catholic Church. At the beginning of Vatican II, John XXIII called for a revitalisation of preaching. Paul VI later reiterated this plea, and the Church of Rome has responded dramatically. Indeed, Kyle Haselden has observed that Roman Catholics presently seem to be 'cornering the market' while Protestants sell their historic concern cheaply (Randolph 1969:5).

Even if this has the internal agenda of a wake-up call to his own church Randolph's comment is an interesting one on the ecclesial vigour he detects next door. The question is whether Roman Catholics have translated that vigour into a general revival of preaching and created a situation where we can say that the average parish is well-served by its preachers and that the poor are receiving the Good News more than they were before the Council. This writer would still be most hesitant to make such a judgement.

Apart from the inevitable lag in the implementation of reforms, there appear to be continuing structural difficulties contributing to this problem. One is that the theological importance of the preaching function of the pastor has not been clearly spelled out to the seminarian in training. This may be because there is an aversion to stressing the obvious - that the pastor is there to bring the Good News. But somehow this message manages to get crowded out, sometimes unfortunately by considerations of hierarchical structure, power and status. The traditional call to the preacher of the Gospel to do so in humility, like 'one beggar showing another beggar where to find bread' as someone put it, can find itself competing unevenly with the upward mobility model of the pastor as part administrator-chief, part man-set-apart to offer sacrifice. Energies that might have been focused on developing a servant of the Word have been absorbed by the creation of a hierarch. The priesthood is an old and powerful social institution in the Catholic communion. Such institutions resist change.

Theological-ideological battles go on and will no doubt be pursued with the traditional vigour characteristic of these debates. That some attention is now being focused upon

the vital area of the preaching function of the pastor, may, under the Holy Spirit, be attributed to some of the factors described above. However, it is fair to ask whether the state of preaching in the Roman Catholic church before or after the Vatican Council (1962-1965) has in fact been in a particularly parlous state, as the writer has tended to describe it. Has it, for instance, fallen into one of the much-criticised errors of the past of becoming incomprehensible to ordinary people? There does not seem to be much evidence of this in the English-speaking world. There is not much use of Latin or other languages, or of obscure literary allusions. I have little information on the situation in Europe outside France. Understanding the English of preaching in English does not appear to be the difficulty although it is surprising how often the neglect of the public address system results in the incomprehensibility of inaudibility.

In the continuing but changing missionary context of Africa the problem has been the frequent inability of the missionary to master the local language sufficiently with the result that the speaker's preaching may be at best basic but comprehensible and at worst incomprehensible.

4.4 The Problem of Tedium

The main complaint from the pews seems to the present writer from conversations with Walter Burghardt, reading and experience, to be not so much that churchgoers do not understand, but that the quality of what is said makes it a mighty challenge to pay attention. The most common complaint among young people in the writer's experience is that the preacher and or the homily is just plain 'boring'.

This may be a more acute problem in literate and image-dominated cultures and hence a greater challenge to preachers in the developed world. However there are many ways to bore of course and this can happen in any culture. The most common is to speak for too long and attempt to cover too much. How rightly does Untener (1999: 53) recommend editing in the face of the tendency of some to go from Genesis to the Apocalypse

in one homily. As Voltaire (1694-1778) so dryly and rightly observed, the secret of being tedious is to say everything.

It is a commonplace to say that today we are in competition with slick and effective communicators in the media who, if they are on TV, have the advantage of the visual to keep one's attention. No doubt this is true, but the preacher, though needing to avoid the slick, is also supposed to be a competent communicator. What this might mean in preaching terms is probably yet to be discovered and widely practised.

Content is probably the next most-criticised aspect of preaching. Content fails to catch the interest of the congregation either because it is pious waffle or tedious moralising. Despite the best of intentions such content is unlikely to be experienced as good news, and in fact may never even impinge on the wandering consciousness of the hearer. We are far from dealing with something scientific and measurable but one quasi quantifiable test for the effectiveness of a homily or sermon is whether people remember anything of what was said. Here Untener would say that the acid test is whether people remember anything after six months. Now if they remember what was said with a sense of upliftment and encouragement to their faith, so much the better. Again, how to judge the level of upliftment is a problem and somewhat subjective but if the hearer cannot remember something of what was actually said then something has gone wrong at a low level or early moment. Worse than this of course is being left angry and frustrated, i.e. with a memory which builds up resistance to possible future preaching.

4.5 Accountability and Professionalism

As has been mentioned the words 'professional' and 'professionalism' plus 'accountability' might also be another factor in a contemporary renewal of preaching. These are fashionable watchwords for professions anxious to maintain their standing in society by maintaining their standards, both technical and ethical. The experience of dealing with glaring cases of unprofessional and criminal behaviour among

clergy and religious in the Catholic church, has led to much soul-searching on what constitutes professional behaviour, not just in the negative sense of drawing bottom lines but in the positive one of once again setting sights on ideals.

Here in South Africa, out of the experience of writing a protocol on how to deal with cases of sexual abuse, came a determination also to produce a profile of the truly professional church worker, a 'Gospel-professionalism' for those who are squeamish about the bald word 'professional'. A document was produced which addressed, among many other things, the issue of standards of preaching. The relevant section is quoted in full.

1.1 Clergy and religious shall, in ways appropriate to the circumstances of their pastoral ministry, preach the Word of God seriously and earnestly.⁵

Commitment to this standard would be indicated by:

- * explanation of Christian teaching in a manner that is suited to the circumstances of one's hearers⁶
- * continuing development of one's public-speaking skills
- * thorough preparation for the giving of reflections and catechesis
- * thorough preparation for the preaching of homilies (SACBC 1997:1).

No doubt these recommendations would gladden the hearts of many long-suffering parishioners in many and varied communities. There is however a structural difficulty when it comes to judging and enforcing the standards of two sections of the professional talking classes, namely teachers and preachers. It is notoriously difficult to remove a secondary school or university teacher whose classroom work or lecturing is unsatisfactory, and the same is true of clergy. There seem to be at least three reasons for this. The first is that it is almost as if the classroom, lecture hall and church are somehow taken to be the sacrosanct and inviolable territory of the one who habitually speaks there, holy ground upon which even those in authority fear even to tiptoe. Head teachers hesitate before interrupting a teacher's class, for fear this might diminish the authority of the teacher. A bishop will rarely call a priest in to demand an account of his pulpit stewardship whereas he will be exceeding swift to

⁵ Code of Canon Law, Can 762.

summon him in matters of mammon. As for university lecturers, their capacity to bore torpid whole generations of students without ever being challenged has frequently almost been remembered as some kind of prodigious intellectual feat. The second reason is probably that in the business of public speaking, because most of us find it a daunting task, we are perhaps inclined to forgive the poor exponent, even if he or she does it for a living. However we would not be so forgiving if the person was our surgeon or our airline pilot.

Thirdly, because it is somewhat subjective, it is actually quite difficult to pass judgement on the effectiveness of public speaking. If someone were to arrive at the podium or pulpit very intoxicated then we would have a clear criterion for a negative judgement. However the usual situation is that the person turns up cold sober and talks. The content might be quite adequate, the words might be audible, sentences complete. However the talk or sermon as a whole might be dreary and uninteresting. Even so, it is not so easy either to point out exactly why or say categorically that the speaker has not, in some way, done the job. Public speaking is one of those arts where people recognise when it is good or bad but expressing why this is the case can be problematic.

Despite these difficulties it would appear that in both the teaching and preaching professions the question of the standard of the offering is being looked at seriously. What exams a professional is obliged to pass tells us a great deal and the fact that professional communicators may not actually have to sit or stand for an examination in public speaking speaks volumes. Young candidates for the priesthood have a rather intimidating *viva voce* before a panel in hearing confessions. It is becoming more common to have a preaching exam, but it is practically unheard of for someone to be held back from ordination because his practical pulpit skills were considered inadequate. On the face of it this seems strange since the commission they are to receive is not just to forgive sins but also to preach the Gospel. In this context

⁶ Ibid, Can 769.

it is worth quoting the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517)..

We decree and ordain,...that nobody - whether a secular cleric or member of any of the mendicant orders or someone with the right to preach by law or custom or privilege or otherwise - may be admitted to carry out this office unless he has first been examined with due care by his superior, which is a responsibility we lay on the superior's conscience, and unless he is found to be fit and suitable for the task by his upright behaviour, age, doctrine, honesty, prudence and exemplary life. Wherever he goes to preach, he must provide a guarantee to the bishop and other local ordinaries concerning his examination and competence, by means of the original or other letters from the person who examined and approved him (Tanner & Alberigo 1990:636).

It has already been suggested that there may be something to be said for the theory that preaching has always had its problems. The above reform of the Fifth Lateran Council was directed at extremes of enthusiasm and millenarianism and those who 'presume to preach or declare a fixed time for future evils, the coming of antichrist or the precise day of judgement'... (Tanner & Alberigo 1990:637). We hear in history of preaching revivals, but these normally only included small groups, in other words minorities. These groups made an impact on their congregations but whether they did much to improve the general level of preaching is not so clear. Had this been the case no doubt we would have heard about it, but one knows of few dioceses for example of which it was said that the preaching improved across the board. Perhaps Bishop Untener's workshops may produce the exception.

There may of course be serious structural reasons why it is extremely difficult to attain a high standard of preaching in a diocesan system. One is simply that the average parish priest probably has to speak too often and is over-exposed, at weekly services, at funerals, marriages, and many other gatherings. The pastor who is carrying out his or her ministry seriously may speak on several different themes each week. Is to make each of these homilies or talks scintillatingly brilliant to ask too much of the average pastor? The average parish priest, then, is over-exposed, and over-exposed mostly to the same group of people. The wandering religious mission-giver, or the Methodist on the circuit, has the advantage that he or she can at least change congregations and can use the same material more than once.

The structures of Catholic religious life have historically favoured preaching revivals; the organisation of the dioceses may not be so favourable. For an effective renewal to take place in the latter, it would probably be necessary to restructure fairly radically the way a parish and the parish priest operate plus provide the money to enable this to happen. Here one thinks of those rare parishes where the priest sees his task of preaching as so important that one way or another he has passed the administration on to others. However for this to become commonplace would probably require a huge mentality shift among clergy themselves away from the administrator model of priesthood while simultaneously providing good administration through effective delegation. However the Vatican II statement in its Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests about priorities is unambiguous, stating that priests 'have as their first charge to announce the Gospel of God to all' (Tanner & Alberigo 1990:1046).

4.6 *What Some of the People Say*

Vox populi, vox Dei, might be translated in modern parlance as 'trust the people'. A survey of people's attitudes to the preaching of my students is a logistical impossibility. However we can make reference to work done by others, e.g. Untener. He has elicited comments on preaching over a period of 25 years. He has sorted the comments of the 'consumers' into 25 basic categories, keeping a relative tally of the categories and has identified a few which are the categories of principal concern such as the desire for a single point, making the homily relate to people's real, concrete lives and the desire for some spiritual depth.

Whether or not these concerns are cross-cultural would be an interesting question. Whether what urbanised Americans feel about preaching is the same as what rural Africans feel, for example, should be fascinating, the subject, no doubt of another thesis. However the contention here is that traditional African society is being transformed swiftly and profoundly in the western technological crucible and that therefore to be aware of what happens in America or Europe

today is relevant in Southern Africa. Modern American culture may not be to the taste of many educated critics, but it is certainly what many people aspire to in the developing world.

Rapid changes in Africa in general as already outlined would also suggest that certain ideas of rural African culture might already be somewhat nostalgic. The younger generation, many of whom will end up in cities and towns, have experienced a jump from cattle-culture to computer-culture in the space of their childhood.

So what are some of the 'developments' ahead that might be foreseen by noting what is happening in the church of the developed, western world? A telling example. At a Sunday Mass in a Melbourne parish this writer heard a layman say very frankly that he was 'a refugee' from his previous parish where he had become bored with the preaching and had gone elsewhere. This is now a fairly common phenomenon in car-borne western societies with something of a supermarket or web-surfer mentality. Parishioners vote with their wheels and a major factor in the choice is the standard of preaching. The village loyalty to the locality has weakened and people are free to join their own 'villages' outside their locality. In many cases where individuals are repelled by the preaching they may simply cease to attend church.

However anecdotal evidence points, in urban African parishes, to a continuing loyalty to the locality and this is sometimes put down to an enduring African sense of community as against the western weakness of individualism. It remains to be seen whether the apparently stronger loyalty and cohesion in African parishes will weaken as both physical and social mobility increase and all the other activities of western living start to impinge - Sunday shopping, weekends away and an ever widening spectrum of leisure activities. The effect of all this on the attention span of parishioners is another area which needs to be monitored, length of preaching being such an important point of consideration.

We take a brief look, therefore, at Bishop Untener's research. As we would expect with a culture in which efficiency and dispatch are values Americans do not like preaching which is laboured. One interesting aspect of this

is the dislike of long and wordy introductions, especially if these are not directly relevant to the central message: 'Tell them to go right to the middle of it' (Untener 1999:22) is a comment which Untener feels sums this up. Something which seems to enrage Americans is the retelling of the Gospel in the preacher's own words as an opening which implies they have not been listening or that they cannot understand the Gospel narrative. Endings are also an issue and his respondents mentioned poor endings, and false endings as especially distracting.

Again, we would not be surprised to hear that brevity and clarity of thought is highly desired. In order to achieve this Untener claims that one single thought, idea or 'pearl' as he calls it, is what is needed: 'There's no sense in saying more if they'll hear less' (42) is the unassailable logic of this. The call is for a single point but a point of some depth and this involves the labour of study, prayer and hard thought. Untener would include the further labour of writing out the homily as a means of forcing clarity and to facilitate editing. His comment here is that 'Many a mediocre homily was one step away from greatness: editing' (53). Rather like Buttrick Untener is merciless on the question of the preacher's responsibility for carrying the attention of the hearers: 'A homily becomes too long at the point where people stop listening' (80) he remarks baldly, a remark which is self-evidently true for all cultures. And another comment which I suspect might not yet find much resonance among African people is this: 'The bigger the event, the shorter the homily. Homilies on these events (Christmas, Easter, centenaries) are often unremembered' (82). How true we might say, but something in us also says that we lend dignity to the bigger even by a longer homily and that to shorten it in a way demeans it. However the fact remains that at a ceremony such as the Easter Vigil which is so packed and visually vivid a programme, the likelihood of a homily, particularly a long one, being remembered, is slight. This too, I suspect, is universal.

Depth is an area where Untener's research shows the futility of trying to fool ordinary people. One of the more

devastating comments he picked up in his years of informal interviews was: 'He's a good speaker. It's just that he's got nothing to say' (64). There will be no depth in homilies without depth in the person, spiritual, intellectual and cultural: 'As I listen to homilies, I think I can tell whose world is large and whose is small. I can guess who reads and who doesn't', (64) remarks Untener. The call is for learned, reflective and prayerful preachers. At the same time however, the people clearly want the preaching to connect with the reality of their lives and to 'cross over the bridge' and 'get concrete' (64).

What comes through strongly in Untener's book is that in his informal research he found that the topic of preaching is not a conversation killer; on the contrary it turns out to be a subject which engages people, if asked. This has been my own experience. This is interesting in the light of Walter Brueggeman's contention that in U.S. culture the Gospel 'is a truth widely held, but a truth greatly reduced. It is a truth that has been flattened, trivialized, and rendered inane' (1989:1). The fact that 'There is a casual, indifferent readiness, even in our increasingly secularized society, to grant the main claims of the Gospel - not to grant them importance, but to accept them as premises of religious life' (1) does not necessarily mean that the thirst for the kind of arresting prophetic message, couched in the fresh poetic, and daring language he is advocating, has been entirely extinguished. It has certainly not been extinguished in Africa where the prophetic kind of preacher is much admired and in some traditions absolutely required.

What comes through from the people in Untener's experience-based book is the sense that this is a vitally important topic and touches on the health of the local church and universal church. I have even found this attitude in people who are unchurched. The remarks made to the Bishop also underline the fact that the people in the pews often have a shrewd grasp of the issues around preaching. I recently asked a white South African congregation what they thought about length of homilies fully expecting the reply, 'Keep it brief'. The first two replies were 'It depends on

the context/opportunity'. (They were polite enough not to add, 'and the preacher!').

4.7 *What Some of the Teachers Say*

Fr Patrick Negri, already mentioned above, is a Blessed Sacrament Father teaching homiletics in Melbourne in Australia. His perspective is very much that of the Developed World grappling with an increasingly unchurched society. He is of the school in which students practised by preaching to their colleagues in large refectories during meals. He believes that the implicit approach of that time was 'advocating moral improvement and the advance in holiness' (Negri Interview: 17/2/2000). He himself is a distinguished preacher whose method is to craft short, sometimes very short, but very punchy and memorable homilies which are much appreciated and draw large congregations. He takes his own advice of being concrete and avoiding abstractions and using narrative, since that is a Gospel genre and people respond to it.

The two areas he emphasises are the centrality of the homily within the eucharistic liturgy since Vatican II and the need for the preacher to be a human being. On the former he says that the homily is no longer 'time out' of the liturgy but, in a captivating phrase, that the homily is 'a way of dancing that particular moment of the liturgy' (Negri Interview: 17/2/2000). On the latter he gives the simple example of a funeral homily and the need for the preacher to know what it is to grieve before he or she can preach at such an occasion. My question: 'Are you old enough to say this?' came up in an implicit way. It is not so much age but of a developed emotional life that Negri looks for. Students of preaching should know about life, love and hate in more than an intellectual way, through experience but also through a knowledge of the dramatist's art and world and particularly of words which open up this world.

About whether preaching can be taught Negri expresses reservations. The major problem he detects in the developed world is a certain kind of student he gets, mostly men, who are emotionally immature and even afraid of their emotional

life. They find it hard to feel, he says. They have little or no experience of loving or being loved. He does not see such people having the basic psychological development to be effective in the pulpit. They will talk of things spiritual, pious and morally rigid but their words are an evasion of the real issues that touch people in the flesh. Hence what they say will fail to move. They fail to be effective because they are not affective. In such cases it is not so much a question of being old enough to say something but being mature enough to say it. He feels that the reason why there is a significant number of such students is because that is the kind of person the present day church is attracting - dependent, authority-bound, conservative men who will toe the church's line. By contrast the more mature and courageous are being positively discouraged from offering themselves because the compassionate of heart will probably find solutions to the hard moral cases of which the present leadership would disapprove.

Furthermore Negri feels that the student who is open and psychologically mature will be precisely the one who will be open to the technical training of the preaching discipline, while the more closed type is likely to be less able to manage this training. This is because public speaking reveals chinks in the psychological armour.

What cultural factors might be helpful in an Australian context? Australia is a society where people pride themselves as being down to earth and are suspicious of pretension. They like talks to be clear and brief and dislike long and vacuous discourses. The Celtic strain in the culture has made them good conversationalists however, and they talk to each other both straightforwardly but also skilfully. They therefore enjoy a style which is heart to heart and which addresses their concrete concerns. The church, however, is becoming much more multicultural, which is making the picture far more complex.

Fr Michael Moynahan⁷ is a Jesuit priest whose background is in drama and who teaches religious studies at Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington. He is the author of

collections of biblical dramas which make connections between scripture and life-experience. His early formation was in the classic Jesuit mould of voice and memory training and which put on plays in Latin. He contrasts this to the contemporary e-mail culture of which the hallmarks are non-existent punctuation, sloppy grammar and an unfocused rambling style. He maintains that one of the best training grounds for his future preaching was classroom teaching and here he makes the interesting point that it taught him to put on a different persona. He feels this is a problem area today since the common perception of a persona is of something false, whereas for the Greeks the idea of the persona-representing mask was not concealment but the revelation of another level or aspect of one's character. Fr Negri would agree.

As a student for the priesthood he followed two formal courses on preaching but these were offered only by Protestant faculties. He had almost no pastoral training except for the so-called 'dry Mass' which included homilies. However the experience of watching others 'perform' was very instructive.

The question of the choice of the means of communication of the Word is an important one for Moynahan. He refers to Matthew Fox's thesis that the most important choice Jesus made was the choice of how he was going to communicate his message and that it is significant that he opted for story-telling. This meant that he trusted the imagery he employed to carry the message fruitfully. Needless to say this approach of Jesus required imagination which Moynahan stresses as a dramatist and he feels that this is his specific contribution to homiletics, the employment of which, he maintains, involves hard work. A contemporary challenge to imagination is that symbolised by the TV channel changer. This device hardly invites us to become involved imaginatively but rather to 'surf' seeking superficial, passive stimulation. Moynahan reports a frequent lack of imagination among present students.

He thinks that preachers and students of preaching tend to be somewhat fixated, unimaginatively, on the lecture as a

⁷ Moynahan, Michael SJ. Melbourne, Australia. 8/5/2000 (Interview).

model of communication and need to be free to employ other models. However there is no one definitive style which preachers should aspire to imitate; they need to find their own. To illustrate this he has ten different significant preachers come and preach to the class including a rabbi. The point is made that good preaching comes in widely different 'packages'.

A fundamental pedagogical aim is to produce preachers who are, very simply, people of the Word. This requires a thorough technical grasp of the scriptures, an appreciation of the liturgical cycle and a prayerful attentiveness based in the community. He reports a problem here in the contemporary United States where he finds people biblically very ignorant these days.

Moynahan agrees that there is a revival occurring in the United States in the Catholic church. Catholics are finally coming to the Protestant appreciation of the presence of Christ in the Word. Other aspects of this revival are a greater cultural awareness and the need to provide appropriate preaching and preachers to the Hispanic, black and Asian Catholic communities. This goes along with a greater global consciousness coming through in preaching on the theme of social justice.

To the proposition, 'preachers are born, not made' Moynahan answers yes and no. Great athletes are born but still need training. In addition anyone who understands his or her own story in the light of the Christian message is able to speak about it with authority. Hence we can understand the phenomenon of the technically poor preacher who, because of his or her insights into life and holiness, is deeply appreciated as a preacher. Paraphrasing Carl Rogers Moynahan says that it is by speaking of our own experience that we tap into the universal.

Dr Robert Gribben⁸ is an Australian Uniting Church minister who teaches theology, including preaching, at Ormond College in the University of Melbourne. He is originally from the Methodist tradition and preached his first sermon at the age of 17 at a youth service. These early efforts as a lay

preacher were supported by some help with biblical studies, technique and preparation skills but as he observes, being a young person in the Methodist Church of his day involved a great deal of formation in faith and worship which cannot be assumed at the present time. By the age of 18 he was preaching to congregations which included adults. At university where he was studying law he encountered 'theological preaching', preaching which challenged the intellect, a revelation to him, and an experience which changed his life.

In the Cambridge of the 1960's where he studied for the ministry and lived in the Methodists' student community, preparation for preaching was as thorough as it was intimidating. Every Wednesday evening a student was expected to lead a service of the Word and preach. This was attended by the entire academic body, students and professors. Afterwards came feedback. Senior students were chosen to criticise manner, matter and method after which any student could speak. After that the speech tutor commented, then the New Testament professor and finally the Principal gave his overall impression. During the entire process the student who had preached and led the service simply sat and listened. The rationale of this no-comeback rule was that defensiveness was unhelpful, that the criticisms were fair and balanced and that once a person has preached they do not have the opportunity to clarify. It has to be right first time.

After such a baptism of fire, any other preaching experience held no terrors, says Gribben. The regularity, formality and seriousness of the occasion was of great benefit. The Methodist ideal is serious: 'always to preach Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor 2:2). That the students witnessed their peers regularly striving to put this into practice and being willing to be judged on their efforts, was extremely formative.

Gribben tries to adapt the above foundational experience for his students. This is easier for the preaching class he runs for his own church than the 'mixed bag' at the theology faculty. However he makes the tantalising observation that

⁹ Gribben, Robert. Melbourne, Australia 14/5/2000 (Interview).

the latter group consists of people who come out of interest and who do not necessarily envisage a 'career' in preaching. It seems that the already mentioned revival in preaching has gone as far as being translated into academic interest, in the best sense of the word 'academic'. Therein lies the interesting prospect that some clergy might soon find themselves delivering their offerings to professionally trained judges of their wares!

Grateful as he is for the formation the monastic structure of his theological college gave him, Gribben knows that it cannot be reproduced today. A problem that he encounters is that the formal is foreign to his students. (Cf. Moynahan's persona). To understand and acquire the skills of taking the formal role of presider and preacher is a hard lesson for those brought up in a culture of informality. In a society where complete strangers can call each other 'mate' and where giving oneself even the suspicion of airs is unwise, formal presiding does not come naturally.

Another area where Gribben looks carefully at culture is the media. Analysis is essential he says, because it can quite simply be 'demonic'. However he also gets his students to consider the broadcast sermon and admires Sara Maitland, the Catholic religious media communicator.

The modern student of preaching needs to understand the didactic role, asserts Gribben, because of widespread ignorance of basic Christianity. However, the ignorant are not necessarily simple or even uneducated and so such teaching must include an understanding of the basic principles of biblical criticism. This is particularly necessary in a world where a new book comes out every week proving that Jesus never existed or that he was married to Mary Magdalen or that he came from Mars. Gribben includes such didactic content into his university sermons which are popular.

Some of the titles of the topics covered in Dr Gribben's course give an indication of the pedagogic value of stimulating themes:

Is there a Future for Preaching?, Preaching in the New Testament Era, The Art of 'Rhetoric' in the Early Church, Chrysostom's Catechetical Sermons, Medieval Preaching,

Hildegard, Reformation Preaching, Cranmer's Homilies, The Principles Underlying the Choice of Readings in the Lectionary, Methodist Preaching from Wesley to Soper, Preaching as Therapy, Billy Graham, The Post-modern Challenge.

One of his students produced an essay on Sheen as an example of a Catholic Evangelical in the era of mass media!

In answer to whether preaching could be taught or not Gribben's interesting reply was that he thought it was easier to teach preaching than the role of leading the liturgy.

Finally, it seems apposite to include the experience of the present writer as a teacher of homiletics. With regard to formation the picture is typical of the generation - quite good foundations of speech training (including schoolboy work on elocution) but with little being built on the foundations that the individual did not construct for himself. The experience of teaching adolescents in secondary schools, including preaching to them during liturgies, was a formidable school of communication. Feedback is swift and the oblique courtesies of the parish are starkly absent. Buttrick's observation about the responsibility of the speaker to focus attention is instantly recognisable. The discipline of preparation is forced upon the young teacher; it can be a question of survival. A legendary history teacher in one particular school, particularly effective with weaker classes, ensured his success by simply making every class a *tour de force* by dint of hours of preparation. Such models are priceless.

Some of the aspects of the present writer's situation have already been mentioned - the large class, the variety of languages, the fact that English is a mother tongue for a tiny minority, the natural ability of many. The aims of the course, on reflection, have been over-ambitious. These were two, firstly to give a course involving practice and secondly to stimulate some reflection on preaching itself. This latter tended to be squeezed out by the need to ensure that all students had a chance to preach (sometimes videotaped) and receive the feedback of their peers, even though important

⁹ Interview with Rev Robert Gribben, Melbourne, Australia 14/5/2000 (All quotes in paragraph).

points for reflection would sometimes emerge from these sessions.

Latterly, with a double lecture period and a reasonably small class the pedagogical situation is much improved. The first period consists of a lecture with discussion, the second the practical, now conducted in the less artificial setting of the chapel.

The basic pedagogical problem is the choice of material for reflection, since the scope is enormous. A whole course might not do complete justice to the subject of preaching and scripture or the history of it or on the Reformation or the Dominicans. The challenge lies in identifying the perennial themes, presenting these and also focusing in on those which are of particular pertinence to the particular students.

The question of what we are doing when a student 'preaches' to the class has been discussed. We have concluded that this is 'for real', that the students are preaching to each other. There will always be an element of artificiality, but this is purposefully minimised. Hence I repeat what Robert Gribben said of his student days, namely that it is permissible in the context to use technical theological vocabulary.

In an institution such as St Joseph's Theological Institute there are different 'styles' and different charisms underlying these 'styles' as well as different theologies. It might be argued then, that preaching practice should also take place within the different communities, and indeed this is done in some cases. The disadvantage here is that the majority of the communities are small in size and hence the exercise is unlikely to be of the scale and formality of later parish preaching. It is more likely to be a quiet, intimate reflection to a few brothers in a small chapel. From this perspective it would seem likely that involving students in preaching at the parishes which some of the religious communities run is a more fruitful route. Seriousness is guaranteed, feedback and support can easily be organised and the larger scale occasion gives the appropriate setting demanding of *gravitas* in which the student is obliged to function in the appropriate manner.

A key point that emerges from these conversations is the importance of leadership and its example. The teacher of homiletics can only do so much. If the leadership favours the 'big man' model of the preacher, the students are likely to follow this lead. If the leadership lays down a 1950's model of formation and 1950's theology then this will impose limitations such as an impoverished understanding of the Vatican Council's vision of preaching. If the leadership accepts candidates who are emotionally under par, this is extremely unpromising material for the pedagogue to work with. The students in the developing world are younger, more numerous and often already experienced. This is the good news from this sector. Some of course need to grow up, but their youth gives hope that they will. The Negri and Gribben interviews indicate that immaturity of students in the developed world might not just be a question of age but of poor early emotional development, with perhaps less hope of movement. The good news is that there are some students coming forward to learn about preaching who do so out of sheer interest in the subject.

4.8.1 Authority and Technical Competence

Some of the above passages might lead one to suppose that what is being espoused is a theology of preaching which lends authority to preach solely on the basis of technical competence and personal maturity, intellectual training and spiritual discernment. It could be seen as an authority taking its source from personal charisma, personal qualities and training. Certainly professional ability and personal qualities are being emphasised for it seems to me that there has been a certain neglect of these. Steps have been taken in recent years to ensure the choice of candidates have basic maturity and psychological balance and some spiritual growth has taken place. However in our choice of candidates, which is after all for the preaching ministry, in the Roman Catholic church at least, we do not, to my knowledge, conduct even the simplest test of ability in public speaking.

4.8.2 Full Authority

What is assumed here is that when a minister of the Word stands up to preach, such a person does so with authority in the full sense of the word. This authority has four parts:

- 1) the authority of tradition; the preacher is a member of the living community.
- 2) the authority of legal authority; the preacher has been officially commissioned.
- 3) the authority of competence; the preacher has been properly trained.
- 4) the authority of integrity; the preacher has properly matured.

Ideally all four legs should be present for this particular piece of furniture to stand up in a dignified manner. Are all of these legs equally important? Perhaps not. A case where one may compensate for weakness in another has been mentioned, namely when the technical competence (3) is poor but is compensated for by (4) a maturity and even holiness through which wisdom and goodness are conveyed despite the poverty of (3). This can sometimes lead people to the conclusion that therefore (3) is unimportant. It suffices to say that those who have the authority of (4) in great measure are few and far between and therefore we are speaking of exceptions to the rule.

4.8.3 An Exception

Another exception to the rule is the non-ordained person who has no official licence to preach at the eucharist but because of great competence and great integrity is frequently invited to do so. A casuistical, even Jesuitical approach to this, already mentioned, is that the person is not really preaching, but only giving a 'reflection'. This semantic approach will probably not do. It is a problem which has cropped up in the church through the centuries and has never been solved. One might venture the opinion that in a church in which the laity have finally been brought officially into prominence, this would be the opportune moment. Some test of competence for lay preachers followed by full commissioning

as preachers should not be beyond canonical creative abilities. In a church in which the possibility of lay people becoming fully licensed preachers, issues of competence and integrity would become more prominent, with positive repercussions for the training of clerical preachers. As Voltaire put it, it might be good for the purpose of 'encouraging the others'.

4.8.4 Suggested Structure

A final suggested structure, then, would be a new Roman Catholic ministry of Preacher analogous to the extraordinary minister of the eucharist. It would be similar to the lay preacher in the Protestant tradition. This ministry would not therefore be linked to priestly ordination, and could be exercised even in the eucharist. Naturally, a change of canon law would be necessary.¹⁰ The law as it stands at the moment is as follows.

Canon 766 states: 'The laity may be allowed to preach in a church or oratory if in certain circumstances it is necessary'... However Canon 767.1 states that 'The most important form of preaching is the homily, which is part of the liturgy, and is reserved to the priest or deacon' (Code 1983:141). Canon law would have to change if non-ordained ministers of the Word were to be allowed to preach the homily. It would also have to change in letter and spirit with regard to its grudging approach to lay preaching, seeing this as an extraordinary, temporary and basically inadequate substitute for preaching by an ordained minister. For a contemporary interpretation of the relevant canons see

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Assessment of preaching competence would be examined and would be analogous to the exam which gives Roman Catholic ordinands a 'licence' to hear confessions. By analogous I underline that without passing this assessment satisfactorily the student would not be given a 'licence' to preach. The exam would be taken by ordinands as well as lay preachers.

It might be objected that there are practical difficulties in the administration of such a system of accountability. However the Catholic church is at present living through a period in which the cost of the lack of accountability is being felt, not least in the financial sense. The reference is to the current rash of cases of sexual abuse. As has been mentioned, this situation has engendered a reflection on codes of conduct for ministers and sections have included the practice of preaching. As yet such codes are toothless. If they are to remain unread documents teeth will probably be an unfortunate but necessary addition. An examination of the standard of a minister's preaching is a suggestion to this end.

This is a recommendation for Africa as well as for the West, since lay ministry is well established here and also because the growth of the professional and educated classes is likely to continue.

4.8.5 Accountability and Preaching

At present there is practically no formal structure of accountability for preaching in the Catholic church. There are informal methods obviously and the codes of conduct being drawn up make pious recommendations about preparation and prayer. Bad preachers do not get invited elsewhere and are relegated to backwaters where they can affect the minimum number of people or they are moved frequently so that one community does not have to carry them forever. Collections can fall. But accountability can be called for if the institution has the will to exercise it, which it does

sometimes when it comes to doctrinal content. If the contents of an ordained minister's homilies are judged to be consistently unorthodox, particularly in the area of sexual ethics, accountability can and probably will be exercised. However in respect of delivery, no matter how appalling, accountability is rarely exercised in the Roman Catholic tradition. In the light of the earlier discussion on the fundamental importance of the focusing of the attention this ability would serve as a useful starting point for judging the acceptability of delivery. Is anyone listening?

Such a structure might also help us find a way through the old and yet still fraught question of who should have the authority to preach in the Catholic church during the eucharist. At present we take a casuistical approach and pretend that when non-ordained people speak during the liturgy they are not really preaching, even if they manifestly speak of God with eloquence, erudition and authority. On the other hand we pretend that when an ordained priest is speaking during Mass, trying but clearly not succeeding in preaching, in some deep but unfathomable sense, he is.

Thus the suggestion is that authority to preach would be given only to those, ordained or non-ordained, capable of passing the assessment or exam. The logic of this is the logic of competence and calling, not just the *ex opere operato* logic of sacramental ordination. Indeed, if the church wishes to continue to link eucharistic preaching with ordination, then if a priest or trainee shows himself to be incompetent then it should surely pose a most serious question about whether the man has a priestly vocation. However, in practice this is not one of the first things that come to mind when assessments of candidates for the priesthood are being made.

Part of this assessment of preaching ability would be made by consulting the *vox populi*, part by an examination by professional theologians and communicators. Such an assessment need by no means be a once in a lifetime event. It could be analogous to the routine testing that airline pilots and many other professional people undergo as a matter of

course. Or it would be like the routine re-testing that many countries are establishing for drivers at certain points in their lives. Naturally it could become the occasion for some re-appropriation or upgrading of the skills involved. Some skills are too important to allow to fall below par.

4.9 Summary and Bridge to Part II

What is a preaching revival? The phrase conjures up visions of enormous tents filled with swaying people. To Roman Catholics this speaks suspiciously of shallow roots and the ephemeral. And yet in some sense the question of numbers must come in. Gloomy media reports in First World countries announce attrition of practice of organised religion and a particular fall in the practice of the young as compared to times past. Sometimes what appears to be missing here is the fact that the young make up a smaller proportion of the population in western countries than in times past. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a willingness to 'shop around', so that the churches where there is the expectation of something worth listening to is well-patronised. This is sometimes referred to as the 'refugee' syndrome.

We can conclude briefly, firstly by saying that a revival of preaching is primarily to do with greater and more effective access to ordinary people, so that the 'poor have the Gospel preached to them' (Matt 11:5). In global terms of course the poor are the people of the developing world and so if the question is asked in those terms, we may have to conclude that in many places the jury is still out, since in much of the developing world, including Africa, the missionary clergy and religious are still to be fully replaced by local people.

For all communicators of the Gospel issues of professionalism have always been there. However in a more demanding era of high professional standards, these demands are felt more strongly today. In this context the problem of actually succeeding in being listened to and avoiding tedium is a perennial one and not to be regarded as irrelevant, even in our rhetorically endowed African society.

This chapter has also attempted to address a particularly Roman Catholic problem, that of authority being linked so strongly to priestly ordination. This powerful linkage results in, on the one hand, a sometimes scandalous tolerance of inadequate preaching by the ordained, and, on the other, official discouragement of the preaching vocation of the non-ordained. The suggested way through this problem is to confer both ordained and non-ordained the authority to preach and to make this authority official through an official test of competence. The pedagogical gain would be a broader spectrum of students and a lessening of clerical complacency about preaching.

Our earlier survey of the history and theology of preaching in the Western Church demonstrates, if anything, an ecclesial capacity for creativity and cultural adaptation. However in African history it would appear that, as in other colonial situations, inculturation was not a priority. However a church that can produce both a Bartolomé de las Casas and a Bossuet, shows at least the potential for such adaptation. A church that can transfigure culture like St Francis and confront it in the manner of Wesley, should be able in theory to rise to the challenge of evangelising the extraordinarily complex social, linguistic and cultural reality that is Africa. In the post-colonial Africa of today the work of the inculturation of the Christian faith is perhaps only a recently initiated project. Certainly this would be the experience in the Roman Catholic church in south Africa where, in a sense, colonialism only officially ended in the first all-race elections of 1994.

We must now focus our attention on the African Church. A broaching of the subject of culture, traditional, modern and post-modern will be necessary in order to do this. Other important themes to be considered in the context of the African Church will be communication, pedagogy and formation and will lead us into our conclusions.

PART II PREACHING IN AFRICA

Introduction

Since, as has been indicated above, this thesis is concerned with the pedagogy of preaching in an African setting where inculturation is a sine qua non, this second section will attempt to do quite a thorough analysis of culture as such and include the dramatic encounter between traditional African culture and the culture of modernity and even post-modernity. The state of this encounter will be assessed and some projections into the future will be attempted.

Communication is an important corollary to culture and within this the themes of orality and literacy continue to look at the ways in which African and western culture meet one another. We shall also consider the abiding genius of African communication in its traditional proverbs and folk tales and the *palaver*. Once this large area has been surveyed we will be able to move to pedagogy where we note the opinions and perceptions of a group of Roman Catholic students and also some teachers of homiletics from the same tradition.

The section is rounded off by some important considerations in the area of the general formation of preachers, the kind of personal and spiritual growth which must be going on simultaneously with the acquiring of technical preaching skills and without which such skill will be vitiated.

The final chapter is a gathering up and summarising of the conclusions drawn by the present work.

Chapter 5. Culture

5.1 Introduction

The issue of culture dominates the following section. We attempt to avoid the twin extremes of cultural nostalgia and cultural defeatism. *Mayibuye iAfrika!* (may Africa return!) cannot mean a return to an idealised past, but neither is it devoid of any meaning or possibility whatsoever, despite the awesome march of modernity and post modernity. In this chapter we attempt to look at culture in some depth in order to see where African and western world-views meet and the dangers and possibilities in this meeting and the relevance of the encounter for preaching.

5.2 Culture and Meaning

This chapter will involve some further exploration of culture in its relation to communication in the African setting. The picture is a complex one because of the dramatic and dynamic encounter between traditional African culture and modernity and post-modernity.

Space does not permit an exhaustive description of all the current perspectives on culture. Louis Luzbetak's gives an overview in a chapter entitled 'The Nature of Culture' in *The Church and Cultures* (1988:133-222). His basic definition is 'society's design for living' or 'plan' which helps each group cope with reality. This socially shared blueprint for living includes beliefs that issue in standards of behaviour or ethics. The blueprint is learned and all its elements are organised into a dynamic mechanism of societal control. Chris Barker's similar image is that of a map or several competing maps:

Culture: Overlapping maps of criss-crossing discursive meaning which form zones of temporary coherence as shared but always contested significance in social space. The production and exchange of meanings, or signifying practices, which form that which is distinctive about a way of life (2000:383).

The present writer's own language-orientated, working definition of culture, distilled out from the above writers, is simply 'culture is shared meaning'. Rhetoric, as we have seen, is a culturally conditioned method of sharing meaning.

On culture and communication Stuart Bate states that 'Culture on the epistemological level is fundamentally communication' (1995:252). Or as Xolile Keteyi puts it in a similar analysis of culture as communication: 'human beings express and communicate through their culture' (1998:20). The centrality of language to culture is a foundational notion to the thesis of Lamin Sanneh (1993) in his nuanced but finally optimistic analysis of the encounter between Christian missionary activity and indigenous languages in *Encountering the West and Translating the Message*.

Culture is therefore both a context and a medium for preaching which is, or should be, communication and sharing of religious meaning.

5.2.1 A Dynamic View

In taking a dynamic view of African culture, the minefield of the interaction of modernity and tradition must necessarily be mapped and crossed. But it seems that this is where the interesting things are happening.

This setting sometimes resembles a war-zone when it comes to debates on culture and within this war-zone are many minefields. The main battle lines are drawn between what can loosely be called 'conservationists' and 'functionalists' (Sebidi 2000:no.2. 8). The conservationists obviously wish to conserve culture or some of it, either because it is conceived of as a good thing in some sense or simply because it is there, something their forebears always did. The functionalists tend to be those who have successfully adapted to modern life, and benefited from it. For them culture is what 'works' and helps one cope and thrive in one's world, in practice the modern world. That which fails to do this is discarded. The conservationist tends to accuse the functionalist of being a sell-out to foreign cultural imperialism. The functionalist upbraids the conservationist for being benighted and backward, an enemy of progress.

Addressing himself to the theme of *Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity*, Marcello de Carvalho Azevedo (henceforth referred to as 'Azevedo'), delivers himself of this hope-filled theological statement: 'I dare say that the

inculturation process may turn out to be for the church the very way to its redemptive self-evangelisation' (1982.3). His context here is a suggestion that the de-Christianisation of Europe is more to do with the cultural distancing of itself of the church from the people than vice versa. He goes on to say:

I am not suggesting that the Church should now simply expose itself naively and uncritically to modernisation. I do want, however, to stress that a consistent, committed and alert dialogue between the Church and the modern world is a fundamental condition for announcing and keeping alive in our time the timeless message of Jesus Christ (3).

Indeed it is a fundamental condition which is another reason why much of the focus of this chapter will be on the interaction of modern and post-modern culture and traditional African culture. This encounter is where things are happening and changing, albeit very painfully at times. Observing this process is complex as well as unnerving, analogous to looking at the various chemical changes in a heated crucible of multiple components as they react with one another. For example not only is there change and transformation but also the perception of that change, the distinction between lived and professed culture, that which people practise and that which they believe they practise or that they feel they ideally *ought* to practise.

However these complexities should not cloud the fact that the continued influence of traditional African culture is undeniable in modernising Africa. One early implication for aspirant preachers then, is that their task will be as complex as the complex social and cultural reality they face. And to do this they require adequate intellectual tools.¹

¹ It is not within the scope of this thesis to put forward and defend a comprehensive theory of cultural aetiology. The general assumption here is that there is no one wellspring of cultural change. Ideas, the technological issue of ideas, climate, customs, traditions, beliefs, historical experience, significant leadership, and the combinations of these all play their part. I also assume that sometimes people co-operate gladly in the process of change, and sometimes change is brutally forced unwelcome upon them, some traditional people accept and co-operate with modernity and others resist it. I also assume that so far no one has found a way of reaping its material benefits without some cost to traditional culture. It is always a trade-off.

5.3 Further Definitions of Culture

At this point we need to look at some further definitions of culture as such. *Communication, Culture and Community*, (1999) a textbook published by the Social Communications Departments of the associations Catholic Bishops Conferences of East and Southern Africa (AMECEA and IMBISA), gives six definitions of culture. These range from Taylor's: 'Culture is that whole complex which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (AMECEA & IMBISA 1999:15) to Hanson's communication-based definition:

a process of communication in which people constantly transmit and receive messages about the way in which society construes the nature of reality and existence, the proper forms of human interaction, desirable goals for human aspiration, appropriate means for pursuing those goals and so on through a myriad of conventional understandings (17).

Various attributes of cultures are identified and explained, their uniqueness, their practical nature as a design for living, that they are learned, like language, and that they are dynamic and changing and in this sense open systems, though in another they tend to be difficult of access to outsiders. Culture, like language, is something into which individuals are born and which equips them for life and upon which they themselves can have an influence. For the individual it is an initial 'given' to which, with maturity, the individual can make a contribution.

5.3.1 'Levels' of Culture

The interesting concept of 'levels' of culture is also discussed. The most superficial level and therefore the most easily amenable to change is identified as the technical level - technology, tools, transport, dress. The next and deeper level is identified as the domestic - the arrangements in the home, cooking and diet, rhythm of life, who sleeps where and when etc. This level is thought to be more resistant to change than the level above it. The level of values is seen as deeper still and even less amenable to change and shows itself in things such as 'generosity, honour, bearing children etc' (18). It is the cultural world-

view, that which tells us the ultimate truths about humanity, its relationship to the cosmos and the divine, which is placed at the deepest level. And it is at this stratum that the writer believes people really find their cultural identity and at which change is the slowest 'This is the level where culture is most tenacious, most stable and most conservative' (18).

5.3.2 Root Paradigms

A variant of this theory is Turner's notion of 'root paradigms' (Biernatzki 1987:49) of culture. These 'root paradigms' are models for action rather than symbols or values. They are so fundamental to cultures that they are essential to the survival of the culture in its current form. They are the great unquestioned assumptions about the nature of reality and they surface in all cultures in varying intensities. They cannot easily be displaced by opposing paradigms. However, innovations introduced into a culture which are in harmony with them stand an excellent chance of being accepted. Examples of two root paradigms which are in fundamental opposition would be cyclical and linear time.

5.4 Traditional African and Modern and Postmodern Cultures

The meaning of the above terms will emerge in the following discussion. However some introductory defining is necessary and possibly helpful. 'Traditional African culture', a very varied phenomenon, we take to be that which existed before the encounter with European and European-derived cultures and which continues to exist despite that encounter. Here we include such things as language, religion, philosophical world-view, anthropology, political and social organisation.

'Modernity' we can define as the complex of ideas and attitudes engendered by the Enlightenment, among which the scientific paradigm, along with its method, is central. As we shall see, the origins of these ideas date further back than the 18th Century, but they were ideas whose time had come in that century, when they seemed to sweep all before them in Europe and North America.

'Post-modernity' is a more recent, indeed contemporary phenomenon. Whereas the Enlightenment can be viewed as a new orthodoxy, usurping the old certainties of religious faith with new scientific ones, post-modernity wonders with Pilate 'What is truth?' (John 18:38). 'The heart of the post-modern mindset is awareness of the relativity of all human thought and action', (Allen 1997:9) rather sums it up. Paul Lakeland in *Post-modernity, Christian Identity in an Age of Change*, (1997:7) highlights a loss of faith in progress as an important characteristic. He argues that this has a number of consequences for the sensibility of many people of the developed world, and by extension, the developing world insofar as it is touched by post-modernity. He characterises this sensibility as 'nonsequential, noneschatological, nonutopian, nonsystematic, nonfoundational, and, ultimately nonpolitical' (8). The preponderance of negatives and the whole sense of the relativity of everything illustrate the difficulty of a solid and positive definition of post-modernity. Post-modernity's negative aspect can be understood as the ultimate failure of the Enlightenment to replace the intellectual edifice it pulled down with anything solid enough to last. 'The Kantian categorical imperative -so act that the maxim by which you act, you could will to be a universal law - implies universal categories of right and wrong' (Lakeland 1997:25). However Lakeland observes that, 'Two hundred years after Kant, the ethical map looks very different... The freedom of the subject championed by Kant has stretched way beyond what he envisaged, and the questions are now different' (1997:25). The genie is out of the bottle and attempts to put it into other bottles have failed like the attempts of the French revolutionaries to substitute a religion of reason for Christianity. Today post-modernity rejects both.

Chris Barker mentions 'the blurring of cultural boundaries' (2000:22) as one of the characteristics of post-modernity. In the following sections, when mention is made of 'modernity', the word is understood to include 'post-modernity' except where we are referring specifically to it

narrowly, as for example in looking at the ideas of the Enlightenment.

5.4.1 *Root Paradigms, Modernity and Post-Modernity*

Now the root-paradigm theory of culture mentioned earlier offers some hope of resistance to the powerful influence of modernity and post-modernity. It supports the view that it is a mistake to think that culture and cultural identity are all about technology, for example. It also contends that things recent tend to frog march cultures towards a kind of cultural 'McDonaldisation', a homogenisation in which because we look the same, and wear the same mass-produced clothes and use the same communications technology therefore we become the same. Surface impression is most deceptive. Cellphone-sporting young Africans who dress like young urban westerners in dark, body-hugging hues and baseball caps and who enjoy rap and 'doof, doof' music, do not necessarily share the same underlying cultural assumptions. Indeed they may well sacrifice a goat to the ancestors in their suburban home, regularly see ghosts and paint *muthi* across the soccer goal-mouth to keep out their opponents' striker's shots. They do these things because these practices rest in deep root paradigms. Americans and Europeans do not do these things, though they have their own rituals, symbols, values and paradigms.

A telling image comes from the Elandskop area of KwaZulu, in South Africa in the era of Victorian Pietermaritzburg.² Apparently the Victorian matrons were not amused by sight of the *bheshu* or male loin-covering and so a decree was passed that all male Zulus visiting the town were to don trousers. And so an entrepreneurial Zulu man made a living on the road from Elandskop to Pietermaritzburg by hiring out pairs of trousers at sixpence a time to Zulu males en route to the city. On their return they would return them to the hirer. This colourfully illustrates how, when it comes to culture, things are not necessarily what they seem on the surface. It is a tale to delight the hearts of the

conservationist camp but the functionalists could also point out that it was a behavioural change and a functional one.

Here we should of course distinguish 'modernity' and 'post-modernity' from 'modernisation' (the process by which a society arrives at modernity and post-modernity). Peter Berger defined modernisation as:

the transformation of the world brought about by technological innovations of the last few centuries, first in Europe and then with increasing rapidity all over the world. This transformation has had economic, social and political dimensions, all immense in scope... Modernity means the resulting characteristics of the process in individuals, institutions, countries and cultures (my italics) (In Azevedo 1982:3-4).

5.4.2 Successful Resistance

Root paradigms or the deepest level of culture are therefore what resist change longest and best. There are some African societies which have resisted rather more successfully than others the transculturation or passing on of modernity. The Maasai pastoralists form a case study of this for an anthropological monograph by Valeer Neckerbrough. He says of them and others: 'It has been known for a long time that stock-raising nomads are among the most difficult to bring to open themselves up to Christianity and to western Civilisation in general' (1993:66). The continuing fascination with the Maasai arises from the almost complete rejection of modern culture, of modern education and Christianity and the maintenance of traditional cultural coherence and identity. Here even the superficialities of modern western society are spurned as any TV documentary demonstrates. In Turner's terms it would seem that the root paradigm of the Maasai (the understanding of the nomadic, pastoral way of life as inherently superior to other ways) is so resilient that it can successfully hold the line in a complete rejection of the new. He identifies the extremely virile, serious and extremely painful rites of passage of Maasai boys as the key rituals which maintain the cultural status quo. But even so, the lingering questions remains: how do these people do it? How do they hold to their very

² Conversation with M.Lewis c.1987.

traditional way of life while everyone around them has 'gone western'?

5.4.3 *Modernity, Post-Modernity, Superficiality and Power*

The Maasai people apparently regard themselves and their way of life as superior to that of others. Does this mean that modernity and post-modernity are superficial by comparison to the way of life of the Maasai? A common assumption is sometimes made that modern western culture is as superficial as the trousers donned and discarded by the traditional Zulu man as he went in and out of the white man's city. There may be a dangerous confusion here between moral depth and underlying power. western culture may well lack a moral depth, certainly, but it is a glib assumption to conclude that it therefore has no power. western culture too has its root paradigms; it is not all Big Macs, Disneyland and the soft way of life of the couch potato naturally despised by the tough cattle-herder.

Modern and post-modern culture can be viewed in many ways, but the evidence is that it is itself a formidable phenomenon. After all, no one suggests that modern culture is in any danger from Maasai culture; the assumption is rather the reverse.

5.4.4 *The World-View of Modernity and Post-Modernity*

What is sometimes forgotten by those who deride modernity and post-modernity's moral superficiality is that like African cultures, modernity and post-modernity also ultimately rest upon a world-view or a set of root paradigms and that these are potent, fundamental and coherent philosophical assumptions about reality. Modernity cannot be simply equated with its technology. This world-view includes the root paradigms of scientific thought - empiricism, non-fatalism, linear time and dualism of spirit and matter. Stuart Bate goes so far as to say it is in fact a *metaphysics* out of which the modern and post-modern age continues to operate, 'a metaphysics of the physical in which the material has been sacralised whether in Marxist Dialectical and Historical Materialist philosophy or in the sacralising of

money, profits and the banks in the West' (1995:255). Therefore modern culture, although materialistic, does not lack an intellectual anchor. As Bate further remarks: 'Culture requires a metaphysical anchor which grounds it...' (252). Now few observers, including conservationists, believe that this metaphysical anchor is easy to displace or is rusting away. On the contrary, the evidence suggest that more ships are attaching themselves to it.

Consider the dualism of modernity. In this division modern culture distances itself from the spirit-world and the divine, and has claimed some 'secular space', (Caesar as opposed to God, the secular state as opposed to the City of God) and can therefore be loosely termed 'divinity-detached' even though some of its origins do have a religious basis. Out of this paradigm comes the secular state, an alien institution to the integrist view of, for example, classical Islamic thought. One ironic source of this 'secular space' is arguably the much-quoted biblical injunction in Genesis for humanity to subdue the earth. The 'pagan', as present day environmentalists remind us, reveres and even worships the earth in which the spirit-world is ever-present, but not necessarily the Judeo-Christian who regards it as a birthright over which to exercise the responsibility, and therefore power, of stewardship. The devotee of the nature-religions is always nervous about directly offending the nature-gods and is therefore much more conservative in the choices made in its regard. Not so Judeo-Christianity, the religious cradle of modernity.

Another characteristic of this more secular world-view is the root paradigm of linear as opposed to circular time. The long-term effect of modern technology is dramatically demonstrated by the question of the accurate measurement of linear time. In pre-modern Europe and elsewhere, measurement of time was linked to natural rhythms of the seasons and human life, *isikhathi saBantu* (people's time). People worked longer in summer and shorter in winter, the lack of artificial light being a contributing factor. The length of the day and night hours 'expanded' and contracted according to the seasons, as it still does in the monastic community of

Mount Athos. With accurate clocks and electric light, the measure of time is no longer tied to these gentle natural rhythms, but to a ruthlessly accurate machine. People clock-in and work day and night shifts which no longer vary seasonally. This is *isikhathi sewashi* (watch or clock time). The likelihood of returning to the attractive pre-modern arrangement in which presumably people slept longer hours in winter months, seems nil. The shift seems, over time, to affect our mentality.

5.4.5 *New Thoughts, New Possibilities*

Armed with these and other paradigms, modernity can not only do things that were previously not feasible but also *think* things that were previously unthinkable. Hence, for example, it is possible to think one's way out of fate, or into a totally new social order than the traditional one: 'The liberation from all bonds that limit choices becomes one of the most powerful inspirations of modernity with consequences for the whole of humankind' (Azevedo 1982:38) This in contrast to the 'static, generally accepted frame of values in any traditional society' (38).

Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau and the other fathers of the Enlightenment dared to believe that their ideas could actually be put into practice and that they would really work. Previous social thinkers, such as Thomas More (*Utopia*) or Montaigne (*Essais*) probably did not expect their writings on society to take flesh.³ Voltaire and others did. According to Frederick Copleston

The Encyclopaedists were animated by the idea of progress as shown in the growth of the sciences and in a corresponding liberation from superstition. Intellectual enlightenment would be accompanied by a growth of toleration and by political and social reform (Vol VI 1960:55).

³ J Friede & B Keen in Bartolomé 1971 *De Las Casas in History: Towards an understanding of His Work*. De Kalb, Ill, N.Illinois University. Quoted by K Starkloff, *Aboriginal Cultures and the Christ Theological Studies* 53 (1992:63). Bartolomé de las Casas (1474 - 1566), before he joined the Dominicans, tried to run his estate as a kind of paternalistic Utopia, inspired by More's work. However it has to be said that, compared to the following century, he was a voice crying in the wilderness.

Modernity is in some measure a vindication of their confidence. The idea of the possibility of material progress, including the possibility of improving human society, is itself a massive paradigm shift.

5.4.6 Challenge to Traditional Society

Now these root paradigms, strongly associated with the Enlightenment, are radical and powerful, some would say constituting an extremely ambiguous ideology which continues to shape our world today. Therefore the scientific, technical and mercantile culture of North America and Europe of today, in this sense, is not so superficial. It may manifest itself as materialistic but it does have historical, cultural, philosophical and even religious roots, some of which are in direct opposition to the roots of other cultures. An obvious example is authority which in many traditional societies is fundamentally situated in the person, rather than in the coherence of ideas. A line such as David Landes's 'the refusal of authority that is at the heart of scientific endeavour' (1999:370), illustrates what a direct challenge the critical mentality of modernity and post-modernity issues to authority which resides in the person and the root paradigms on which they stand. Some insignificant person, outside the hierarchy, but with a good idea, can now claim to pronounce on the way of the world and expect to be heard, even contradicting the 'big man' armed with the full and mighty weight of tradition. Which fundamental assumption will triumph in the long term? Martin Kennedy, reflecting in *The Tablet*, on the 'powerful cultural impulses' (Nov 4 2000:1476) in modern Ireland, says modernisation brings with it 'an enhancement of our sense of the individual - a deepened sense of the significance of experience. This could be described as a shift from the experience of authority to the authority of experience' (1476). John Mbiti would agree. 'The traditional solidarity in which the individual says "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am" is constantly being smashed, undermined and in some respects destroyed. Emphasis is shifting from the "we" of traditional corporate life to the "I" of modern individualism (1969:224-225).

On the other hand, some hold that the root paradigms are not easily uprooted. According to Biernatzki in his discussion on the inculturation of new religions:

A successful apologetic can be mounted by the new religion if its apologists recognize the distinction between this level of factors and the deeper level of the root paradigm. Resistance based on adhesion to the earlier forms of value and symbol may be intense, but might be circumvented by an approach which is fully in accord with root paradigms. On the other hand an attempt to 'uproot' the existing root paradigms while simultaneously introducing new values and dominant symbols will be doomed to failure, except possibly among some culturally-marginalised members of that society among whom the older root paradigms are poorly developed (1987:31).

Biernatzki has in mind the missionary. What this discussion is concerned about is more the influence of less gentle things such as politics, business and technology. The Samurai warrior class of Japan scorned firearms as the weapons of cowards and in a battle in 1878 (Landes 1999:370) they were mowed down by a peasant force armed with muskets. The story is strikingly similar to the Anglo-Zulu conflict of 1879. The martial cultural paradigm is the same - only cowards fight at a distance. Today both Japanese and South African armies are equipped to kill clinically at ever greater distances and swords and spears are now merely ceremonial. Technology changes practice and practice changes attitudes.

Does the root paradigm change? Most things do. Might it be that the paradigm which ultimately delivers the economic goods or is believed to do so will be the winner in the clash between traditional and modern cultures? It is argued that Japan's highly successful economic modernisation was based not on a displacement but on a re-interpretation of some of the root paradigms of traditional feudal society, such as loyalty to the liege lord. However, in recent times, as the Japanese have begun to note phenomena such as death from overwork, modern 'feudal' loyalties which were transferred to the modern company appear to be loosening. The government has recently initiated a campaign to persuade the Japanese to take more leisure time, an unlikely occurrence in feudal times. Root paradigms are being weakened, or to put it in Berger's terms the structures of plausibility show evidence of, if not collapse, at least some severe strain. This

indicates that in the long run, it is very hard to resist modern cultural erosion.

• It can therefore reasonably be argued that some of the root paradigms of modernity have in fact displaced earlier traditional ones. Certainly this has taken time, centuries in fact. For example the assumption of the efficacy of sympathetic magic (sticking pins into effigies or taking powdered rhino horn) has been replaced in western society by the assumption that life is governed by scientific laws. And despite some evidence of isolated reaction, no one is predicting a whole scale return to traditional religion as no one is betting that Maasai culture is the way of the future. The often brutal flow of history appears to favour modernity, not just its products but very much its world-view. In the end it appears to be a package.

5.4.7 *The Ultimate Roots of Modern Western Thought*

As already noted, it is conventional to locate the origins of western paradigms in the Enlightenment and the Renaissance which prepared for it. Landes in his economic history, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, would say that much of the practical innovation of the European Renaissance was already in the making during the Middle Ages and he lists a fascinating array of inventions or developments of earlier invention to this period to support this claim. He mentions simple things such as reading glasses which had the effect of allowing craftspeople and scribes to add some twenty years to their working lives or complex ones like the mechanical clock 'the greatest achievement of medieval ingenuity' (1999:49) because it laid the basis for vastly increased European productivity.

Others claim that some origins of European cultural paradigms ultimately go back to the pre-Socratics, to the truly revolutionary Ionian thinkers like Thales, Anaxagoras, Anaximander, Hippocrates and Democritus. These original inventors and scientific free-thinkers or *esprits forts*, are said to have laid the intellectual foundations of modern scientific culture in which literally earth-shattering

notions like atomic theory and the theory of evolution are part of the modern mental makeup.

According to the Australian philosopher Eric Wilmot this is the basis of the power of European and European-derived cultures: *European and European-derived cultures (my italics) are clearly the most powerful on earth'* (1986:24).

As the West accelerates into the globalised information age the political, economic and intellectual domination of its culture has perhaps never been so evident.

5.4.8 Culture and Technology

To linger a moment on technology. Technology is a surface manifestation of culture but is rooted in the scientific paradigm. Technology has existed in every society but it has never given humanity quite the power over the environment that it has achieved in recent times. Nor was it the self-propelling and even self-propagating force for change that we currently witness, change that is apparently irreversible in the absence of some major self-inflicted catastrophe.

Whether this technological transformation of the world is for the better or not is a moot point and the debate is illustrated by different theories. The liberal theory of progress takes the view that modernisation equals progress, plus or minus one or two details. The Marxists would oppose this with the theory of imperialism or the theory of dependence, seeing modernisation as a tool of oppression by one class over another. However whatever view one takes of modernisation and its issue, modernity, few people envisage it going away and this is thanks to the fascination with power of its technology.

5.4.9 Effect on the African World-View

Now our young African men and women in their baseball caps certainly use this technology and imbibe the scientific attitudes from which it comes. The question is how deeply? Well, they are clearly not like the Maasai even if they also differ from westerners. Azevedo reminds us that

Political and economic carriers have brought western modernity to almost every country, deeply affecting or deeply transforming age-old traditional societies. This *de facto* diffusion of modernity has been consistently reinforced by some structural characteristics of modern times that apparently appeal to men and women everywhere regardless of their cultural roots (1982:1).

Since it seems these influences are possessed of so much power, it surely cannot be ruled out that they affect questions of world-view to the extent of eventually *modifying* the cultural world-view at the level even of the root paradigms, particularly of the young and impressionable. Hence the wearing of the western style dress may, in the long term, not be so superficial after all but may signal a change at the deepest and most conservative level of culture. Dress is symbolic, even if it is dowdy and western. To dub western culture superficial is to underestimate its frightening capacity to modify everything it touches. Islamists who vehemently or even violently oppose westernisation have instinctively understood this. And Berger, speaking of orthodox religious groups, says:

The intrinsic problem of the accommodation posture (to modernity) is that, once taken, it has the powerful tendency to escalate to the point where the plausibility of tradition collapses, so to speak, from within... The fierce opposition to concession of even a minor sort among ultra-orthodox groups in the religious institutions may be said to rest upon a rather sound sociological instinct, which is frequently absent in their more 'open-minded' opponents (Quoted in Azevedo 1982:50).

Our anthropologist-fascinating friends, the Maasai, spring to mind here. Their strategy, whatever their motives for it, is not to give a cultural inch in certain vital areas, particularly the daunting and painful rites of passage initiating boys into the identity of the tough manhood of the Maasai herdsman's life.

However, the Maasai, Amish and ultra-orthodox religious groups are exceptions, minorities. David Landes does not spare the reader in his mercilessly analytical historical tracing of the triumph of western scientific and mercantile culture. Landes listens to many points of view, takes into account such givens as climate and natural resources, but concludes that *culture* is an indisputably important factor in determining who will be the winners and losers in the modern

economic game. Africa, unsurprisingly, is listed as one of the more spectacular losers at present.

If we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes all the difference. (Here Max Weber was right on.) Witness the enterprise of expatriate minorities - the Chinese in East and Southeast Asia, Indians in East Africa, Lebanese in west Africa, Jews and Calvinists throughout much of Europe, and on and on (1999:416).

The implication, of the final quotation of Landes' book 'I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life' (Deut. 30:19) is that those whose culture does not favour the western model of economic growth should choose to adapt or die. This is the functionalist view. Indeed, the pressures are depicted as so inexorable that one wonders whether choice comes into it or not.

Until very recently, over the thousand and more years of this process that most people look upon as progress, the key factor - the driving force - has been western civilization and its dissemination: the knowledge, the techniques, the political and social ideologies, for better or worse (Landes 1999:513).

The lesson, once again, is not to underestimate modernity and post-modernity, the power of an economic system, underpinned by an ideology and a metaphysic which in a brutally obvious sense, works.

Azevedo thinks that this happens even where people are not in direct contact with modern technology:

'By various means, the indirect transportation of technologically-rooted mental categories leads to technologically-shaped thinking on the part of people who are not directly in contact [my italics] with the production of technology' (Azevedo 1982:32). The influence of modernity, particularly through its technology (the clock, the television, the motor car, the telephone) alters relationships, to time, to nature, other human beings and to the self. Such changes of relationship occurring at such a fundamental level necessarily involve changes of thought patterns, mentality, consciousness and language. Modernity, through technology, has already entered into and shaped the soul of the developed world and is rapidly doing the same elsewhere. There appears to be little resistance. The Maasai and the Amish are insignificant minorities easily dismissed as odd Luddite societies, anthropological and touristic

curiosities. The mainstream appear actually to aspire to the modern way of life, or at least to its material fruits and if they do not so aspire they are being powerfully pressured.

Azevedo stresses that Marxism, although apparently an ally of forces resisting westernisation, is also a product of the Enlightenment and therefore also a manifestation of modernity. Hence it is not a real alternative to modernity. It is also an ideology which involved the idea of mastery over nature, in a more systematic and top-down way than capitalism and it also enabled people to be more daring in thinking the previously unthinkable - the perfectibility of humanity, history as linear progress, scientific reason as a liberator from the opium of religious obscurantism and superstition. Its attempt at exportation and its claim to be international made it very much a transcultural force, particularly in the Third World of the 1950's, 60's and 70's. Having waned and then suddenly collapsed it is rapidly being supplanted by western Capitalism as the dominant force of the developing world.

5.5 Competing Systems of Ultimate Meaning

An analysis in *Spearhead* by Njino, Renato and Kirby sharpens up the issues and certainly views the situation in terms of competing cultures at the level of ultimate world-views. It presents the problem from the African point of view and provides an alternative perspective to that of Landes: 'In present-day Africa there are two co-existing world-views: the traditional and the modern. Each one is loaded with its own values, symbols and perceptions of reality' (1992:120). On the one hand there is the traditional world-view of the African anchored in an integration with the sacred, via the ancestors. Hence even the most mundane of activities can be informed with great sacred significance, e.g. the building of a house which is not just a place to shelter and to live but also symbolises important aspects of family relations and is a link with the ancestors. Good manners towards older people are more than just good manners: they are an initial step towards entering into communion with the ancestors. Zulu

culture will sometimes refer to a very old person as *idlozi*, an ancestor.

However in the divinity-detached, secular world-view of modernity people are no longer fundamentally interested in relating harmoniously with the sacred and quickly forget the dead. The basic preoccupation is the domination of the world for individual gain. People tend to become secondary: 'In extreme cases [of economic life] economy has become more important than people' (41). Individual human economic advancement becomes the supreme value, despite minority religious and ecological views. In western culture, seen from the point of view of traditional cultures, the tail of technology is very powerfully wagging the dog of humanity.

Njino, Renato and Kirby illustrate the confusing and stressful effect which the new complexity can have in people's lives, for example the Malawian working for a big company in town and who has to ask permission to return home for the funeral of a relative. It is a common dilemma in modern Africa. He has to steer between the Devil of the real possibility of being sacked and the deep blue sea of failing to show respect to the deceased and the ancestors, i.e. of being cut off financially or being cut off spiritually. This situation is reproduced all over Africa: 'There is no hidden village where the modern world-view has not reached and there is no African who has discarded totally his/her culture' (43). Hence, for these writers it is not just a question of the culture of the West impacting on the literate, urban classes. One could add that the vulnerability to loss of culture is always exacerbated by loss of older people to pass culture on. With staggering numbers of AIDS orphans anticipated in the coming years, one can envisage the tragic situation of a generation of young Africans without an African world-view. A volunteer worker helping street children in Pietermaritzburg puts his finger on this problem: 'Our fundamental task... is to provide a sense of belonging, an identity. Loss of traditions and rites of passage leave youngsters adrift in a society which has no place for them' (R Gumbe in Harrison, *The Natal Witness* 24 Nov 2000:9).

5.6 Mass Media in Africa

The AMECEA publication includes a discussion of the use of modern mass media, another powerful technological product of western culture which has a profound impact on consciousness. These are compared with the traditional African oral-visual means of communication of dance, rituals, drama, story telling, praise singing, drums and a number of others. The point is well made that the modern means, such as radio, TV, newspapers and books tend to be one-way means of communication and that there is not normally any direct personal contact between the sender and recipient. It is also admitted that they can affect traditional culture.

It would seem that unlike traditional means of communication, they would tend to weaken traditional relationships and community ties in African societies, as they require a person's attention while being operated. For instance, people listening to a radio programme, watching television or reading a book cannot meaningfully engage in a conversation with each other at the same time. Either they do not speak to each other and listen to the radio, watch television or read the book, or they turn off the sets, close the book and talk (AMECEA & IMBISA 1999:108).

Indeed so, even if it is also true that some aspects of modern media do enable the kind of communication which supports the traditional culture. One thinks of the telephone or phone-in radio or the posting of death and funeral notices on the radio, or the celebration of traditional culture on TV.

Modern technology involves losses and gains. With technology come family-linking phones but also TV and western soap operas with lowest common denominator western values and western fantasies. I once watched TV with a group of university students in Zimbabwe who were glued to an American soap opera of such poor quality that the walls of the set moved as the actors walked about. To some extent this scene was the result of pitiful quality of local television - another factor in the equation. Where the local culture is unable to afford an alternative, the media will take the line of least resistance and show the cheapest and often nastiest of foreign offerings.

African culture, then, like all traditional cultures, is being affected, some would say corrupted, by both the means

and the messages of the modern media and the philosophy which ultimately underpins them. However the AMECEA/IMBISA volume claims that the university students referred to above are still untypical. Although Africa is becoming part and parcel of the 'global village', 'it is no secret that the majority of Africa's population live in rural areas where these super highways have not made any inroads and the technologically advanced communication networkings are non-existent' (109). Quoting Esayas the writer also cites poor literacy as a barrier to the penetration of modern media maintaining that 80% of African people do not communicate through functional literacy (115).

What we are talking about is rapid change for a minority, but it is an influential one. But the rapid spread of mass media in South Africa may be the shape of things to come in the rest of Africa. A radio is standard in rural households and TV is not far behind.

5.7 Relevance for Preaching

The obvious lesson that this chapter stresses is that those presently preparing to be preachers face an extremely complex cultural world. Apart from the complexity of the African side of their cultural backgrounds, where they may be called upon to be competent to preach in several different languages, there is the added complication of the rapid cultural and linguistic shift effected by modernity and post-modernity. One immediate practical implication is that, for congregations of a certain age, education and cosmopolitan makeup, English may be the preferred language for preaching. Along with this will be expectations about length and structure of preaching, modes of address, intellectual tenor and content and style. Needless to say these will differ markedly from the expectations in the more traditional settings of the countryside, but even here cultural shift, especially among the young, cannot be underestimated. The present writer occasionally reminds his students that they may soon be preaching to congregations containing professionals, including professional communicators with high expectations.

This does not mean that artful communication is a monopoly of educated people. Traditional communities have their own 'professional' communicators. The problem is that they may not be taken as seriously as those in the towns and cities in the universal neglect of the country, a temptation which modernity and postmodernity pose.

The desired capacities par excellence, then, for our future African preachers would seem to be those of adaptability, flexibility and a high degree of technical versatility.

5.8 Summary

To sum up then, it appears it is not just the superficial aspects of culture in Africa which are under assault, but also the deeper areas touching on world-view and fundamental identity. A recent conversation with a young Korean student suggested that this is not unique to Africa but is happening anywhere where traditional cultures are coming to terms with modernity, post-modernity and the west. This young man reported that when he and his friends discussed the topic of Korean culture they were unable to agree on what this might be today. Clearly there is a fundamental problem of cultural identity here, the kind of problem which is a central theme in recent and contemporary African literature and encapsulated in the debate on the concept of *négritude*⁴ and graphically illustrated by the unfortunate irony of the need for much African literature to be written in English, French and Portuguese.

The dynamic view of cultural interaction held by Njino, Renato and Kirby, is expressed thus: 'The clash is creating a fluid situation, from where new cultural elements are bound to emerge. The clash could be so dramatic that in the span of

⁴ 'In the ideological sphere the African leaders are trying to create a new image for their countries and people - one which will both transcend ethnic boundaries and give the African an identity comparable with and not dependent on that of the European. Thus the concepts of *négritude*, the African personality, and African socialism are born' (Lloyd 1996:51). See also Abiola Irele in *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* 1981. London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann, especially p 67, What is *Négritude*?

two or three generations a whole new cultural synthesis will emerge' (1992:45). Let us, with them, allow ourselves some realistic optimism.

Chapter 6 Communication

6.1 Introduction

This chapter takes up the theme of culture with the narrower focus of communication. Again the meeting of traditional and modern culture is of interest, as in the cultural dialectic of orality and literacy presently being worked out in African society. We try to get to the roots of African eloquence in the chapter in order to determine what deep resources are available for the inculturation of preaching or, in other words, what African preaching might be like.

6.2 Orality and Literacy

Today primary oral culture in the strict sense hardly exists, since every culture knows of writing and has some experience of its effects. Still, to varying degrees many cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambience, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality (Ong 1982:11).

Such a statement resonates with the modern African situation, with preachers everywhere in the church and has a particular pertinence to many African students. As Ong also points out, 'Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the father of modern linguistics, had called attention to the primacy of oral speech, which underpins all written communication' (1982:5). Orality is primary, despite 'the persistent tendency, even among scholars, to think of writing as the basic form of language' (5). For writing is in the last analysis always a 'representation of an utterance, of words that someone says or is imagined to say' (84). 'Writing is always a kind of imitation talking...' (102).

The mention of African students is made because many resemble European scholars of the Middle Ages whose oral-based mother-tongues were distinct from their literate scholastic tongue (Latin). In this context it is worth noting with Ong that most languages have never been written down and even today this remains the case. Hence for most language groups orality is the primary experience and when it comes to language as an art-form it is west African *griot* or the Provençal *jongleur* who takes centre-stage, not the writer. It

is the illiterate specialist in what has confusingly been dubbed 'oral literature'. Text does not impinge on this world except as a foreign language.

Indeed, language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages - possibly tens of thousands - spoken in the course of human history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a sufficient degree to have produced literature, and most have never been written at all... Even now hundreds of languages in active use are never written at all... The basic orality of language is *permanent*. (my italics) (1982:7).

Some African students will have a mother-tongue that is not written at all. Others will have languages which, though written, are not much used in the written form, but rather are almost exclusively an oral form of communication. Hence our need to reflect on this primacy of the oral.

However we should stress that this is not just an African issue. Ong (9) points out that even when a society becomes literate it continues to be fascinated by oral speech, as the Greeks were fascinated by rhetoric. The recent importance of the speeches by George Bush and Al Gore underline how, even in a literate and image-dominated culture like the United States, the power of the spoken word persists. It would not be acceptable for modern politicians to publish their speeches over the internet or in the newspapers.

Language is therefore irredeemably oral and all writing has its origins in speech. Modern scholarship came to this conclusion through classical study, particularly the analysis of Homer, where rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and formulaic expression betrayed a pre-literate poet. As Ong points out, 'In an oral culture, knowledge, once acquired, had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost; fixed, formulaic thought patterns were essential for wisdom and effective administration' (24). These patterns, of course, survive long into the era of literacy, and are perhaps permanent, if reduced features of speech. 'Oral formulaic thought and expression ride deep in consciousness and the unconscious, and they do not vanish as soon as one used to them takes pen in hand' says Ong referring to 'Opland's observation that when Xhosa poets learned to write, their written poetry was also characterised by a formulaic style' (26).

However it is difficult for literate peoples to imagine life in a truly oral culture where nothing can ever be 'looked up' and where words only exist as sounds and sound, as Ong notes, 'exists only when going out of existence' (32). The oral context has tremendously important implications for how people view language. 'The Hebrew term *dabar* means both 'word' and 'event'' (32). In oral cultures language is therefore not just a set of symbols for thought but it is a 'mode of action' (32). This makes for a much more dynamic idea of language than when it has been reduced to static print and objectified. Hence oral people often think of names as giving power, not just as labels, and certain verbal formulae as having magical powers, not just as conveying information.

The manner of problem-solving will be different in oral cultures. Without books to consult and through which one can 'dialogue' with others, it will be necessary to make use of an interlocutor. Once the problem is solved, the question is how to remember the solution.

The answer is: Think memorable thoughts. In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. Your thought must come in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetition or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic or other formulaary expressions, in standard thematic expressions (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero's 'helper' and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall... Serious thought is entwined with memory systems (34).

In other words, in oral societies it is a waste of time and effort to think through things in a way other than mnemonically. You know what you can remember; you have no texts so knowledge is best formulated in a memorable manner, rather like in the way students for modern exams devise mnemonics to help them retain and recall what they have learnt, except that after the exam the student promptly forgets what has been absorbed. The student in the oral society retains it.

This means that what in literate cultures might seem to be a cliché, in oral societies is an indispensable way of storing the knowledge. A king must not just be a king but a

'wise king', the dawn is not just the dawn but 'rosy-fingered dawn', the revolution is always referred to as the 'glorious revolution'. Ong comments: 'Once a formulaic expression has crystalized, it had best be kept intact' (39). In addition the figures which emerge from the lore of such a society tend to be larger than life and given to easily memorable superhuman heroics. If they are bland and colourless their memory dies. The 'baddies', e.g. witches and wizards, are extremely wicked and sometimes notably ugly and repulsive. Hence they cannot easily be forgotten, cf the fairy tales compiled by the brothers Grimm.

There are a number of other characteristics of primary oral cultures. One is the tendency to pile up rather than to subordinate in a narrative. The Gospel of Mark is linked together by a series of 'ands', betraying its oral origins. The literate approach would be more careful about such repetition, rendering 'and' in more varied fashion with words such as 'then', 'when', 'while', 'thus', 'hence' etc. This is because 'Oral structures look to pragmatics the convenience of the speaker...' (37) while literate structures look more to syntactics.

What strikes the literate as redundant in speech in oral societies is rather a manifestation of the way in which the literate's way of thinking has been 'linearised' by literacy. For the literate person it is always possible to 'look it up' and so the danger of losing the train of thought is eliminated in a world of texts. But the more circular or looping back patterns of thought of the oral culture are more natural for keeping the train of thought moving steadily ahead without a lapse of memory. The pause can be effective but not if it is obviously a pause for thought. When a speaker loses his 'train of thought' or 'blacks out', he tends to lose his audience and it is embarrassing. So the speaker in oral societies repeats what has been said in another way while the mind moves on to the next step in the narrative. Rhetorically, 'loops' are also effective when addressing a diverse audience whose levels of attention, intelligence and experience will vary. Intelligent and creative repetition is still a pedagogical principle used in

classrooms in literate societies. This tendency is referred to in rhetoric as *copia*, as in copiousness. Early written texts bear the mark of this copiousness as any glance at the Fathers or Medieval church writers will demonstrate. For modern, literate persons *copia* comes across as mere redundancy and unnecessary repetition, and in a world where literature is effectively infinite and time is limited, *copia* is viewed in a dim light.

There is a strong conservative element in orality. Again, it is born of the necessity to preserve what has been acquired. Obviously literacy has its own conservatism in the shape of pedantry, but written records also free the mind from the need to be constantly memorising things and it therefore has more scope to range more freely and speculatively without the anxiety that by so doing, previously acquired knowledge will be lost.

Not that orality is devoid of originality. Precisely because there is no text, each performance of a story has the capacity to be uniquely presented by the particular *raconteur* for this particular audience. But the changes tend to be made within the traditional and conservative conventions of the genre. Praises of chiefs or other notables are a good example. It would be bad form to omit the time-worn praises, but the *imbongi* might well add more contemporary ones to address the present situation of the person or give the old ones a slant which refers to the present. The present writer once heard an *imbongi* list the series of honorary doctorates received by Archbishop Hurley ('uMehlowemamba [Hurley's nickname] wadokotela eGeorgetown! wadokotela eNotre Dame! and so on).

Writing and printing tend to distance us intellectually from our subject. They are a technology, an artificial contrivance, and like all technologies they alter our consciousness and our way of perceiving the world. The analytic-minded literate person finds it extremely difficult to learn a second language by simple total immersion. Such a person always wants to know *why* something is expressed in such a way and many need to see the written word before being able to attempt to pronounce it. In oral societies analysis

abstraction are not so tyrannical, and concepts, lists, definitions and skills are couched in the context of what Ong calls the 'lifeworld' (42). As he says, 'Oral cultures know few statistics divorced from human or quasi-human activity' (43). Genealogies are not just dry records, lists of dead ancestors but ancestors who did important and memorable things. It is not that conceptualisation cannot be done, but rather it is done in another mode. In one study reported by Ong (51) illiterate people were presented with pictures of a saw, a hammer, a hatchet and a log. Most put these into the same category rather than distinguishing between the category of tools and material because the category they were using was situational, i.e. all the tools can do something to the log. Hence they all belong together, a perfectly logical conclusion. In the same fieldwork the researcher found resistance to defining concrete objects, people not seeing the point of trying to define a tree, which everyone sees every day. "Why should I? Everyone knows what a tree is, they don't need me telling them" (53) was the reply of an illiterate peasant to such a request. As one who has suffered from the sterile word-games of some Anglo-Saxon philosophy, the present writer can only applaud such common sense.

This lifeworld is one in which the struggle for survival is the norm. Hence the description of it is dramatic rather than dull. It is 'Agonistically toned' (43). Therefore the proverb or riddle is not just a way of storing wisdom or the law, but it is a weapon for use in the verbal struggle with an adversary. A modern example would be rap, which can be violent and aggressive with the extreme violence and aggression found in the epics of oral cultures. There are rap clubs in which contests are held, battles between rappers trying to outsmart each other verbally in the way Shakespeare's characters can sometimes be seen to be doing verbal battle in his plays.

It is not all violence and doing each other down in this *agonistic* oral world. The other side of the coin is the fulsome praise heaped upon the heroes, precisely as in the praises that Africans will use to applaud their heroes or their friends and family members.

In this struggle-world it is not surprising that full-blooded participation rather than objective distancing is the norm. Writing established conditions which enable us to be, or believe ourselves to be, objective. Ong (46) points out that Plato excluded the poets from his ideal republic precisely because they enable one to engage topics with *soul* and *feel* with Achilles or Odysseus.

6.2.1 Application to Preaching in general

In the realm of preaching the difference between the literate lecture style where the preacher keeps a cool, objective, intellectual distance from the theme, and the oral style where there is powerful emotional and even physical engagement of the person in it can be very telling. It is the difference between a sermon in an Oxford college and one in a African Independent Community.

We are talking here about cultures in which the spoken word does more *work* than in a world of paper, a world where agreements and transactions are verbal. Ong calls this kind of culture a 'verbomotor lifestyle' (68) after the word *verbomoteur*, coined by the Jesuit priest and scholar Marcel Jousse (20). He gives examples in the business world where, as he says, 'even business is not business; it is fundamentally rhetoric'. In Pick 'n Pay the buyer and seller do not even have to speak to each other as the transaction is essentially done on paper or electronically. In the verbomotor culture this is unthinkable and transactions normally involve a certain showing off of verbal skill, a polite verbal duelling, a battle of wits 'an operation in oral agonistic' (68). Naturally such contexts foster all manner of things communal which are lost or being lost in literate societies where reading and writing are solitary activities requiring a certain level of quiet and privacy.

Perhaps one of the most important of these is the sense of the interiority of sound itself and of how speech mediates the inner reality of reality including the human person. The sound a coin makes will tell us much about its metallic makeup, as will the quality of the sound made by a guitar say much about the wood and the craftsmanship. But we also 'sound

out' people, learning much from their tone of voice, accent, and vocabulary. This is not to say that gesture and body language do not also reveal a great deal. But in an oral culture, the distinction between gesture and speech is probably not so sharply made as in literate and image-heavy cultures.

This insight is germane to preaching for the reason that, although religions of the book have sacred *texts*, these texts are still read out and God is thought of and experienced as *speaking*, nor writing to us. In Christianity, moreover, the Second person of the Trinity is described as the Word who is spoken or uttered, by the Father. He is not inscribed. And the one who expounds the Word is not distanced from it but is, or should be, immersed in it because it is an event, a momentous event (*dabar*), not a still sign or a cold object. Further more it is an event which reveals us to one another and resonates within us as a community. 'When a speaker is addressing an audience, the members of the audience normally become a unity' but, 'If the speaker asks the audience to read a handout...as each reader enters into his or her own private reading world, the unity of the audience is shattered' (74).

6.2.2 *Language and Languages*

The contrasts between oral and literate or mainly oral and mainly literate cultures illustrates the fact that the cultural drama is being played out is at the level of language itself. Making it possible to write a language enhances but does not guarantee its survival. There are other factors at work such as the size of the language group and the capacity for that group to transfer its culture onto paper. Afrikaners, Greeks and Icelanders are small language groups that have achieved a disproportionately high per capita output but they are exceptions.

Abiola Irele explores this question in his article entitled 'African Literature and the Language Question (1981:43) He takes an optimistic view: 'For all its value and significance at the present time, modern literature in the European languages may well turn out in the future to occupy

a marginal position for us. A new surge of literary creativity may well lie ahead of us, in which our languages will then be playing their natural role'... (1981:61). He bases this view on the innate strength and adaptability of African languages as well as what he saw at the time of the hopeful situation in the Soviet Union where the indigenous languages were encouraged to flourish and were thus not dominated by Russian. However that was before the breakup of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a world with a single military, economic and cultural superpower.

The power of western scientific culture has a powerful vehicle, that of western languages, in particular English and even more particularly today, American English. If the communication definition of culture and the idea of language as a key to culture are at all coherent then the state of languages in Africa needs study. Recently the writer met a student from Francophone west Africa who reported that he was unable to write his native language since it was too small to be deemed worthy of being written down. Needless to say he spoke and wrote beautiful French. In urban Africa local languages are losing traditional vocabulary and gaining anglicisms and gallicisms. Certain classes of African society find that their children speak French or English as a first language. A young Nigerian reports to the writer that, like many young people brought up in Lagos, he speaks only English and Pidgin.

In this context the positive impact of Christianity on culture has been acknowledged by the already mentioned Lamin Sanneh (1989). William Oxtoby traces the expansion of Christianity through translation in his article *Telling in Their Own Tongues* (Concilium 1995/1:28). In the context of the evangelisation of the Goths and other oral cultures he maintains that 'Along with the technique of writing, the Christian contribution has offered models for literary style and a fund of cultural ideas and ideals' (1995/1:29).

Translations of the scriptures into African vernaculars have also made a permanent contribution to these cultures and the languages. Vernacularisation, often encouraged by western missionaries, is therefore a brake on the westernisation of

local culture but the momentum the brake is having to deal with is formidable. However, Jean-Pierre Ruiz in *New Ways of Reading the Bible* (Concilium 1995/1:80) holds out the hope that the gathering voices of Third World interpreters are making themselves better heard in the West.

6.3 African Public Speaking and Its Eloquent Exponents

In an essay on the inculturation of the eucharist Elochukwu Uzukwu underlines the power of the spoken word in African oral societies:

Since verbal communication in Africa is mainly oral, the spoken word assumes a dynamic character. A bard in the Komo initiation ceremony in Mali has said:
 The word is everything.
 It cuts, flays.
 It models, modulates.
 It perturbs, maddens.
 It heals or kills.
 It amplifies, lowers, according to its force.
 It excites or calms souls.
 (Thomas & Luneau 1981:28, In Gibellini:104)

This would appear to be because so much of traditional public speaking in Africa is poetically coloured. Isidore Okpewho explores the relationship between written and oral poetry in *The Modern Writer and Oral Tradition*, his contribution to a volume edited by Jones, Palmer & Jones (1988). He identifies the figure of the *griot* as an important exponent of the oral poetic art. The west African *griot* has his counterpart in many other African cultures, and is roughly equivalent to the Zulu *imbongi*.

Among the Mandinka of western Africa, the *griot* was traditionally a court poet attached to the king for the purposes of singing the king's glories and recording in his songs important historical events surrounding the ruling house. ...Among the Zulu of southern Africa the *imbongi* traditionally fulfilled that role.. (In Jones et al 1988:5)

Okpewho points out that such an artist often only performs after a considerable period of training as an apprentice, normally within the family or clan or even at a specially established school.

It is a cliché to identify the court poet as a sycophant, but Okpewho paints him more sympathetically as a diplomat, one who has to portray the failures of the king with some delicacy and care (1982:6). He adds that 'the art

of the griot was geared not simply towards praising the ruler but also toward reminding him of the established standards of rulership in his people's history' (11). Trevor Cope sums up the function of the praise-singer's art succinctly thus: 'The function of praise-poems arises from the function of praises in general, which is to bring about conformity to the approved modes of behaviour' (1968:31). The important point here is that the praise-singer is not just endlessly parroting ancient formulae. The exigencies of the present require him to be creative.

It used to be assumed that because these forms of poetry were handed down from father to son or from one generation to another, there were no changes or differences... But more recent study has shown that even in these more restricted forms of traditional poetry the poet still has to depend on his imagination as he is called upon to perform the same text in a variety of situations (6).

Another category of oral poet was, and to some extent still is, the freelance entertainer who would perform at ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and house-warming parties. Such freelance poets vary in their functions but 'they are all united in the skill with which they adjust their performances to a variety of situations and audiences' (7). The comment underlines the importance of the performative context of oral poetry and all oral presentation. Here Okpewho quotes Albert Lord's pithy phrase: 'an oral poem is not composed for but in performance' (9). Obviously the poet does not approach a particular performance unprepared and relying completely on spontaneity. He has something ready. However this is not the preparedness of 'the modern writer, working in the cold privacy of the printed word' (24) but the fleshly warmth of a real setting with particular people belonging to a particular group and tradition. The poet must therefore trim his artistic sails accordingly, and this requires imagination, creativity, spontaneity and sensitivity to atmosphere.

Live performance also requires more than just words, powerful as these might be in themselves. It required the dramatic presentation which harnessed music, song and movement to the poetic aim. 'Much of the emotional delight that we get from oral poetry comes from the musical quality

that is contained in the song or chant' (10). This musical and hence rhythmic aspect is the reason for repetition, the sheer enjoyment of a good line or chorus which can be taken up by the audience. Hence the written renditions of these repetitions can appear redundant or ridiculous on paper.

Something else which cannot be rendered on paper is movement, Ong's 'semantic component' (8) and Okpewho remarks that 'the somatic underpinnings of the performance of such poetry count a good deal in its effectiveness as oral poetry' (9). Another aspect of African oral poetry expressed with great difficulty in text is tone, as in the subtle differences of meaning and nuance that highly tonal languages can express. Once again, the performance, rather than the text is the thing. If we read the words *really?* and *really!* the question mark and the exclamation mark give us some sense of the tonal rendering, but they are only a very crude introduction to a whole host of possible shades of meaning contained in the words when spoken.

Okpewho's task is to portray a modern African world in which 'orality and literacy confront(ed) each other' (8) and this he does. How does this oral poetic world cope with a world of text and the inevitable detachment this involves from the live performance and cultural context of this performance? He believes that the coming of the Arabs and Europeans to Africa, and the colonial experience, have given rise to a new breed of poet who,

having usurped from the traditional poet his time-honoured role of giving both delight and education to the society, have found themselves locked within a medium and a context of ideas which lack much of the immediacy that ensured a bond between the traditional poet and his people (13).

The situation sounds analogous to that of the contemporary African seminarian studying western theology and thought in a western language and even training to preach (i.e. practice one of the oral arts) within the limitations of these categories.

The history of this alienation is a doleful one, beginning with slaves whose poetry, though artistic, suffered the humiliation of cultural amnesia. Okpewho mentions Juan Latino (?1516-94), Phillis Wheatly and the 18th Century

Gustavus Vassa. Their adopted slave-names say it all. In the pre-independence cultural world of Africa, the French appear to have been more culturally imperialistic than the British, but the effect was much the same - the downgrading of the local oral culture and the great danger of its complete loss (14).

The fascination with literacy was a natural attraction and therefore a distraction from the richness of orality. The Malagasy poet Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo is an extreme case. His work is a celebration of French symbolist poetry and the attractions of French culture were so powerful that he committed suicide after the colonial authorities refused to let him visit France (15).

Once the African literate class began to study abroad the mood changed as they saw the less attractive sides of European and American society, particularly its racism towards Africans. These experiences prompted many to take a fresh look at their own roots. *Négritude* is a name for this reaction 'a celebration of blackness in all its dimensions, not the least of which was a sustained effort to rediscover the traditional qualities of black African culture' (17). In poetic form this is particularly powerfully expressed in Senghor in which the skin colour of the African person and a veneration of African tradition are treated with in lyrical poetic form. Not that this reaction was slavish or entirely of one mind. Okpewho points out that Christopher Okigbo could plough a lonely and very individualistic furrow and that Senghor could depart from the tradition to address a praise-poem to a second-class Senegalese private who fell in action during the Second World War; a far cry from praising kings and chiefs. Wole Soyinka could poke fun at *négritude* saying that 'a tiger does not need to proclaim his tigritude' (21).

As to the present Okpewho is a realist, noting the power of literacy and the western culture that accompanies it. 'African nations find themselves in the grip of a cultural climate brought about by the ever-advancing typographic and audio-visual technology: pop romances, video etc. If 'literacy is going to rule the cultural future of African society' (22) his solution is that 'we must try to recover

from the oral culture those elements which can conveniently be accommodated within the culture of the written or printed word' (22). This return to the culture is regarded by Okpewho as 'an intellectual duty' (23) because the threat of loss of culture is real and dire. As he says: 'The pilgrimage has been encouraged fundamentally by the feeling that western culture is in a basic sense alien to us and we need constantly to return to our roots so as to reduce the menace of the alien element' (23). However, in the end he is sure that 'literacy is here to stay and has a discrete character of its own; the best justification for the tradition is not a wholesale transfer into literate art but a judicious selectiveness which will prove its adaptability to changing circumstances' (23). And he adds, 'While I applaud the recourse to tradition, I really do not see the point in some of our writers carrying on as if orality is our destiny' (23). He sums up the dilemma well.

6.3.1 Prayer

Our investigation of traditional African oral culture would not be complete without reference to traditional prayer and the articulate specialists who offer them. John Mbiti's *The Prayers of African Religion* demonstrates how important prayer is in the religious culture. There are prayers of great beauty and piety for almost every occasion. Most are addressed to God (1975:3) though some invoke lesser divinities, spirits and ancestor-heroes and heroines. Normally the prayers are said or sung on behalf of the community by a leader with the community coming in with a chorus (2). In these prayers we can come to know the image of God projected by traditional belief in Africa, the God who is a father, an elder, a mother and who is the origin of the people and before whom a person is like a child (3). These prayers also express God's attributes of creative love, power, care for humanity, justice and so on.

The right values which persons should strive for emerge in African prayers as well as those vices which should be shunned. Hence a person aspires to be holy, pure and humble

before God and speaks to God in trust, faith, confidence praise and thanksgiving(23).

The evils and misfortunes of life feature strongly in these prayers and help us build up a picture of what the 'good life' is for traditional people. Death and sickness, drought, barrenness and witchcraft are examples of those things from which protection is sought from God in prayer. The graces which are sought are the opposites - life, health, good rains, children and freedom from evil influences. (20).

'Most of these prayers are recited by people in their official capacities as priests, diviners, medicine-men, kings, ritual and family elders, and heads of family.. (2) according to Mbiti. He adds that comparatively few are said by individuals for their own needs and so 'as a rule, these African prayers are community-based and community-orientated' (2). Through this medium of public prayer, offered by an official representative of the community and to which the community assents by joining in, there is an implicit teaching and reinforcement of theology and values. It is not preaching in the explicit sense that modern Christians would understand it but rather an implicit sharing of the theology spirituality and ethics which are the common religious heritage of the community.

6.3.2 Proverbs

No doubt traditional oral culture in Africa shares characteristics with other oral cultures. However we will try here to sketch some of those African characteristics which stand out. African use of proverbs must be among the more important of those characteristics and their function holds promise of fruitful study for the preacher, as we saw Mbiti pointing out earlier.

In an essay entitled *Proverbs in African Spirituality* (Ed Getui 1998:57) Hannah Kinoti reminds us that 'Chinua Achebe is credited with the remark that proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten'. Kinoti profiles the Bwami of East Africa, the proverb specialist, and this profile is a striking witness to the high regard with which the proverb and the teller of the proverb is held. For this particular

figure is initiated into the Bwami confraternity only after having mastered a thousand proverbs off by heart (57). Once again, in the context of the training of preachers, it is instructive to note the fact of specialisation and the thorough training that goes into this specialisation.

The function of proverbs within African languages are described by Kinoti at some length. Apart from being used to clinch arguments, they are to help people have an appreciation of the ways of nature, they are instructions in traditional morality. They 'challenge people to a moral life' (65). The promotion of healing within individuals and communities is another function, as is their help towards appreciating the supernatural, for, 'The essence of African religion...is the integration of the supernatural and the natural (70). Their use fits well with the traditional African cult of the ancestors because 'The proverb is usually quoted to the disturbed by a senior, and it comes as the voice of the ancestors, his seniors par excellence' (Hertzog, quoted by Kinoti:67). The writer is critical of the failure of early missionary efforts to harness the power of African proverbs which she believes can help foster a truly African spirituality as well as morality. Interestingly enough for our present purpose she concludes with an appeal to preachers: 'Proverbs need to be articulated more explicitly in the preaching that goes on in our pulpits without being regarded as "extra curricular". They need to be woven in more boldly in the theologising that goes on everyday in our communities. In an article in Pastoral Care in African Christianity reporting on the findings of a survey, C M Mwikamba mentions that the 'use of African proverbs, poems and narrative stories imparting Christian thoughts and doctrines was appreciated by many' (In Waruta & Kinoti 1994:222).

Moreover they need to be studied with all seriousness' (76). S Guma's work on traditional literature in Southern Sotho illustrates that the proverb is not just important in East Africa. For him

proverbs constitute the philosophy of life of the Basotho. Their whole life and thought is reflected in them. As a group, they embody their most traditional values, which are the

findings of past generations in their struggle for existence. In a community that could neither read nor write, they constituted the unwritten laws of the people, and whose force was perhaps stronger than that of written ones elsewhere, in that as proverbs, they had the sanction and approval of the community as a whole. Because of this, they touched the heart-strings of every individual, and made him a policeman unto himself. They teach; they counsel. They do this on the basis of past experience, because *Tsietsi e a ruta* (Experience teaches). For this reason they are invaluable to the modern generation, which is beset with its own peculiar problems, in its struggle for existence (1967:99).

The preacher who aims to do some serious inculturation of pulpit oratory would do well to reflect on Guma's words.

A note of caution is sounded on the subject by M. Bourdillon in his *Religion and Society* in which he writes about the ritual quality of secular rhetoric (1991:108-112). He notes that formal speeches in this context can be used not so much to communicate information but to reinforce authority and respect. Formal speeches, full of conventional sentiments, including proverbs which he calls 'canonical messages' (112), can be used for propping up the traditional authority. Naturally this can be good if the traditional authority is behaving properly, but Bourdillon appears to be hinting that it can be hijacked in the cause of maintaining the power of oppressive leaders. Certainly, the corruption of the best things is always a danger. However let us leave the final word on proverbs to Mbiti: "It is in proverbs that we find the remains of the oldest forms of African religious and philosophical wisdom" (1969:67).

6.3.3 Folk Tales

The importance of the African folk tale in African rhetoric has already been mentioned in 4.7.1 under the general consideration of metaphor, since these tales are lengthy metaphors. There are different classifications of these. Guma uses the wide term *ditshomo* (myths and legends) (1967:4) under which the category of folk tales falls. However he points out that these stories all revolve around humanity 'on whom the universe is centred and created' (4) and that they deal with 'the origin of death, the human institution of marriage, as well as those that seek to explain how certain food-stuffs came to be generally known

and accepted' (4). There are others dealing with romance, sexuality and the relationship between the sexes and its complications (6) and stories to do with 'sterling human qualities such as those of selflessness and self sacrifice on behalf of others'... (7). He observes a 'striking friendship as well as co-operation between man and animal, particularly the smaller ones, which are endowed with supernatural powers. Their role is mainly that of protecting the weak and the helpless'... (7).

Trevor Cope's essay on *Zulu folktales as a Literary Art* (In Argyle & Preston-Whyte 1978:183) mentions the words *izinganekwane* and *izinsumansumane*. The first 'suggests simplicity and suitability for children' (1978:184) and the second 'strange fantastic stories' (184). He distinguished animal from human stories, arguing that the animals represent character types while in the human stories the people are actual persons. The role of the small animals, as well as young girls and old women, is sometimes to be the 'mediator or agent towards resolution' (185). The main actor in the animal stories is the trickster whose role is to expose 'the weaknesses of human nature as represented by the animals' (185). Cope makes some interesting general remarks about oral as contrasted to written literature.

Oral literature is different from written literature in that it is composed as it is performed, according to a tradition which is rigidly laid down. Furthermore it is performed and appreciated by the community, unlike written literature which is restricted as to writers and even readers. We in the western world have largely lost the appreciation of language in daily life, especially its creative aspect ...because of our loss of a universal oral literature (193).

Cope also sketches out the relationship between storyteller and hearers in Zulu folktales which is probably common to African society.

The episode ends but the narrative does not end: it goes on as long as the bond between the storyteller and audience is strong. Zulu folktales, like Zulu songs, do not demand attention for a prescribed duration. The audience determines the duration of the performance, and the storyteller concludes when the audience begins no longer to participate or agree (*vuma*); just as the solo singer concludes when the chorus ceases to join in (*vuma*), as one by one they wander off to attend to other matters (203).

The applications to preaching are not difficult to draw out. In this setting the audience is not a captive one and the speaker needs to hold their attention if the performance is to continue. There is a freedom in composition. The genre can be used to address important issues concerning human origins and human behaviour. The warning sounded by Cope is that an exclusively written literature is a threat to the genre itself and even to an appreciation of everyday language.

6.3.4 *The Palaver or Indaba*

The power of the spoken word to effect change in society is greatly underlined by the important part played by the palaver in solving the problems of the community, problems such as sickness and division. The word appears to come originally from the imperial Latin *parabola*, a comparison, similitude, parable or proverb; in other words not just a word, but a word with the muscle of some added significance or meaning. The term *palaver* seems to have been adapted and indigenised as African, a kind of catch-all rendering for the vast array of African languages, e.g. *indaba* in Zulu.¹ Like *indaba* the meaning is flexible and can refer to the actual topic for discussion or the gathering in which the discussion is done.

Some palavers, upon which the ancestors are called to bear witness, are confined to certain ruling classes or ages but some are for all and in these all are allowed to raise speak. Indeed, in some cases to remain silent means that a person has something to hide. What is striking to westerners is that the *palaver* can continue so long, even weeks, until a conflict or problem is resolved. The lack of shyness about speaking in public and how fluently this can be done with apparently little preparation is another characteristic worth noting. This is sometimes explained by early socialisation of the kind where the child is encouraged to sing, dance and speak before the group. However, unlike in western society,

¹ This rendering is given in the English-Zulu dictionaries of both Dent & Nyembezi and Doke, Malcolm, Sikakana. Colenso (1905:91) translates it as 'Story, tale, adventure; report; matter, case, affair, business, doing: plur. *Izindaba*, news'.

the youngster steps into the limelight from the group which is already singing or dancing, and therefore does not have to start from cold. The way even very small children come into the dance circle in Zulu society, do their solo, then merge again with the group is a helpful example. The clapping and singing of the group positively encourage and support the individual. A person who is about to preach or speak in church is often sung to the front. Early experience of these customs must help. As someone remarked, westerners have to work to be members of a group, whereas Africans simply belong.

The chief's place in the palaver is to guide and sum up. This brings us to the specialist speakers in African society. Sundkler portrays the king or *inkosi* as a man of few words and believes that his speaking ability is not the most important quality but rather his presence, prestige or *isithunzi*. Sundkler assumes that the chief is the implicit model for the religious leader or preacher and describes such a figure thus: 'He need not be a good preacher, he must not be talkative. A Zulu chief is reserved in his speech and so should the Church chief be' (Sundkler 1961:102). *Gravitas* appears to be the quality being depicted here, the authority of one who presides.

6.3.5 Application to African preaching

When Sundkler implies that the church leader does not need to be a good preacher, he means to fill his social role insofar as it mirrors that of the chief. He is not writing as a pastoral theologian but an anthropologist. And the point here is that because he is a chief a few words are enough. This is precisely because of the profound link between authority and exercise of the Word, a universal notion writ (or spoken?) large in oral societies. As Nadine Gordimer recently remarked: 'To have the Word has come to be synonymous with ultimate authority, with prestige, with awesome, sometimes dangerous persuasion: to have *Prime Time*, a TV talk show, to have the gift of the gab as well as that of speaking in tongues' (Sunday Independent. 20 Aug 2000:13).

The *imbongi*, or praise singer, is somewhat different. Flair, verve, volubility, fluency, the ability to remember and pile up praise after praise with dramatic and athletic gestures is what is required of him. And even so, there is a ritual about the singing of praises since many are rooted in historical memory. He certainly exemplifies the argument of those African liturgists who hold that physical movement is one of the defining characteristics of African celebration.

6.4 Language and Inculturation

The context in which we are obliged to consider the question of social communication is rapid and radical change which it is hoped will lead to a new cultural synthesis. If we agree with Njino, Renato, and Kirby that, 'a person's frame of mind is formed in his/her culture and his/her forms of communication are likewise products of this culture' (1992:47) then communication, including rhetoric and preaching, will never be static for our present students but in a complicated state of flux. This means that a stable cultural 'standpoint' is probably not possible. The only certainty is that of uncertainty.

This leads Njino, Renato and Kirby to propose as a practical response to a changing scene what they call 'appropriation'. They make it clear what this is not - the taking of old symbols and putting them into a new context - and what it is.

The use of old symbols is normally the kind of inculturation done by theologians, anthropologists, liturgists and intellectuals. If they are not creative people - as so often happens - their path to inculturation is the path of taking old symbols and putting them in a new context. For example the Mass celebrant is made to wear the kind of hat that was formally put on by the chief. This could have some meaning, but most probably in the *present changing cultural context* [my italics] it is meaningless or can even have a negative connotation. True appropriation is a re-creation of symbolic meaning... The highest example of an appropriation which created a new symbolic meaning is Christ who took the cross, symbol of infamy and made it a symbol of love and glory. True appropriation was done by the martyrs of Uganda, who again transformed the instruments of their torture into symbols of new faith, making Christian faith part of the *Baganda* living tradition. An example of true inculturation is the members of the Church holding a prayer service on the train going from Johannesburg to Soweto every evening. The trip from the white modern culture of Johannesburg to the African culture of Soweto is symbolically transformed

into a trip back home, the heavenly Jerusalem, and so the banality of everyday life is charged with new meaning(49).

Such a process needs to be in the hands of what they call 'creators in the circle of cultural activity' (1992:49). Notable among these 'creators' are leaders of the independent churches in Africa because they are able to motivate people in an extremely powerful way, even dying for the cause of their faith. Among the examples cited are Lenshina Alice Mulenga, foundress of the Lumpa church in the north of Zambia in the 1950s. When the mainline churches look at the independents they see people who appear very much at ease with their way of worship and communities which are dynamic, growing and not dependent on western money, western ways or expensive institutions. At the same time these independent churches flourish in the rapidly westernising urban settings of African cities. At weekends central Johannesburg teems with independent church members fully *vatile*, (dressed in church garb). The use of uniforms is itself an interesting example of appropriation, the taking of what is thought to approximate to the dress of a biblical prophet so that traditional African prophecy is biblically 'enfleshed'.

In this process, incarnation and *koinonia* are identified as that heart of the matter and the means of expressing them proposed are, interestingly enough, verbal rather than visual.

If symbols, stories, parables and experiences re-expressing Incarnation and *Koinonia* in the African culture are born, then we can say that a truly in-depth appropriation of the Gospel on the part of African people has started. This is the real test. The use of drums and dances during the liturgy, a colourful stole, an African bishop, could be very external or even deceiving signs, to which little corresponds in the depth of a culture, in the cultural *ethos* (52).

However the 'creators' are not from the official end of church or state:

Who are the creators in the present African society?... Not the bureaucrats, not the chairpersons, not the party officers, the soldiers and the policemen. More likely they are those who have nothing to lose, those who have hope in the future, those ready to change. The artists, the young adults, the poor, the women, the ethnic and cultural minorities, the groups of human and political commitment. The evangelical preferential love for the poor happens to be also the most logical choice for an in-depth appropriation of the Gospel. Is it just chance? Or does God

know that the poor are the best way to ensure that the Gospel establishes roots in a certain culture? (50).

This is a prophetic, spirit-filled view of inculturation, one which perhaps might not find great favour with the institutional church. It is an argument for a bottom up rather than a top down approach. It is wary of a re-packaging inculturation which is no inculturation at all. It is unhappy with inculturation done by academics and officials.

When the writer moves to the specifics of the theme, mass media and communication, they continue to keep their distance from the dead hand of an institutional model and dependence on western ways. They use the interesting phrase 'African use of technical means' as in the statement: 'Even the technical way in which mass media production is done should be open to creativity and allow Africans to make African use of technical means' (1992:53). The fact that a person knows how to use the gadgetry does not make that person an effective communicator in any given cultural context. Technology and effectiveness are not to be confused.

Creativity, then, is central in cultural appropriation. But there are issues which touch on the moral. Effective communication needs to foster respect and personal freedom to be truly human, our writer maintains. The exercise of selfish power is anathema to an authentic system of communication: 'An institution using mass media as a means of power rather than promoting free participation and growth is doing a disservice to the community in which it operates' (1992:52). If the word 'preaching' is substituted for 'mass media' in the above sentence, this will serve as an *entrée* to the next phase of this discussion which touches on the exercise of the preaching ministry in a changing cultural context.

6.4.1 *The Cultural Issue of the Age of the speaker*

When two cultures influence each other the search is for a synthesis from the best of both worlds, the traditional and the modern. We see this quest in contemporary South African music. However it can certainly be argued that Boere-rap was a case of the worst of both worlds. The melody of the

traditional *boeremusiek* was lost and the violence of post-modern rap was gained. Interculturation can be a highly creative process but as a human process is not immune from the human factor.

Take the example of a person's age, a case which touches on our specific area of preaching. In traditional society, including African, the notions of wisdom and age are closely linked. A question which I have had occasion to ask my students of homiletics rather by way of a caveat when they are preparing a specific point in a homily is this: 'Are you old enough to say this?' In the context of largely male, black African students, such a question stimulates reflection. The idea that a young man in his mid-twenties or early thirties can speak with a chiefly gravitas and the authority of wisdom to a congregation in which his parents and grandparents might be present, strikes a culturally awkward note and the young man knows it. He does not need to be an anthropologist to be aware of the issue here. But Njino, Renato and Kirby echo the popular perception: 'Advancing age brings power and authority to men and women. For the man, his age will call for respect, and the young will accept the judgements of his experience and his religious authority' (1992:52).

The question, then, can and perhaps should be asked, and in different ways such as:

- Are you sufficiently steeped in your language, culture, traditions to say this with authority?
- Are you also sufficiently in touch with the rapidly changing youth culture to say this with authority?
- Are you able to say this in your own tongue i.e. have you got an adequate command of inculturated theological terms or do you, embarrassing as this may be, in fact have to work on your mother tongue for purposes of preaching?
- What is your knowledge of the rhetorical style of your own culture and how does this differ from what you have learned in the classroom in English?

- Are you initiated and is it normally regarded as socially necessary to have been initiated to speak in public and does this apply to students for the ministry?
- Does the fact that you are unmarried and childless leave you at a social disadvantage when it comes to public speaking?
- Do you have a clear idea of what may or may not be said by a person of your age and status in the differing social and cultural contexts you will face?

The question about age and experience strikes a powerful chord in traditional African society for particular reasons. For one thing the ancestor-veneration of traditional society is a kind of theological filial piety and so the older person is closer to the ancestors and therefore worthy of more respect. Then there is the fact that it is frequently necessary to move from adolescence to adulthood via the dramatic transition of initiation. Hence the following anecdote comes as no surprise. A newly-ordained priest, not yet thirty, is sent to a fairly traditional Zulu-speaking rural mission. In a welcoming speech an old woman representing one of the women's groups remarks in the humorous way that is so often significant. 'Well, the Bishop promised us a priest and he has sent us a boy!' The new 'boy' had been put on notice that he needed to grow up a bit before asserting himself.

The writer's own experience indicates that some of the young men to whom the question about how competent they are to speak in public has been posed clearly had not thought too much about it, despite their relative closeness to their traditional culture. Theology and how it has the tendency to impact upon the social system (sometimes quite rightly) might be one reason. Sometimes this seems to be a new consciousness created by an old-fashioned theology rediscovered. The priest is the omniscient leader of the community, omnipotent president and oracle of the assembly (I am exaggerating for effect), is a model which it is congenial for some to take on board, the traditional cultural view that youth should wait for wisdom before such an elevation notwithstanding. And

unless there are adult representatives of the culture present to challenge this, the challenge simply tends not to happen.

The eminent liturgical scholar Fr David Power OMI recently remarked, referring to the present way in which Roman Catholic ordinations are conducted: 'We are ordaining men to a status, rather than to a service'. Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that this is not just an African phenomenon but in Africa the social reasons for these elaborate celebrations are obvious and understandable - an ordination might be the first in a particular parish or family or diocese and the fact is that as such it is a big feather in their caps and calls out to be recognised. But a valuable opportunity for the inculturation of an important value may be getting lost here: the value of a becoming modesty in public speech among the young. But the sudden dramatic elevation involved in ordination can give one the deluded impression that a young man is now able to speak authoritatively on any manner of subject. Bishop Peter Sarpong of Kumasi in Ghana, nuances the issue with an observation of a traditional authority structure, namely that of the present Ashanti king. According to Sarpong,

when you get into a certain position, that position itself is equated with old age. For example we now have a very popular king of Ashanti. He is only 51 years of age but I can tell you that everybody respects him because he speaks the truth and is very just. When he drives through Kumasi people shout, "King Solomon, King Solomon"... The respect is not just for the aged but for the sacred and also for those in authority. The one who is in authority takes precedence over the one who is old and the sacred takes precedence over the one who is in authority. (Letter from Bishop Peter Sarpong 11 Nov 2000).

It would seem, from Sarpong's perspective, that age is not the overriding consideration, though clearly an important one. However he implies that the relatively young Ashanti king would not be so successful were he not also well endowed with wisdom beyond his years.

6.4.2 Criteria for Discernment

All inculturation must needs involve much discernment about what is and is not to be incorporated in the process of appropriation or inculturation. The question of the criteria of discernment is a vital one. If the criterion adopted is

simply the retaining of that which enhances the power and social status of the priest and the rejection of that which might limit it, then this hardly seems a worthy criterion of reflection and Christian discernment. However, such criteria will appeal naturally to societies, not to mention churches, which have a strong tradition of authority, hierarchy and patriarchy. Put together such a tradition with the contemporary church theology of the ministerial priesthood which sometimes seems desperate to shore up the authority of the ordained and fend off any limitations on it, and we are in danger of producing 'ministerial chiefs', and young and inexperienced ones at that. Somewhere along the cultural-theological line the biblical servant model falls between the cracks.

The debate tends to be carried out on the level of theology, but the issue of power never seems too far from the surface. The controversy on the ordination of married men and of women may be cases in point. For there seems little doubt, observing the Anglican experience, especially of women priests, that power would shift rapidly away from a male, celibate clergy. The priesthood would change, become less set apart, hopefully more service-orientated, more accessible, less associated with power. Such shifts can be conceived as a threat.

Hence traditional male superiority, a traditional view of society as hierarchical and a traditionalist theology of priesthood can make for a formidable alliance of culture and theology. My culture tells me I have a superior status by virtue of being a man and my theology tells me I have a superior status by virtue of my ordination. As Sundkler reminds us: 'The leadership pattern of Zulu society is imprinted on the leadership of all the independent churches. The leader, whether "Bishop", "overseer", or "President" is a king, *inkosi*, and the Church is his tribe' (1961:101). And of course the coming of age of a king or chief can occur quite young, as in the case of the present Zulu and Swazi kings. But the Gospel and the tradition of the church reject an

authoritarian model of leadership.² It is an extremely important and delicate issue for inculturation.

The young person stepping forward for the preaching ministry in African society is therefore someone whose task is far greater than simply assimilating the theology while he waits to come of (ministerial) age. The challenge is also to be one of the 'creators' and 'appropriators' described above. The same is probably true for other communicators, such as teachers and broadcasters. To return to a previous cultural golden age is a naïve and impossible hope. To become enthusiastically westernised is to lose touch with past identity and values. But an attitude which welcomes feedback and is capable of self-criticism will be important for an awareness of how cultural models, or corrupted versions of these, can unconsciously affect the approach to preaching and presiding. The temptations to power created by a high theology of the ministerial priesthood and a traditional respect for any person of rank are ever present.

Furthermore it may be necessary to admit that the experience of being brought up within both traditional and modern cultures means that there are gaps in the knowledge of the traditional and it is hard for bright young persons to be told, for example, that what they need is to learn their own language, customs and traditions properly. Far easier to take refuge in an *ex opere operato* view of their function, a view which gives a false sense of security based on a quasi automatic theology. Much easier to build oneself up with the power invested in the office of priesthood. But these paths deviate far from the goal of creativity and the need to grapple with the exciting but also unnerving contemporary situation of culture in swift and accelerating change as it confronts modernity and post-modernity simultaneously.

² Mk 10:43 "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all." (RSV)

6.4.3 *The Length of the Homily*

The question of age and the power to exercise the Word is only one example of the complex problems faced by the young African student at present being prepared to preach. The really key question seems to be how to be an effective preacher in a rapidly changing world undergoing the cultural transformation outlined above. A very practical question helps to illustrate the problem, picking up, as it does, on the notion of time: the practical question of length. How long should a homily or sermon be? The answer will always be that it depends upon the context, especially the cultural context. The general assumption is that in a western setting brevity is appreciated and this would be the experience of the writer. The impact of modernity is usually identified as being at the root of this. A very graphic example of this was the parish in the US where it was important for the Mass to be under a certain length of time or else there would be a traffic snarl-up in the church car park as the departing parishioners came headlight to headlight with those arriving for the next Mass. Technology and tight scheduling, two aspects of modernity, were clearly keeping the proceedings brief. This is the people of the clock *par excellence*, not the sun, seasons or human needs.

Attention span is said to be shortened by canned entertainment, in particular television. Sound bites and headlines say it all. The importance of leisure and the consequent need for worshippers to 'get away' to relax from their exhausting lifestyle after church is another modern factor. In more traditional societies people have more time for church and therefore the homily because they do not have to rush off; their attention span is longer and coming to church is a social event which can be the occasion of the enjoyment of the pleasures of meeting people, singing, courting and dressing up. Undoubtedly these observations are fundamentally correct. However the pace of modernisation is not to be underestimated and what may have been appropriate to one generation of traditional people will almost certainly not be to the next.

There can also be an underestimation of thoroughly modern congregations. The desire for brevity is the child of tedium. Boring preaching is best kept short. If we are to experience pain, let the pain be brief. The demand for the brief homily often betrays extremely low expectations. On the other hand there is a thirst for engaging preaching and if this is delivered people can live with greater length. I have heard Jean Vanier preach for a full hour and keep a group of young people enthralled.

Traditional African cultures seem able to tolerate tedium and boredom better than modern cultures, even though public speaking as a traditional art can draw on a lively and vivid legacy. And length is not just about attention span or toleration of tedium. The length of discourse symbolises its importance, probably in all cultures. An Archbishop of Canterbury would not give a two minute homily on the occasion of the death of a British monarch, despite the western setting and the limitations imposed by television. Even if he were exceedingly tedious and boring the length would be endured for the sake of dignifying the occasion. Obviously if most homilies and sermons were interesting and inspiring, then the question of length would be determined, within the relativities of culture, by the importance of the occasion. How long? As long as the congregation is still listening, says Bishop Untener, and when they stop listening it is too long. But how to judge that in advance with mixed congregations and a changing cultural scene? Here, as for any preacher faced with a congregation in the process of cultural change, the answers are far from easy 'True eloquence consists in saying all that is required and only what is required' (de la Rochefoucauld, *Maxims* No.250). He makes it sound so easy but clarity on this and other issues to do with speaking and preaching were probably as difficult in de la Rochefoucauld's clear and classical 17th Century France. How much more difficult it is in our cross-cultural, post-modern muddle.

The student preacher in Africa, then, requires a formation which will enable her to operate successfully in two worlds somewhat like a cultural chameleon. To be able to

communicate well to elderly rural women and 'cool' township adolescents requires a raft of skills beginning with wide linguistic ability and adaptability. It also requires a standpoint, cultural and religious, a secure place from which to sally forth in different 'modes'. Before the preacher can be all things to all he needs to know who he is. And yet this identity cannot be built upon nostalgic sentiment. If this course is taken there is no prospect of a new cultural synthesis since our preacher would be stuck in an imagined past. The standpoint will only be secure if it is based in reality which is highly complex and becoming more so. The intellectual, personal and spiritual tools to establish that standpoint should be an all-important goal of the formation of future African preachers. A final reflection from Njino, Renato and Kirby seems very a propos.

I am personally convinced that most of the communication of the Gospel that went through in Africa in the last century was due to the personal witness of goodness, dedication and love of many missionaries. These have had a greater impact and have been more challenging to the Africans than all the catechism they have been taught by heart, which has not changed an iota of the recipient culture (1992:52).

6.5 African Preaching

The paucity of material on African preaching has been alluded to already. I have been unable to find a single volume entitled *African Preaching*. An internet search revealed two articles, an unpublished lecture by Prof. Nhiwatiwa of Zimbabwe actually entitled *African Preaching, and The Hermeneutical Process of Pentecostal-type African Initiated Churches in S.Africa, In Missionalia 24: Aug 1996* by Allan Anderson. The same search revealed several books and articles on African American preaching. The title list of the University of Natal had no African authors listed under the word *Preaching* with the exception of a few Afrikaners such as HJC Pieterse's *Communicative Preaching*.³ The collected sermons of Alan Boesak and a few other African preachers are in print.

In the kind of rapid cultural change outlined above it is clearly very difficult to define African preaching and it would be a mistake to do so in purely traditional, premodern

terms. However the tradition of communication out of which it springs is surely part of African preaching. As Ronal Allen says, 'We must be careful not to oversimplify, or romanticize, premodern views of language' (Allen, Blaidsell, Johnson 1997:161). But he adds:

Nonetheless, even if premodern uses of language did not have universally the romantic qualities attached to them by professors of preaching, it appears to me that premodern people had a greater sense of the liveliness and importance of speaking than do many people today (162).

The 'liveliness and importance' are captured in a description of a great contemporary African preacher in action, and he is a thoroughly modern man - Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It is by Allister Sparks at the Eloff Commission (1981) set up by PW Botha to investigate the funding policies of the South African Council of churches. Tutu's biographer remarks that '...Sparks was in the courtroom to hear what he suggested was probably "the greatest sermon of the Bishop's life"' (Du Boulay 1988:173) and described it thus:

He sat bouncing and twisting in a carver chair, his hands shaping the outlines of his ideas with vivid gestures. It was like a mime show with voice accompaniment, when he spoke of the resurrection of the body, his arms folded around him in a hug.

The voice was the other instrument in this concert performance. Sometimes it would be sonorous, playing with the cadences of his African accent, and sometimes it would break into a high-pitched chuckle as he would hit on some pertinent new insight. It would be sombre, joyful, impatient, humorous, reflective, switching rapidly in response to a quicksilver spirit.

And all the while, the white Commissioners watched, expressionless (Sparks in Du Boulay 1988:173).

Like many things difficult to define, they are not difficult to identify when we see them. Here the contrast between the African and other 'styles' is underlined by the presence of the representatives of a rather heavier, dourer 'style'.

The grim and oppressive setting of the Eloff Commission underlines another characteristic of much African preaching which is its facing up to adverse socio-economic situations of injustice and facing down the oppressors. Much of the tone of Boesak's (1979) sermons to students of the 1970's is similarly prophetic. The pity of the situation is that the energies of such fine African preachers have been pillaged by

³ Pieterse, H J C1987. *Communicative Preaching*. Pretoria: Sigma.

apartheid while they could have been doing other things, including reflecting on African preaching, had South African society and life been more normal.

In African public discourse the response of the hearers is something which differentiates it strongly from the western way, particularly when it comes to preaching. This is where it seems that one of the greatest weaknesses in modern western preaching lies. In effect, western preaching admits of no obvious mechanism of response from the congregation. There is a sense of words tumbling into a vacuum. In African preaching, even where western traditions have been followed, it is hard for hearers not to respond if they feel something telling has been said, hard or joyful. In freer settings a preacher can be sung into action and the discourse can be punctuated with and ended with song, dance and ululation. It is also possible to let the speaker know that it is time to bow out through song, but also sometimes to encourage him to continue. As John Mbiti remarks in a paper on *The Bible in African Culture* (In Gibellini 1994:32),

One of the strong areas of African oral communication is the involvement between the speaker and listeners. This is called "multidirectional communication". Quoting Herbert Climb, he continues, 'When we survey the lively level of audience participation in a traditional African audience it reveals a very healthy and multidimensional flow of communication. Signals are sent by the performer to the audience. Immediately the audience begins visibly and audibly to share their reactions with each other and with the performer... (In comparison) the Western Church may be organised to facilitate good listening in a very large group, but most of the communication is one-way. The seating faces one way. For much of the service one person speaks to many who cannot express themselves individually...(33).

There is, then, a wide gamut, from the occasional *angithi?* (is it not so?) which elicits replies of *ehe!* (yes, indeed!) among Catholic Zulus through the regular punctuation of the homily with mutual greetings of peace in the Zairian rite, to the vigorous cries of encouragement of African Independent church congregations. Naturally there is an element of ritual in all of these, but the point is that the overall context is of a dialogue between president and hearer. One could argue that this is substantially different from the underlying model of communication in the average western discourse, this despite Craddock's 'dialogical world'

(Craddock 1981:16) and Pieterse's (1987:133) appeal for the enhancement of communication through a context of dialogue. Dialogue and feedback are part of the tradition and culture of African preaching.

6.5.1 *Personal Experience.*

There is a perception, then, that traditional oral African culture contains within it great advantages over the western writing culture when it comes to verbal communication. The writer's personal experience indicates that people do seem to have a greater capacity to listen intently and speak in public naturally. As children they have been trained to take verbal messages to family, friends and neighbours. This inculcates the discipline of listening and repeating carefully. Congregations, in his experience, did not automatically become restive if a discourse went on longer than five minutes, as a western congregation is wont to. They have retentive memories for the spoken word and anecdotal evidence suggests that what has been said in preaching is discussed and dissected.

Speakers seem frequently fluent and colourful and have at their disposal a whole range of devices to obtain and retain attention such as starting and punctuating a discourse with song, eliciting verbal responses from the hearers, and the sayings, stories and illustrations which are part of the cultural rhetoric. Speaking is an altogether more exciting event in these cultures than in societies which have become accustomed to words being accompanied by highly sophisticated imagery.

The patience and politeness of audiences can be taken advantage of. In the cases of politicians who speak Castro-like at stupendous length from a cool shaded podium while their supporters doze off in the sun, there appears to be a problem of a losing of touch through a lack of accountability. There may be a warning here for our future generation of preachers in Africa, and indeed anywhere. The position of the minister, especially the Roman Catholic one, tends not to be particularly accountable and the structures for the accountability of his preaching are either weak or

non-existent.. One opinion holds that the Roman Catholic priesthood is one of the least accountable of the professions.

A further subtle pitfall for the young preacher is what we might call the missionary model. Due to a poor grasp of the language, the missionary priest often did not and was not expected to speak well. At worst he was almost expected to be quasi-unintelligible. Such a history does not set a very high standard. In Zimbabwe the Shona spoken by some of the missionaries is referred to humorously as *chiBaba*, the language of the (white missionary) priests. The young seminarian, therefore, might do well to beware of being lulled into a false sense of linguistic security. To be able to speak a language fluently does not automatically mean one is able to speak it eloquently in public. The public speaker's problem of focusing of attention is a human problem as well as the particularly challenging cross-cultural one of the expatriate missionary.

Models have power and the model portrayed by some politicians is of one who does not really have to try very hard. As far as preaching goes the model on offer from the expatriate is unlikely to be perceived as relevant. The schoolteacher is not a particularly helpful model since the teaching method prevalent in rural South Africa is rote, rod and repetition, with little feedback or comeback. Truth tends to be associated with personal authority; the answer to the question is correct because the teacher says so, rather than because it is so. If, as Bishop Untener says speaking of the United States, good feedback is difficult to get, how much more difficult under the above social circumstances and working with these models?

However if, as already observed, eloquence or rhetoric in Africa is regarded as fundamentally a good thing then African eloquence can be freed up as a servant of the preacher and the Word he or she serves. A positive view of effective public speaking creates great possibilities in all newly evangelised cultures for the transmission of the Christian message. It should be noted in passing that, in contrast to some European societies, the higher and more

rhetorical style in many African groups is often understood and appreciated better by the more rural and less literate (*IsiZulu esijubile* - 'deep' Zulu). At the same time, the westernised city-dwellers tend to struggle with this finer eloquence and for them another register may be required which avoids the 'deep' expressions and/or substitutes alternatives or even western loan-words or phrases. This is all a way of saying that in oral cultures rhetoric is alive and well and the preacher would be well advised not to ignore the fact. However he should be aware that language is never static and that linguistic change is perhaps as fast now as it has ever been. And patient and polite listening out of respect for the office and authority of the speaker does not necessarily mean that one's speaking is effective or as effective as it might be.

6.6 Summary

We have, in this chapter, surveyed both preaching and language in Africa from a number of different points of view. Firstly there is the tradition which is strongly oral, and which despite modern literacy, remains a feature of the culture. This is clearly significant for the oral art of preaching. However literacy threatens traditional memories and even the existence of smaller languages is under threat, despite the strengthening which came from translations of the sacred scriptures.

African eloquence has its own genius which is practised by certain specialists such as the griot, who often undergo long and rigorous training, another significant fact for preachers. However, once again, literacy is changing the scene radically and the new poets are writers rather than the oral performers of yesteryear. In addition, they are frequently forced to practise their art in European languages. But African poetic eloquence, even of the oral variety, has survived the many shocks to which it has been subjected - colonial disdain and disadvantage, the onset of literacy and today the visual popular 'culture' of the global soap opera. Literacy and western culture may be here to stay, but so also, if African verbal artists are selective in their

(continued)

use of the modern, will oral culture. Forms and traditions like proverbs, folktales and the palaver are an abiding part of the African linguistic universe and there is much contemporary interest in them. Furthermore the literate colonial languages which scholars are forced to use can be enlisted in the task of preserving and propagating more widely such cultural treasures, so that now an Achebe or a Soyinka or Senghor can be appreciated all over Africa and beyond.

We considered the question of the age of the public speaker in African tradition and also found that it was a complex and changing picture.

Finally we come to African sacred eloquence itself where it would seem that little study has been done outside the United States of America where literature on black (American) preaching abound. Here in Africa we seem to be still bound to some extent by the missionary paradigm. On the other hand the models that can be adapted from cultural tradition need to be viewed with caution in order to ensure faithfulness to the Gospel's insistence that the servant of the Word should be precisely that, a servant. In traditional culture the *griot* is the servant of the king. The Gospel asks the preacher to be the servant of the Lord. The question of the model consciously or unconsciously adopted is crucial. The old insistence on thorough training is a tradition which teachers of preachers would do well to make the subject of serious inculturation..

In language itself in Africa the richness of oral expression is a vast treasure house available to the preacher willing to undertake the labour of inculturation. This is especially the case in proverbs and folktales and the vital elements of music and movement in African public speaking.

Having treated communication we must now look at how communication is communicated, how the art of putting across a message is it self put across - the question of pedagogy.

Chapter 7 Pedagogy

7.1 Introduction.

This chapter draws on some of the foregoing insights to explore more fully the question of whether preaching can be learned and if so how. It surveys the results of some simple questionnaires to students. It also uses interviews with a number of teachers of homiletics. It also looks at some of the literature on how preaching is received by the hearers.

7.2 What Some of the Students Say

Students whose *raison d'être* is to become preachers are hardly likely to take the view that the ability to preach cannot be learned. They have a great deal riding on the proposition that it can. The majority of the members of the class surveyed¹ were in fact on their way, they hope, to ordination in the Catholic church. Others, the women religious and the laypeople, are in the business of communicating the Christian faith to others by public speaking. Whether we call this preaching in a technical sense or not is immaterial - they see themselves as preachers of the Gospel. All this would have to be borne in mind in such a survey, as would a sense that such a survey would be a reflection on the effectiveness of the teacher whom students might possibly wish to treat with politeness and respect. However, with these provisos in mind we can usefully take a look at the results of the survey delivered by Questionnaires 1,2 and 3.

The sample size was 27 students.² In a sense this is a random sample³ within a sampling frame since they come from a variety of countries in Anglophone Africa and are from the

¹ The fourth year theology students of St Joseph's theological Institute, Cedara, South Africa, 1999.

² Their origins were as follows: South Africa - 9, Zimbabwe 6, Zambia - 3, Mozambique - 2, Tanzania 2, Botswana - 1, Lesotho - 1, Angola - 1, Swaziland -1, Nigeria - 1. Their ages ranged from early twenties to late forties. There was one layman and one laywoman in the class. All but five of the class were men.

³ Bailey Kenneth D 1987. *Methods of Social Research*. New York: The Free Press. P.87. Bailey argues that random sampling has been proved to be an effective sampling method in social research.

specific group of young, mostly male, African religious⁴ in training. An assumption is that similar opinions and attitudes would be likely to be found in such a trainee group in, say, Nairobi, where there are inter-African colleges for similar students.

I make no major claims for this survey beyond that it gives a rough picture of the students' own experience of preaching both as 'practitioners' and listeners and explores their attitudes and opinions on the topic. Hence the modest title of the section - 'What Some Students Think'.

Judging by the enormous spread of skills and disciplines as still needing to be developed, the students were far from believing that they had already 'arrived' as preachers. These skills ranged from logic to flexibility and use of stories to effective use of preparation time. This broad range of responses probably simply reflects the wide-ranging discussions that took place during the semester course. An observation I made was that many of the issues had not really come up for them before, possibly because so much of what they have studied previously was more theoretical and they were now suddenly plunged, normally with relish, into the practical.

On the other hand the overwhelming majority felt that they were now ready to preach, despite their limitations. To the question: 'Do you think you are now ready to preach?'⁵ 21 out of 25 respondents replied in the affirmative. There were many modifiers to this 'yes' such as the need to integrate studies with pastoral skills, or to get experience or that young people would be preferred to adults for the time being. However the resounding 'yes' was surprising. Although, as mentioned above, the students for the priesthood have a great deal riding on their course of studies, this particular group were at a relatively early stage and did not necessarily have to declare themselves 100% fit for the ministry just yet. Against this there is a cultural caveat with young men from a rather 'macho' ethos, namely that admitting that one cannot

⁴ 'Religious' in this context is Roman Catholic shorthand for 'member of a religious order'.

⁵ Appendix 3 - Questionnaire 3 Question No. 6.

do something requiring skill and courage does not come that easily.

However this youthful, male confidence may also partly be born of experience. For a number of these students have in fact preached in one way or another, either as religious students or even before they entered their religious congregations. This is due in most part to the needs of the African rural church where a person with leadership and some learning can often rise naturally as a lay church worker. This may be because of the lack of ordained clergy or the lack of clergy competent in the vernacular. One extreme case in the survey is a vivid illustration - an Angolan whose parish had the eucharist once a year. From a pedagogical point of view, a conclusion that can be drawn here is that there is actually a wealth of preaching experience in the average class of African seminarians and religious. Many will have in effect been handing on the faith since quite tender years, often as youth leaders. Some have even 'preached' the homily at Mass.

Once in the seminary or religious order preaching does not necessarily stop. Someone who is in training for the priesthood or religious life is more likely to be called upon to break the bread of the Word in their local parish. What emerges is a picture of young people being inspanned to preach in the place of the absent or non-existent priest. To some this might seem a bad thing, akin to allowing people to drive before they have a licence. To others it could be seized upon as a great opportunity to guide and work with this rather early initiation, a situation which cries out for input and guidance and in-service training. A flexible seminary system has an opportunity to build creatively upon such a situation. One comment from Questionnaire 3 sums up: 'I wonder if preaching can be taught because mostly people who attend the homiletics course can preach already (they have been preaching whenever there was a chance)'.⁶

The reality of the church in Sub-Saharan Africa was reflected in the replies to another question, a hypothetical one. It is which village will end up more Christian, the one

which has only good preaching for 50 years or the one which has a regular Mass for fifty years but with no preaching. Of the 28 replies to this question 24 opted for preaching without Mass as the formula more likely to produce a more Christian village. 4 opted for Mass without preaching, perhaps significantly these four were from more developed countries in the Continent - South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana.⁷ One anecdotal comment caught the eye. 'In my local home area (outstation) people only have Mass once a month but they are different by far, perhaps better, than the people who have Mass every day in the mission'.

To a question on their home parishes, whether they have laypeople preaching or not, 16 replied that they did and 14 that they did not. In the cases where they did not have lay preachers it was not always the case that the preaching they did get from the clergy was particularly satisfactory. The comments on the standard of the lay preaching were very varied, some students saying that it was good and effective, some that it lacked theological meat, some that the preachers were poor and even used the preaching role to pursue their personal agendas. The picture seems to indicate the patchy nature of training of clergy and laypeople in Africa and is probably not very different from any church anywhere in the world. The power of parish priests either to encourage or prevent lay leadership is quasi absolute and so what happens or does not is often simply a result of his particular taste.

The question on the standard of the preaching of the clergy in their parishes on a scale from 1 to 10 gave an average score of 6.6.⁸ I am doubtful whether this says much more than most are trying their best. The comments, however, both positive and negative indicated some areas of preoccupation of the students. On the positive side we had the following:

The parish priest does not do his own thing but involves lay people; The language is down to earth, yet challenging and people appreciate this; Well presented in ordinary language, easy for people to identify with and grasp; Very good because the priest knows the people and does understand the culture; Priest knows very well the cultural context; Quite informed,

⁶ Appendix 3 - Questionnaire 3 Question No 10.

⁷ Appendix 3 - Questionnaire 3. Question No 7.

⁸ Appendix 3 - Questionnaire 3. Question No 3.

always prepared; Attendance improved because of good homilies; The preaching is always contextual. The preachers do not talk of things in the clouds; It was real and encouraging; Does put an effort into preparation. On the negative side: Not good; attacks people; unprepared; Too abstract and intellectual; A white priest who does not use the vernacular; Not everyone has the gift; The priest is barely audible; Average. I really doubt if my parish priest prepares his homilies; Language problem; had nothing to do with people's experiences; it was abstract; White missionaries, and Bemba is difficult for them. Mostly just read the homily with a lot of mispronunciations; Parish priest is a missionary - finds difficulties in Swahili; Too long, too many focuses, seems designed to occupy a certain amount of time; Is not fluent in the local language; His preaching has no connection with the scriptures. His homily is boring.⁹

The spread of comments on difficulties of language of foreigners is predictable. Some have the gift of languages and some do not. However the comments give some sense of what the students think the picture *ought* ideally to be than what it actually is. There is a concern about expatriate priests who are communicating imperfectly or with priests who are unprepared or too abstract. These comments betray real experience, good and bad, but also a vision of how things might be, and also a hope that the indigenous generation will be more effective in the preaching ministry. Every younger generation assumes it will outdo its elders of course, but in this case some natural advantages, such as a mother-tongue command of the language, give something upon which to base this assumption.

The students were asked the question: To what extent do you think preaching can be taught in class? Most of the replies were nuanced, either saying that yes, teaching can be taught in class but only up to a certain point or no, it cannot really be taught in class but class can give some useful helps to preaching. Some of the following quotations give the flavour of the replies.

Preaching skills and self confidence. I think preaching must be taught in all years of theology. I do not think preaching can be taught in class, rather an awakening in the students of what they have not realised, and most importantly equipping them with the necessary techniques. Preaching can be taught in class to the extent that it allows the students to be practical, practising their preaching. I can learn a lot from others and they can learn something from me. In class a preacher's confidence can be built. The criticisms that are offered by the lecturers and fellow-students can help people to grow.

⁹ Appendix 3 - Questionnaire 3 Question No 3 (all comments).

Practical skills and the use of voice and body language. But the rest - interest, initiative, zeal - has to come from the preacher. The ability to communicate effectively can be learned but not the imagination and creativity which engages the listener. (It) can build awareness of what to avoid doing. We may gain the theoretical skills of how to structure a homily and the practical skills of speaking effectively. Preaching is also perfected in practising the art, so the greater part of formation in preaching continues outside of class in an actual pastoral setup. A one semester course in preaching is sufficient... but a pastoral ministry period could be a conducive time. What we did in the class was just wonderful. I would suggest that more time be given to the cultural context of the people with biblical application. The time was too short. I think preaching needs the whole year. Perhaps one or two more lecturers could be invited at times to come and listen and give feedback so as to make this even more serious since it is part of the core of our theological studies. What we are learning in the class should be put into practice outside. One can do wonders in class, but outside in our parishes, our communities, one can certainly do wonders or see where one really needs to improve. I wonder if preaching can be taught; however, I think various skills for preaching can be effectively taught in class. Integration of theory and practice. The use of other means of preaching e.g. poetry, story-telling, proverbs and drama. I think teaching of preaching should be an ongoing process.¹⁰

Three modest things, then, emerged from this survey and was confirmed by the discussions held in class during the semester. These are a degree of self-confidence, a keenness to learn and work on skills and quite a good grasp of the issues involved in preaching and of 'learning' to preach. The self-confidence is particularly noticeable and my suggestion is that, apart from coming from oral cultures, it is based both on some early experience and on the knowledge that they have such a superior command of both language and the cultural background than their expatriate missionary forebears. However this self-confidence did not result in an attitude of 'we have nothing to learn'. On the contrary, the willingness to discuss the topics with interest, to learn, to practise, to be criticised, to take note of the abilities of other students, were heartening to the pedagogue.

We end this section with the responses to an open ended question: To what would you compare preaching?¹¹ The variety of images chosen is wide to say the least and tends very much to the concrete. Preaching was likened to:

African storytelling,

¹⁰ Appendix 3 - Questionnaire 3 Question No 3 (all comments).

¹¹ Appendix 3 - Questionnaire 3 Question No 14.

gardening,
 an eye-opener,
 the sharing involved in spiritual direction,
 the nurturing of a mother,
 a presidential campaign,
 an opera,
 a musical performance,
 pasturing cattle,
 passing on lived experience,
 searching for water in the desert,
 taking an oath,
 power,
 poverty,
 a chief addressing his people,
 distributing food,
 finding food like parent birds,
 a garage where all kinds of cars receive attention,
 counselling,
 artistic work,
 a community working together.

If imagination is a pre-requisite for preaching, then this rich collection of images might be somewhat encouraging.

7.3. What Some Teachers Say

'All who preach eminently well... will be found, with scarcely an exception, to have laboured much to acquire skill (Lischer W 1995:412). This was the considered opinion of the already-mentioned John Broadus. Naturally those who teach preaching will, like their students, incline to the view that it can be taught since this is their job and *raison d'être*. However Broadus' observation more than hints at the cost to the student and perhaps by implication, their teachers. Fred Craddock offers scant encouragement to the teachers when, in the context of a lamentation of the poor quality of much preaching, he opines that doing more homiletics in the seminary is not the answer (Craddock 1981: 18) For him the changes which must occur are much broader and deeper.

The following section records the interviews with three 'practising' teachers of homiletics, in South Africa.

7.3.1 Fr Michael Lewis

Fr Michael Lewis S.J.¹ teaches pastoral theology at St John Vianney Seminary in Pretoria, in South Africa. His

¹ Interview with Fr Michael Lewis S.J., Pretoria, South Africa, 12/12/1999.

opinion is that, in the Roman Catholic church, trainers of preachers are doing their best and making a modest difference in a generally flawed training system. His rather pessimistic appraisal is based less on the question of whether training preachers is possible at all, but more on the difficulty of training preachers in Southern Africa in the year 2000 with poor resources and church leadership which either cannot or will not rectify the problem.

Lewis also believes that the complacent view that the African church is 'on a roll' is misplaced and dangerous. Numbers are increasing, partly through the birth rate and partly through conversions, but these latter Lewis thinks are often about upward social mobility and he predicts a serious falling away when the values of the consumer society start to take hold of the growing middle class in South Africa. First we had rice Christians and now respectability Christians. Not that it has ever been any different elsewhere, but the fact is that real faith needs deeper foundations and these need to be built by able preachers who are facing a pre-evangelised, syncretistic and missionary church with the added problems of rapidly encroaching secularisation and materialism brought by the forces of modernity.

Unfortunately, according to Lewis, timid leadership results in a failure to address the problems of a continuing model of formation which grew out of the European church of the 1950's. The teachers in these institutions have until recently been products of that system. The younger generation of teachers were not from that system, but their own formation was badly flawed by some of the shortcomings of a post Vatican II formation in which examples can be cited of priests who have no formal pastoral formation and as a result, no pastoral sense. This was about as far as one can get from the desired 'rigour of the trade' (Lewis Interview: 12/12/1999), the disciplines of practice and evaluation other professions see as a normal route to competence.

Not that the post-Vatican II period of formation was entirely flaccid, as it is sometimes portrayed says Lewis. Many Catholic clergy acquired a sound knowledge of scripture as an excellent basis for future preaching, and the

liturgical reform signalled the return of the homily, i.e. preaching as theologically part and parcel of the eucharist.

The hidden curriculum is that we are training people to become like us, priests who have a little knowledge about everything. Academics often imagine that they are training people to be academics. They are not; they are forming people who will not work in universities but in businesses, industries and government service. Most seminarians will not work in seminaries but in parishes.

Lewis feels that what is needed for the generation in training is provide them with those tools which will enable them to cope and even thrive in their future jobs. Skills for finding out what they need are perhaps the highest priority. This is how the world operates today and the internet is the obvious example. For preaching the emphasis should be on how to find and use sources such efficiently. Concepts of preparation and pastoral time management need to be thoroughly inculcated. Many pastors in the field complain that they do not have time to prepare their homilies properly. Lewis maintains that time, or the lack of it is not the problem, rather how it is used and managed. My own experience with my preaching classes is that students prepare ferociously for the trial by fire of preaching before their peers. The results are very encouraging. Could it be that one key to effective preaching is the teaching of time management?

An earlier discussion (in 1973) of the use of time by clergy is found in Edward P. Echlin's *The Priest as Preacher*. His post-Vatican II concern was that the priest would become so caught up in social and political activism that he would lack the time for the study, reflection and prayer necessary for what he calls 'informed preaching' (1973:79). He says: 'It may be, as one sympathetic Protestant minister has warned, that we are preparing not lifelong ministers of the Word, but social workers for the early seventies' (81).

Thirty years on observers like Lewis would agree that time is still not being appropriately allocated in the preacher's life, but for less theological reasons.

Lewis is proposing a very different model of formation to that inherited from the church of the mid-century. It is known as 'pastoral training', an in-service approach in which the student undergoes practical training in a real pastoral situation which is carefully supported, monitored and evaluated. The old name for such a pedagogy was the sandwich course.

The 6 month internship that Lewis currently runs has accommodated some 60 students. Preaching is a challenging aspect of the experience particularly appreciated by the students. Remarkably, there has been hardly any negative feedback on any student's preaching. This seems to be because much practical preparation has been put into their preaching before they depart - a course on the basics of public speaking with an emphasis on the technical side. By the time they preach they should have the confidence which goes with a grasp of technique.

Lewis sounds a note of optimism by saying that he feels that in the Catholic church preaching is now on the agenda in a way that it was not in the past. He would also caution that it is early days yet and the pastoral training approach will only really be able to be evaluated once its products have been working in the field for some years. However my impression is that the programme is successfully inculcating skills and building confidence plus attitudes of 'professionalism' including in preaching. This indicates that preachers can in some wise be trained. Lewis, of course, insists that the many limitations still hampering seminary training mean that still better results could be achieved.

7.3.2 Sr Immaculata Ngubane

Sr Immaculata Ngubane is a Zulu-speaking South African Dominican religious, also teaching homiletics with her colleague Fr Lewis at St John Vianney Seminary. She is now 60 and has had a varied career including parish work, retreat and catechetical work. She has 'preached' frequently in a variety of situations, including at the eucharist in order to assist expatriate clergy who were struggling with the local

language. She says she operated 'almost like a deacon'² at one stage. She recently completed a master's in pastoral ministry in the United States in preparation for her work at St John Vianney's.

Ngubane's view is that the students have much natural talent and that some are born preachers. The students come from both town and country and therefore speak different versions of their mother tongues. A student from town going to the country has to make linguistic and cultural adjustments and vice versa. South Africa is a country where you open your mouth and reveal your origins. But she feels that most adjust well. However most are going back to where they came from.

Ngubane says that important outcomes for the students are the ability to contextualise the message and the habit of preparation. This latter discipline is instilled by the insistence on the presentation of a written text before the classroom preaching takes place. There is also class feedback and the less merciful feedback of the video. One of the most useful forms of feedback has been that of a laywoman who reads the students' texts. Her comments focus on whether the message is comprehensible and/or relevant to the average parishioner. A living reality check, she pounces on words like 'kenosis'.

Like all classroom homiletics the artificiality of the situation is a limitation. At present most of the students preach in English, another element of artificiality, but considered necessary for the process of assessment. However this is being reconsidered.

The artificiality is more than compensated for, says Ngubane, by the internship. This is where reality bites. Some even decide that the life of the preacher is not for them. For most the sudden contrast between theory and practice makes them grow up fast. Learning about HIV/AIDS in the seminary is one thing; preaching at the funeral of a young AIDS victim is altogether another. Ngubane observes simply that 'they go away boys and come back men' (Ngubane

² Interview with Sr Immaculata Ngubane OP. Pretoria, South Africa 31/8/2000 (Interview)

Interview: 31/8/2000). The internship serves as a kind of initiation into the realities and responsibilities of pastoral life, including preaching. The post-interns are the ones who shoulder responsibility once back in the seminary. She reports that their interest in theology is considerably enhanced by the experience.

Preaching can be taught according to Ngubane, even to those students who are not 'naturals'. These can be trained to the point of being competent without being charismatic. This distinction echoes the artist/artisan one made earlier. She is also of the opinion that a necessary condition of 'learning' to be a preacher is growth in general and spiritual maturity. Here she highlights the capacity for reflection, the contemplative ability to notice things and make sense of the world, the self and the scripture.

7.3.3 *Fr Sean Wales*

Fr Sean Wales³ is a Redemptorist and has worked in South Africa for a number of years. The Redemptorists are preaching specialists who take the subject seriously and their charism was and is the preaching of missions in parishes. The traditional preparation for this was thorough and continued throughout their training with weekly preaching 'academies', or small groups of students who met to practice preaching together. These 'academies' emphasised the external, rhetorical elements. It was expected that there would be daily private practice at the basics of public speaking, things such as voice production. The first theological analysis of the 'practice' preaching of the students was done at their year's course in sacred eloquence, which was a special Redemptorist course.

Wales feels that the strength of the Redemptorists in South Africa is that all of the students have been part of their mission team and have therefore had experience of preaching in the field. A special seminar has been set up for Redemptorists and others on preaching and this has been

³Interview with Fr Sean Wales, Merrivale, South Africa. 4/1/2000.

extremely helpful even to others, for example the Passionist (another religious order) students, who have a similar charism.

It is interesting in the context of our earlier discussion on age to note the Redemptorist students are not allowed to preach the main sermon of a mission but only what they call the 'instruction'. It seems that the Redemptorists definitely have a sense that at certain ages and stages people are not ready for certain topics or types of discourse. Wales readily speaks of a 'hierarchy' among Redemptorist preachers. Complex subjects like marriage are not given to people who are either too young or inexperienced.

Redemptorist preaching has a precise aim - to lead people to prayer. The founder, St Alphonsus Ligouri, always made his sermons end with an act of contrition, but the modern Redemptorists have widened this to various types of prayer - adoration, petition, meditation etc.

Reflecting on his personal experience Wales says that the formal, technical training in public speaking gave confidence above all. Can preaching be taught? He feels that the preacher's experience of God makes all the difference for effectiveness and this is something which cannot be taught, only encouraged. The same is true of the disciplines necessary to be successful (preparation, meditation, editing) but he feels that the enthusiasm of the preaching mentor has an impact which can persuade the student to adopt these disciplines.

The present programme's effectiveness is adequate but somewhat patchy and hampered by the limitations of the study context. A man who is rather wooden in English can be quite charismatic in his own African language. Wales sees one of the major challenges in Southern Africa as 'releasing the Africanness in people' (Wales Interview: 4/1/2000).

7.4 Inculturation

Wales' remark about 'releasing the Africanness in people' is a statement about inculturation. It may well be that one of the principal pastoral challenges in the Catholic

church in Africa is precisely summed up in his epithet. If inculturation of the Gospel is the crying need that it is said to be, then the manner in which the Gospel is preached cannot be ignored in this inculturation. Indeed, if the definition of preaching as itself part of the inculturation process is correct, then the conclusion is inescapable.

This has obvious implications for the pedagogues. A deep sense of the local culture is indispensable, and this is most likely to be possessed by a local teacher. However at a time when local oral culture is facing a cultural onslaught from the West, a solid academic knowledge will be required in addition to natural cultural roots. The pedagogue needs to be able to avoid the problem of the native speaker of a language who is called upon to teach it and who, although thoroughly fluent and splendidly eloquent, is ignorant of the history of the language, its relation to other linguistic groups as well as the more analytical issues such as how the grammar, syntax, phonetic and other systems within the language work. Not only must such a person be able to speak with African eloquence, but also to describe what African eloquence is, where it comes from and how it is related to African culture, history and religion.

7.5 Summary

We have, in this chapter, looked at students and pedagogues. The students, as befits youth, seem somewhat more optimistic about their ability to master their subject than their mentors. Their self-confidence and keenness, however, arises from a background of early experience in preaching in an oral culture. There seems to be no reason why they should not do well if they receive well organised and practice-based training.

The pedagogues are more in touch with the problems, including the structural ones of the church, the limitations of institutions and of individual leaders. However they too share some of the younger people's optimism with the proviso that other formation processes take place, such as a growth in knowledge of God and the disciplines of time management and prioritisation.

If the conclusion here is that fundamental competence in preaching can be taught to those of moderate ability, and that those of unusual ability might be formed to be outstanding, the voices of those in the congregations which we heard earlier indicate the extreme necessity of the success of such work. The literature suggests that, particularly in a post-modern society such as the United States good preaching is still highly prized. No doubt African congregations would concur.

Finally, it seems imperative for the furthering of the intelligent inculturation of Catholic African preaching to have well trained African pedagogues attending to the needs of students of preaching. Their competence should include the theology of inculturation and a knowledge of the traditions of African orality. Input from specialists in this area would greatly enhance the pedagogy of preaching.

Our final chapter follows and adumbrates the theme of the general formation of the aspirant preacher. It will be argued here that unless certain other areas of formation are successfully being achieved and integrated, the preacher will not be an effective one, no matter how brilliant his or her technical skill.

Chapter 8 Formation

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter we try to go deeper than technical expertise. In the previous chapter Wales was reported as saying that the preacher's experience of God makes all the difference, a statement of the obvious but one worth making. This 'experience of God' must rank as the most important, among those which constitute the 'depth' already alluded to in our consideration of Untener's work. We find some help here in the consideration of the deeper aspects of formation by reference to initiation, age and the importance of rites of passage. The importance of ethos or character is referred to by once again noting the opinion of the classical rhetoricians.

8.2 Formation and Age

'Only the one who listens can speak'. I am unsure of the provenance of this saying but no doubt it is said in various ways in various cultures as in Max Picard's: 'By taking it away from silence we have made an orphan of language' (Craddock 1981:7). In this sense formation for public speaking goes far deeper than the technical ability to craft and deliver a theological discourse. As mentioned earlier it is a commonplace that in traditional society in practically any culture, including African, the notions of wisdom and age are closely linked and for the young public speaking is deferred; a certain maturity is desirable. Given that maturity normally takes some time to acquire, the question 'Are you old enough to say this?' seems relevant to young preachers. On the other hand, the only way in which the young learn responsibility is by taking it.

The discussion is more relevant since we are in fact, at least in the developing world, ordaining young people to preach. And if we agree, even partly with P.T.Forsyth that, 'with its preaching Christianity stands or falls' (Lischer R 1987:74) then the quality of the 'product' must needs be of concern to those concerned about the health of the church. Hans Van der Geest has written an entire volume on the vital

importance of the character of the preacher. He says by way of conclusion to his work: 'The effect of a preacher is a very important factor in the worship service. God does not exclude it, but sometimes he outdoes it' (1981:163).

The importance of the formation or, to use an anthropological term, 'socialisation' of our young preachers therefore cannot be taken seriously enough. The image of the upbringing of young Maasai pastoralists, comes to mind. We saw how the understanding among the Maasai that the pastoral way of life stands or falls by the 'formation' given to their young boys has resulted in an exceedingly serious and by western standards, harsh socialisation. The qualities required are constantly reinforced in folktales, myth and painful rituals. Early responsibility is the order of the day, very small boys having to look after herds, and failures and mistakes are mercilessly punished. Cowardice carries an inalienable stigma. It is as close to a zero-sum culture as can be found: either you are a Maasai or you are nothing, therefore you must submit to its disciplines or you will be nothing. The carrot is that the sense of the superiority of the Maasai way of life is simply unquestioned and is therefore the highly desirable goal.

The shepherd is the image we find in the Gospel. This is an extremely tough shepherd. However its aspect of rigour and its all-or-nothing aspect can speak to young people (perhaps especially young men). If we agree that 'with its preaching Christianity stands or falls' (Lischer R 1987:74) this ought not to be a soft option. If one is contemplating doing this, then it should be undertaken wholeheartedly and formators should be wary of admitting the 'second class persons' abhorred by Emmanuel Obeng (1994:15). Initiation as a preacher should not eventually come if one keeps one's head down during the formation programme, but by proving oneself in challenging and indeed costly trials. As for educators, we should not hesitate to demand and maintain these daunting standards.

The Maasai model of the herd boy reminds us that this is not a soft and easy option for a pleasant lifestyle with automatic status and respect. The real as opposed to formal

status and respect will come, the student should learn, if it is earned.

8.2.1 Formation and Character

The practitioners of rhetoric in the ancient world were implicitly aware of the 'formation factor' and those who reflected upon it expressed the desirability of rhetors being mature men of good character. Aristotle, in the *Rhetoric* puts it thus:

It is not true, as some of the technical writers assume in their systems, that the moral worth of the speaker contributes nothing to his persuasiveness; nay, it might be said that almost the most authoritative of proofs is supplied by character (In Jabusch 1980:13).

The Greeks generally felt that three things were required to constitute a good speech - *logos* (reasoning), *pathos* (the appeal to the emotions) and *ethos* (the character or reputation of the speaker) and they tended to think that the third element was the most important.

Roman thinkers such as Quintillian were of a like mind. In his *Institutio Oratoria* he expressed this opinion:

The orator, then, whom I am concerned to form, shall be the orator as defined by Marcus Cato, 'a good man, skilled in speaking'. But above all, he must possess the quality which Cato places first and which is in the very nature of things the greatest and the most important, that is, he must be a good man (1980:13).

He observes that there is an obvious danger in not insisting on good character in orators since eloquence can be used to pernicious ends in pernicious hands, or mouths. We moderns would have to concur and admit that there is something mesmeric and compelling about Hitler's eloquence for example. But Quintillian does not want to argue simply on utilitarian grounds. He also wants to say that it is of the essence of the true orator to be a good and true person. If he says this of pagan oratory, it should not be surprising that the church has said the same and more of aspiring Christian orators.

On the question of the character of the speaker Gracian says with characteristic succinctness: 'in speech, discretion matters more than eloquence' (1992:84). Hence the importance of formation other than the technical matters of rhetoric or eloquence, important as these are. We have been using the

term 'formation' in a broad sense even though the purview is the training of preachers in the Catholic church. Religious 'formation' tends to have the sense of the psychological and spiritual maturity which we hope can be fostered by what can be termed psychological and spiritual exercises. Examples of the former would be the Covey course or the Myers Briggs Test, and possibly also psycho-therapy. This is a somewhat narrow and restrictive view. A candidate for the religious life or priesthood is entering upon a whole new way of life which must of its very nature be formative. An analogy is marriage and having children. Life changes radically entailing massive and mature adaptations which are necessary just to cope, let alone positively thrive. Hence we should include all aspects of the way of life under the umbrella of 'formation', from the community life, to the structure of the day, the spirituality, to the study, the experiences of the works done by the organisation, to the different way such a student is treated by others and the many other experiences that make up this colourful and interesting tapestry.

'Discretion' then, is a fairly fundamental aim for our student in formation. To put it bluntly the least we are looking for is someone who does not scandalise or embarrass and thereby let down the church. An indelicate and insensitive loudmouth of a person is a liability in most organisations but one in which receiving many confidences is part of the job, and in which treating delicate topics in public in a forum where the right to reply appears not to exist, is the proverbial bull in the china shop.

The indiscreet person tends to lack the knowledge and self-knowledge born of reflection. Hence the goal is a wisdom born of a habit of reflection. Stillness of the mind, or reflection, is a prerequisite for powerful and moving speech, including in the realm of secular public discourse. The need for an analogous process in public religious discourse is clear.

8.2.2 Character and Curriculum

The Renaissance saw a rebirth of interest in things classical, including classical literature and its rhetoric.

The Christian humanists of the Renaissance, among whom the Jesuits may be counted, attempted a practical synthesis in their educational system which they hoped, to put it simply, that good literature would produce good men. (They ran schools and universities for males). The system took the student through a grounding in the rudiments of Latin and Greek, then on to the supposedly higher things of grammar, syntax and poetry. The crowning achievement of this course was rhetoric and the stars of their schools were the boys able to give a good Latin oration in classical Ciceronian style. But this was not regarded exclusively as a technical training. Today we would say that the hope was that it was holistic, that this training in language, literature and above all rhetoric, was also a training in character. Naturally the system included other important character-forming elements, such as training in theology, prayer, piety, the sacraments and moral exhortation. But it is interesting to note that the academic and practical lessons conducted in the classroom were themselves regarded as potential formers of good character.

Part of this notion would have come from the philosophical moral rectitude which comes through the pagan authors themselves. Part would also originate in the idea that certain disciplines are inherently good for the character, in the same way that the British public school believed and continues to believe that sporting activities build qualities such as teamwork, unselfishness and resilience. In other words, curriculum is not simply a utilitarian choice for the Renaissance mind. This is an interesting notion which appears startling to a world steeped in the utilitarian mentality: the humanities are worth doing because they humanise or at least have the potential to do so. The African notion of the moral education through the learning of proverbs echoes this sentiment.

It is an interesting question as to whether the church still believes that curriculum affects character. If the formation programme of Roman Catholic priests still begins with philosophy is this just because philosophy is regarded as utilitarian, something which will help them to do the job

of serving as a basis for theology? The suggestion here is that we do still believe in the importance of curriculum in a character-forming way, but more implicitly than explicitly. If we did not we would value business studies or computer science or government administration as highly as philosophy and literature as a preparation for the priesthood. I make no judgement about whether in fact these subjects as presently studied in African settings have the desired formative effects. However if the underlying notion of a connection between curriculum and character holds good then it would appear to need re-thinking and to be inculturated.

8.2.2 Formation and Social Change

The discussion of culture and the focus on the inescapable fact of modern culture have, or should have, consequences for the intellectual formation of religious and clergy. This is an ever more complex world which they are expected to take the lead in evangelising. Laying appropriate intellectual and other foundations for the preaching ministry is of paramount importance. Take the subject of inculturation. As Azevedo puts it the contemporary situation in our world 'demands thinking of inculturation in relationship to modernity, not just as a matter of pastoral planning' (1982:37). Which raises the question of whether the intellectual formation being given enables the students to get a satisfactory grip on this 'modernity' about which we have been talking. Experience suggests that the background formation may be lacking for this. In order to understand the modern world it is most important to study the history of western ideas, and this will normally be done in any respectable philosophy course. However it is science and technology which are calling the economic and intellectual tunes. The question should be asked as to whether our students have much scientific background given the impoverished school system they come from. And if not, to what extent will they be able to engage in any helpful processes of reflection on the impact of modernity. A high-profile example is biotechnology and related issues such as genetic manipulation, which might soon be affecting the lives

of African farmers. How much basic science is required to be enabled to reflect on such a question and then to preach something intelligible? The trend in the priesthood and religious life in western countries is for a lessening of expertise in science due to accelerating specialisation. As with technology itself, there is a problem of rapid obsolescence. Azevedo (1982:34) points out that *Gaudium et Spes* was envisaging the modern world of the Industrial Revolution at the dawn of the information and genetic revolutions and hence was out of date when it appeared. Azevedo's article is itself several years behind the coining of the term 'nano-technology' which is about to transform the processes of production.¹

With specific reference to language and therefore to preaching, Azevedo wonders whether ecclesiastical institutions have an adequate command of a language which is both conversant with technology and the realities of modern communication methods: 'The analysis of ecclesiastical documents at almost any level discloses how limited their potential is for genuine communication' (1982:34) and he feels that present formation 'results in certain rather specific language which characterises our preaching, our catechesis and adult education of the laity' (33).

One could envisage the danger of returning to a very defensive pre-Vatican II posture vis-à-vis modernity and post-modernity rather than one of engagement and dialogue. This would come out of ignorance and the inability to make sense of modernity. Hence religion would become a separate compartment of life, as it so often tends to, and we would 'fall short of proposing our message in a way that animates, directs and unified the culture' (33). This is food for thought for directors of studies of clerical students who make requests to pursue scientific studies 'on the side' during their philosophy and theology.

8.2.3 Formation and Reflection

¹ Peter Hebblethwaite (1984:51) points out in his biography of Pope John XXIII that in 1906 the young Roncalli's bishop had science laboratories built in the diocesan seminary at Bergamo.

Reflection, in both the secular religious sense, usually arises out of study although in the religious sphere it includes something called prayer. St Francis of Assisi: 'A preacher ought first in secret prayer to draw the water he intends later to pour out in sacred sermon; he ought to grow warm within before he utters words without' (Jabusch 1980:57). Or as Hilkert puts it:

To take on the life of the preacher is to commit oneself to becoming a contemplative and to embrace ongoing study as part of one's vocation. This commitment to study includes not only theological study, but also an active interest in other areas of human discovery and knowledge and, most important of all, daily and sustained reflection on human experience (1997:98).

Reflection, then, presupposes a certain attitude of mind honed by habit. It is a process requiring patience and discipline. It is not necessarily a lonely introverted process but it will require some silence and solitary dialogue with books and the ideas contained in them. A 'mind poised and still' is not something that can be acquired without some schooling. Experience is rightly much lauded but experience is raw. A colleague recently commented that many of his university students appear to live with much raw experience with which they do not know what to do.

It seems, therefore, that the extroverted task of preaching to a vital extent depends on the introverted discipline of reflection. The question of whether this can be taught is then one key to answering the question whether preaching can be taught at all. Are reflective people born or made? There is actually a case to be put for the former. It is a common observation that the priesthood and religious life contain a disproportionately high number of introverts, i.e. people who are by nature more comfortable with their inner world and find energy there. This appears odd when one thinks of the highly public nature of the priesthood and much of the religious life of today. Why are there not more extroverts? Part of the answer is that the kind of public appearance demanded by these professions requires this high degree of reflection to be effective in public. This does not mean that extroverts are automatically unsuitable for these ways of life; it means that they may have to work harder to develop an appropriately reflective style in order to give

depth to the public speaking that flows naturally from them. Even naturally reflective people will require schooling. It is not suggested that such students spend time in a Buddhist monastery, (although for some such an experience might be helpful for those whose formation is not already monastic in character), but that the very way in which the formation is 'done' should naturally incline them to this reflection. As a schoolboy the present writer tended to do his homework to the sound of the popular music of the time. This is probably not the appropriate model for developing the kind of reflection desired. A basic goal will undoubtedly be a tolerance of silence leading to an appreciation of it. This somewhat simplistic example is an illustration of what is meant by 'style'.

8.3 The System and Confidence

This writer's experience in the area of formation, has brought home the importance of the building up of confidence.

In the post-colonial, post missionary context the confidence factor is a central formational consideration. How can confidence be built up when education, or lack of it, colonial history and poverty have contrived to destroy it? People are left with the feeling that local is lacking and cannot cope.

These experiences enter the soul insidiously and can serve to convince a young person of a fundamental lack of ability vis-à-vis his predecessor from overseas, his greater linguistic ability and knowledge of the culture notwithstanding. If we are to avoid setting up such a person for a debilitating experience of the prophet being unacceptable in his own country and to his own kin, then serious thought has to be given to a formation which builds confidence on real and solid foundations. Hence the argument is not for a training which is purely practical, from the word go, out there in the field, although I would also argue that this, properly timed, is also vitally important as a builder of confidence. Academic competence is an index of achievement. It may not be so important to rural villagers where a pastor was educated and how well he or she achieved,

but it certainly means much to the pastor. People judge themselves by comparison to their peers and in the developing world of Africa, including South Africa, young church students compare themselves with their local and international contemporaries at university. Nothing establishes confidence more than solid academic achievement.

Michael Lewis identifies one of the main causes of dysfunctional behaviour among clergy as stress arising from the inability to cope with the challenges of the pastoral ministry. In some extreme cases the dysfunction manifests itself as a kind of inertia or paralysis in which a priest effectively withdraws from the fray. Lewis' appraisal of such cases is that the man has not been given the skills to cope with the job he has to do and so lacks confidence that he as it were, 'seizes up'.

Confidence is an important element in preaching. The very public function of preaching is one of the more searing experiences of the public gaze as even the experienced will testify to. Obviously the knowledge that a person can stand up in front of a congregation and acquit him or herself competently is very much a builder of such confidence and, provided it remains appropriately modest, is much to be desired. There is, therefore, is an underlying formational challenge inherent in this process, which is how to build competence without pride, confidence with becoming humility. There is a need to bring forth a confidence which is not dependent on the trappings of office. The truly confident young preacher will not need these to boost a low self-esteem.

8.3.1 Field and Classroom Education

The argument here is for more training in the field. This notwithstanding the observation of this writer is that without a fundamental confidence born of academic adequacy, the fieldwork will be attempting to build on shaky foundations. It is a fact that students for the priesthood and religious life compare themselves with their peers 'outside'. There was a time when theology ensured that such a comparison always demonstrated that the young student for the

priesthood and/or religious life was in a special category since the calling was securely described as 'higher' than those in the lay state. Such theology continues to be invoked but belief in it is enfeebled today. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was the council of the laity and this has had a relativising effect on the 'higher' way theology, even if there is a recent attempt to claw this back. Add to that the increase in educational levels, including theological, among lay people in many parts of the world relative to the clergy and religious, and one can see how important the comparison between the young seminarian and his peers is. Hence the need to create the opportunities for these young men and women to achieve academically up to the level of their capacities within their chosen field. For the purposes of preaching a thorough grasp of scripture will be the most important part of that field, not just in the sense of what the texts say but all the other hermeneutical subjects surrounding the study of both Jewish and Christian scriptures. Cultural input, as mentioned already, will also be vital for the inculturation of preaching.

The question of the adequate academic education of the future preacher is an area where congregations also makes comparisons. This writer's memory of discussions with parishioners about the Zionist churches is that Roman Catholics took a dismissive attitude towards them on account of the lack of learning of their ministers. One could criticise this view as un-ecumenical or even snobbish but it is certainly revealing, indicating that education of the leadership is a key factor in the confidence of at least the Catholic community. Therefore the confident perception of a particular Catholic community that their pastor is sufficiently educated would clearly affect the pastor positively, and the opposite perception negatively.

It may be argued that this is all another form of status seeking, a chieftainship model of priesthood and religious life. Certainly this can happen. But there is a distinction to be made here. The chief receives office by right of heredity, not by dint of hard work and solid personal achievement, even though he will also have to earn the

respect of his people. The model of ministry being proposed here is in fact ultimately subversive to the chief model, and therefore somewhat counter-cultural, proposing what Rodney Kennedy calls 'a nonauthoritarian status for the preacher' (Kennedy 1993:59). There is no guarantee of office through blood, nor through a 'higher way' theology, nor through an *opere operato* theology. The only guaranteed gateways to the office are competence and integrity in the manner of our Maasai herdboys. If the formation structure makes this clear, then the one who gets there can be quietly confident that he or she is adequately equipped and therefore not needful of any artificial upbuilding.

8.3.2 Personal Experience and Personal Growth

Ordinary people are remarkably difficult to fool, especially en masse. If the preacher has no experience with which to back words and fine sentiments, these will sound hollow to the people, no matter how technically brilliant they may be. If a preacher purports to be bringing good news, then that person must needs have experienced it in a way which communicates itself. A preacher who lives in habitual despair is unlikely to announce glad tidings effectively. Without some 'consolation' in the preacher's life there will be no evangelisation of the lives of the congregation. Here the question, 'does the person know what he or she is talking about?' is key. 'Know' in the sense, not just of an academic knowledge, (which I have stressed as being inestimable) but also a spiritual and experiential knowledge. Here we are back in with St Francis and the reflective habit but perhaps more in the realm of spirituality. Kennedy's quotation of King's *Power and Communication*, is apposite here: 'Speakers exhibit visual and verbal signs that prompt their listeners to make judgements about their right to communicate' (1993:99).

The natural caveat to this shrewd observation is that if no one is ever truly worthy then no one can ever preach. Growth is always to be hoped for, but there is a kind of 'stuckness' or being 'hung up', which holds out little prospect of growth. Psychological assessment and its effectiveness is an area of continuing debate. I would argue

that a fundamental importance of assessment is the avoidance of ministerial catastrophe in the future. In this sense the assessor is a helpful assistant to the 'gatekeeper', the one charged with deciding who will or will not be admitted and who will or will not go forward at the critical moments of incorporation into priesthood and religious life. The airline pilot analogy might once again help. It is the responsibility of the assessor of candidates for the task to ensure that no one suffering from epileptic seizures or psychotic episodes goes through to the responsibility of flying an airliner.

The issue of the capacity for psychological growth is important because of the observation of how it affects spiritual growth and therefore that which gives depth and authority to the potential preacher. Once the capacity for this is verified then the work of fostering it can begin in earnest and there are many paths to this which have been well tried and tested throughout the history of the church. In the chosen context of the still largely missionary church of this region of Africa there are some observations which can be made.

8.3.3 Spiritual Growth and Vocation

The contention here is that students for the priesthood and religious life will grow in the spiritual life if they are receiving nourishment from the appropriate quarter. The enclosed monk whose way in the spiritual life is to be found in the cloister will struggle outside that cloister. Similarly someone who is truly called to a missionary order will probably find the cloister a positive block to spiritual development. One does not have to be a Christian or even a believer to accept that one ignores one's calling or vocation in life at the peril of personal frustration and lack of fulfilment. The point is that in the missionary situation the structures or lack of them can create problems in this regard. So we can find that those called to the diocesan way of life can find themselves in important respects living like religious and vice versa. Congregations which are work-specific or even preaching-specific such as the Redemptorists and Passionists, can find themselves building churches and in

administration, which is not ideal for their spiritual lives, indeed it might result in 'structural neurosis'. Generosity of service has meant that groups have accepted this 'charism-dissonance' at least as a temporary solution. But the question needs to be asked whether it is right and indeed healthy to be asking people to join an organisation whose function is theoretically one thing but whose practice is altogether another?

Another observation concerns resources available for spiritual formation, in other words their limitation. The most obvious one is the limitation of human resources in the shape of suitable mentors who are conversant enough with the local culture to be able to guide the candidates into a satisfactorily inculturated appropriation of the spirituality of the group. In this writer's experience this is an extremely serious problem indeed. Without such people the spiritual formation programme can have a feeling of 'flying blind'; no one quite knows whether the students are really growing or not. The lack of trained personnel can lead to conservative structures and timetables which tend to the monastic because they establish a measure of control through regularity and the need to put in frequent appearances. Apart from being an inappropriate preparation for later ministry which will very definitely be un-monastic, these structures can cause major problems to go underground until later burdens of responsibility reveal them in all their extent which is sometimes intractable. Coupled to this there are often serious limitations on physical resources such as the availability of books. But these pale into insignificance beside the problem of sufficient numbers of able spiritual formators.

8.3.4 *Spiritual Discernment*

Finally, in the light of the discussion on the complex relationship between modernity and the developing world, the quality of spiritual discernment is a desirable if not essential one for budding African preachers. All the intelligence and schooling in the world do not guarantee a person the wisdom necessary to find their way through that

particular maze. Pascal's famous dictum on the heart and the reason suggests that discernment is dependent upon a properly schooled heart as well as a well educated head. A spirituality cannot, in this day and age, stop at methods of prayer; it must go on to develop that dimension of human sensitivity whose instinct is constantly to weigh up the good and the bad and, more importantly, the better from the good.

8.3.5 *Born or Made?*

It would be hard to overstate the need for good preaching. The preparation of effective homilies takes considerable time, but all the time in the world does not necessarily produce one. Nor does mastering good rhetorical style or practice in public speaking. In the end preaching is a charism bestowed by the Holy Spirit, and it serves the Word of God and builds up the life of the Church when it flows from this charism (LaCugna in *America* 1994:March 19).

Catherine Mary LaCugna's observation is perhaps a timely warning against a Pelagian approach to preaching. In the end it is a gift the Spirit to the church.

However no doubt Bishop Untener would say that we have the responsibility to work with the charism so graciously granted. Therefore he makes bold to say: 'Great homilies are within the reach of homilists who are not great speakers' (1999:14). This is more considered than Erasmus's 'If elephants can be trained to dance... surely preachers can be taught to preach' (Thornton & Washburn 1999:20). Against Erasmus Patrick Negri feels that in any class of aspirant preachers there are but few who have the talents to become really proficient. He even goes so far as to say of some: 'let them not start' (Negri Interview: 17/2/2000).

The two sides are not necessarily irreconcilable. The Bishop's statement is preceded by a number of provisos, such as that the homily is truly focused on the Word of God, rather than the preacher, that the work is done on behalf of the church and that the homily is a humble discernment of what God is doing or saying through the scripture in the relevant circumstances. If preachers can manage to assimilate all these attitudes and put them into practice, then with basic speaking skills they can do the job successfully. 'A good homily still requires basic speaking skills, but these

are within our reach. We don't have to be gifted raconteurs or extroverts' (Untener 1999:15).

Robert McCracken, in a lecture entitled 'Preaching as an Art' makes the pithy and quite helpful remark that: 'Preachers are born and not made, but they are born raw' (1956:68). He says this to emphasise that even the most gifted hone their skills. He clearly does not mean that no honing is required, or he would not have been giving the lecture. But he is of the opinion that fundamental talent is required, as in the pursuit of any subject. 'The primary thing is the preaching instinct. Without some semblance of it at the outset there is reason to doubt whether a man should enter the ministry at all' (69).

He illustrates his point by a description of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under its conductor who rarely steps to the podium with a score, so perfectly has he mastered his material and how his whole being is given over to his art, adding, 'If we applied ourselves as assiduously to our craft as (the conductor) does to his, our people might be at a loss to account for the change that would come over our preaching, but how they would welcome it!' (70). As a model for time management, professional musicians, with their daily hours of practice proffer a terrifying example.

Robert McCracken talks of the 'preaching instinct', the unselfish stance of directing the limelight elsewhere. It goes without saying that Bishop Untener assumes personal maturity and spiritual growth which enable the preacher to acquire this instinct. Negri, however, did not seem optimistic about whether all of his students had the capacity or the courage to grow in this way. Neither did he seem to be teaching many who were naturally endowed with eloquence. With such lack of the 'preaching instinct' one could understand the position that at least some should not start.

The opinion of Negri raises a question for those charged with selecting candidates for the ministry. Apart from physical and psychological health, intellectual ability etc, might it be worth enquiring whether a candidate comes with preaching potential? Has the young person preached before? Or taught? If not, it would be a simple matter to put the

candidate through some kind of a public speaking exercise which would give an indication? As we have noted, public speaking is an extremely revealing exercise, saying much, for those listening at the appropriate level, about character and maturity. But on a naive level of how effectively someone who is 'raw' speaks in public, there would be an indication of whether this person was in any sense born to the craft. The fact that at present we make a careful investigation of the candidate's academic abilities, spiritual journey and psychological balance, but without any test of the ability to express ideas in public discourse, seems in itself significant.

The underlying contention here, with Echlin,² is that preaching is so central to the priestly vocation and that of all Christian ministers that formation cannot be left to chance. If the indications are, after a sufficient time, that progress is not being made and is not likely to be made in this vital area, the very vocation to the ministry must necessarily be called completely into question. To go ahead with the training of a preacher who is clearly headed for incompetence thanks to a fundamental lack of maturity or inarticulateness, would be like passing a surgeon who cannot overcome a fundamental physical clumsiness.

8.4 Artificiality and Reality

We can argue, then, that it is necessary for those charged with the training of preacher to get an early look at the aspirant's preaching potential and to begin to build on it early while insisting on solid intellectual achievement. According to Broadus this cannot be done seriously in an artificial setting. Indeed he goes further and argues that preaching in such an artificial way can do positive harm since the preacher's first attempts can set his style and tone for life. In living memory it was customary to make young religious preach to their communities as they ate their meals in silence in monastic refectories. It is difficult to

² Echlin, Edward P SJ 1973. *The Priest as Preacher: Past and Future*. Cork: Mercer.

imagine a more artificial setting even though it did have the one advantage of striving at audibility.

Preaching before a video camera in a studio has pedagogical advantages, the main being that the students have an opportunity to see themselves in action, but in some ways can be even more artificial and 'staged' than in the refectories of yesteryear. The use of the video camera in the real parish situation is in this writer's experience one of the more effective combinations, putting together the real situation with the merciless feedback of this now standard tool.

Given the observation of Broadus and my own on the importance of building up confidence, an obvious practice which has to be questioned at the level of the classroom is the use of language. Assuming that the objection to the artificiality of the classroom as a setting for practising preaching can be overcome, this still leaves the difficulty of the artificiality of 'preaching' in a foreign language. The present practice is analogous to giving trainee pilots of civilian airliners their solo flights in military jets. Military jets, like foreign languages, are that much more difficult to control. The experience is not good for confidence-building. Even the student with a most articulate command of the second language will not be able to do his or her best in that language and will always be somewhat cut off from the rhetoric of Africa which goes with the mother tongue. As Ong (113ff) mentions in his section on the use of Latin in the Europe of the Middle Ages, a language not learned at one's mother's knee and which is an academic vehicle, tends to be abstract, lacking in emotional content and controlled by writing, i.e. is part of the world of literacy. In other words English for most African students is not a naturally suitable language in which to exercise an essentially oral art, even though English, unlike Latin, is still a spoken language and is becoming the de facto mother tongue of a minority of Africans.

If preaching is a form of inculturation of the Christian message, and this inculturation is primarily likely to be carried out in the student's native tongue, then the use of

European languages to practise preaching in the classroom makes sense only insofar as he or she is likely to be preaching to people who worship in this language.

8.4.1 *The Language Factor*

These observations are made from the experience of a practical class conducted precisely in this way - non-English speakers 'preaching' in English. That the students did as well as they did was a great credit to them. Admittedly there was a sense that they were all in the same boat, except for the handful whose first language was English. However this is not entirely true given the fact that they were all aware of different abilities. In addition they had to preach before the teacher whose native tongue is English. To their credit, therefore, the standard was generally impressive. In some cases the natural ability struggled through but one was left wondering how much better a student would have acquitted herself had she been completely at home with the medium of speech. Much better, was my sense and this is being borne out in another class where mother tongues are used.

One was acutely aware of the fact that the fact of being forced to use English had the consequence of making them employ a whole style of speaking which was alien. The symbol of this alienation was the text to which many had to consult as a guide to keep them from 'losing the plot'. Clearly this is not the way these students would be communicating in church at 'Nazareth'. The last thing they would be doing would be following a text. Not that they would be unprepared, but they would be able to exercise a freedom which would enable a freer flow and a pouring of energy into those aspects of public speaking which can make all the difference - eye contact, pace, asides, and being aware of how its all going down with the audience. When the concentration is on not making grammatical errors or mispronouncing and keeping to the text, this can be very difficult.

A practical conclusion for classwork is therefore that if preaching is judged appropriate at all in the classroom, then it should be done in the student's first language. This presents fewer problems than at first one might suppose. It

is perfectly possible for the student to present those members of the class who do not share the language, plus the teacher, with a resumé of the message, perhaps on an overhead projector. In addition there will normally be at least a handful of other students who know the language and can make useful comments on content. The non-comprehending members of the class can then be instructed to concentrate on the general impression that the speaker makes and the conviction conveyed through fluency, tone of voice, eye contact, volume and pace. The contention here is that such an exercise can give a much more accurate idea of the fundamental ability of the speaker and that this can be judged. Secondly, the use of the student's mother tongue in this process of 'blooding' or 'jumping into the deep end', has the potential enormously to enhance the student's confidence. Experience in the above-mentioned second class, is bearing this thesis out.

A counter argument runs that English is the medium of instruction and therefore to make a concession such as this is to go against the need to maintain standards. I would argue that this may be true for other subjects such as Biblical Studies or Canon Law or Moral Theology but that homiletics is different. The aim is primarily to enable the students to proclaim the Word competently in their own language. A secondary aim may well be to aim at doing this competently in English. My view is that a competence and confidence in the mother tongue will make the same more likely when the student turns to English than vice versa.

8.4.2 Preaching in Church

No matter how this comes, however, in the end there is the need to begin and this is the only certain way of judging the true effectiveness and the true potential of the student preacher. The real challenge is preaching in church. Regular, supervised preaching to a parish congregation as in the pastoral training course of the modern seminary is the ideal. This is an experience which will either help build up this much-desired maturity which will enable them to do justice to the office of preacher or make it sufficiently clear that he or she either lacks the ability and potential to acquire the

ability to preach. Clearly for this approach to work effectively a whole system of support will be necessary.

The above is a conclusion for the church in general. The discussion of the problem of teaching preaching in Sub-Saharan Africa not only supports this conclusion but underline its necessity in this region. If Broadus' problem with the artificial situation is indeed a problem then it is even more so a problem for present day African students. These men and women are often studying in a setting which is often light years removed from where they will work. The institutions of study are cultural imports, operating according to an expatriate mindset in a foreign tongue. This is often the case even when they have been taken over by local people - the model persists through momentum. They are still very different from the culture to which many will be returning, even given that these cultures are changing rapidly and becoming more urbanised and westernised. The very fact of 'practising' in a foreign language puts huge constraints upon the students, restricting their range of expression and metaphor, their ability to explore the natural rhetoric of their own language and to relate to their hearers in an appropriate manner. Unfortunately this particular constraint is to some extent unavoidable given the historical legacy of colonial languages, the diversity of African languages and the financial and political necessity of centralising training in particular places where it is less likely to be disrupted by war or economic collapse. However the suggestion above about beginning classroom practice in the mother tongues might go some way to helping students in this regard.

Despite the inevitability of the 'deep end' it is not advisable to begin preaching 'immersion' in a parish setting until the student really has something to say, i.e. has done at least some theology, and in particular some study of the scriptures. The question: 'Are you old enough to say this?' also has an educational corollary along the lines of: 'Do you yet have anything to say?'. This is not to argue for waiting until the end of academic study; rather not to start preaching before any academic study has been done. A young

person who is thrown in at the 'deep end' without any ability to swim will drown. With no theology at all the young person is most likely to take refuge in pious exhortations or moralising. We can forgive this when he was a lay leader without much theology, but here we are looking for more.

8.4.3 *Preaching to Two worlds*

For the present generation of young African students for the ministry the challenges facing them are formidable. Among these is the rapidly changing world in which they live, a society leaping from the agrarian into the knowledge-based computer-driven economy. The complication is of course that vast segments of that society are, for one reason or another, remaining in the agrarian world and are likely to be there for a very long time to come, while at the same time a smaller, younger segment races away into another world and another mentality, without fully understanding what they are taking on.

The student for the ministry in Africa will need to be able to preach the Word to the inhabitants of both these worlds and those somewhere between the two, with the rhetoric of traditional and modern Africa. The obvious danger is to fall between the two stools. The aim is to be able to get the best that both worlds offer and be able to straddle both, preaching as effectively to rural peasant folk as to urbanised professionals. This, as they say, a 'big ask' and the fact that those involved in their training may themselves not be that familiar with one or both of those worlds, is a handicap.

8.5 *Summary*

We have surveyed the main issues where personal formation touches on preaching. The maturity and depth of character which should come with age and experience and are helped to develop in the formation programme are clearly key. The complex question of the age at which one can preach, or preach on certain matters, was also mentioned. The mature preacher will be one who has a contemplative attitude or a capacity for reflection in all senses of the word. Such a

person will also be able to analyse and cope with the rapid social change signalled in Chapter 5 on culture and go beyond analysis to what might be termed *spiritual discernment*. The calling is not an easy option and its rigours and responsibilities should be presented to candidates remembering that initiation in African society has never been expected to be pain-free. The image of the Maasai herdboys can help us here.

We also considered the question of the programme of formation which prepares our preachers. While it is important for them to experience the preaching task in the real-life and non-artificial setting of an ordinary congregation, it is important that when they do this they have something to say. In other words they must have enough intellectual and practical training plus the indispensable maturity of character. A training structure that will ensure confidence with humility is what is needful. In all this we should beware of divorcing intellectual from spiritual formation and remind ourselves that there is a tradition of curriculum affecting character.

We looked at the question of whether preachers are born or made, concluding that while it is true that some people are definitely unsuitable for the preaching ministry, those candidates who are, even if possessed of great natural speaking ability, cannot do without formation and training. This need is underlined by the fact that the demands of the African church are such that they must be able to be servants of the world in two cultural worlds and often in more than one language.

Chapter 9 Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has taken as a given the inculturation task in theology to be the theologian's duty. Insofar as inculturation is a road to liberation (Keteyi & Maluleki 1998) is the duty that more pressing. The duty is analogous with that of the African writer upon whom the expectation was and still is placed of being a voice of liberation. Hence the preacher as agent of inculturation shares this duty and by extension so does the pedagogue of the young preacher. There is certainly no liberation without education.

9.2 History

Our historical survey of preaching enabled us to identify some of the great themes in the church's experience of preaching. One was that of inculturation, for although the word is modern, the process is as old as the church itself. Because the Word himself is incarnate in a particular time and culture but given for all times and all cultures, his words are immediately translated into language that can be appropriated by all, particularly the poor. The word is proclaimed in public and hence the language used must in some sense be rhetorical. Therefore the encounter of a culture's eloquence or rhetoric with the Word is the locus of the inculturation process.

This has taken place in Augustine's Hippo, Bossuet's France, Wesley's England and Tutu's South Africa. In the African setting there have been and still are obstacles due to the colonial history of the church. This fact of historical disadvantage of African language and culture in the church makes the task that more important in the present.

9.3 Theology

Preaching is theology is action. It is doing theology in the field, for and with ordinary people. Hence it is important for the preacher to understand what it is that he or she is doing and the principles that guide this activity. The thesis here is that the theology of grace is highly

significant since this will colour the preacher's attitude to culture and therefor to cultural forms of eloquence. A theology which sees grace as suffused in nature, including human culture, will perhaps feel more at ease making explicit use of culture in the theological project of inculturation, including in preaching. Hence a preaching which comes out of such a theology, while being fully rooted in the Word and the tradition of the church, is more likely to be couched in the linguistic forms which make it comprehensible and attractive to all members of that culture.

This question may be more of an issue for Protestants than Catholics. For Catholics the theological question is more radical in the sense that preaching the Gospel has been done 'institutionally', through schools, universities, hospitals and other bodies. Since these are either no longer viable or losing their influence, the Catholic church, particularly in the developed world, may need to re-discover preaching as its main agent of evangelisation. The Second Vatican Council laid the ground for this change in decreeing the revival of the homily, but implementation seems patchy. However developments in the United States suggest some progress and might give signals about where the church of the developing world will need to concentrate in the future.

9.4 Descriptions and Definitions

Here we have described and analysed what makes for effective preaching with the help of David Buttrick in order to come to a definition of preaching. We looked again at the connection between eloquence and preaching and the rhetorician and the preacher and arrived at the conclusion that although there are many aspects to a full description of preaching, a definition highlighting the aspect of inculturation is the most helpful for our purposes. Preaching is the inculturation of the Word.

9.5 Challenges

The challenge is for the church, under the Holy Spirit, to revive preaching in the sense of seeking a greater access to people so that 'the poor have the Gospel preached to them'

(Luke 7:22). In the developing world this demands properly trained local people who can further the work of inculturation of preaching through exploration of the use of the riches of African oral culture in preaching.

In the developed world one of the challenges currently being addressed is that of professionalism and accountability. In a milieu in which these are positive values and large sections of the population are 'professionals', this is an authentic inculturation. It affects authority since authority not backed up by professional competence and accountability is suspect in this context. We have suggested that for Catholics, who have been developing the lay ministry since Vatican II, a preaching authority could be conferred not primarily by ordination but via an examination of preaching ability. As African culture encounters the West and as Christian congregations become more educated the call for professional preaching ability is likely to increase locally. Lay ministry is a fact of the life of the African church, including in the Catholic church. Hence a test of professional competence would not be inappropriate or out of place in the African context.

9.6 Culture

This chapter on Culture focused on the drama of the meeting of western and African cultures and suggested that exponents of African culture should avoid complacency in the face of the frightening power of western culture and its vehicles, the English language, the media and money. The superficiality of the soap opera should not distract from the powerful philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment upon which western culture is built.

The fact that it has been felt necessary for African intellectuals to propound the philosophies of *Négritude* and *Black Consciousness*, and for Thabo Mbeki to proclaim proudly 'I am an African', indicate a somewhat defensive posture towards western culture. Given the way in which western culture was inevitably associated with western political and military power, this is hardly surprising.

However there is no return to the traditional ways of life exemplified by the Maasai people. Synthesis is the only way forward. But there are many possible syntheses. The call and duty of preachers with the best interests of the people at heart is to bring forth the best synthesis possible. How this might be achieved and of what elements it might be composed, would be the subject of another thesis.

9.6.1 *Communication*

Here we concluded that African culture is essentially oral in its history and background and persists in this orality despite the onset of literacy. Hence it is vitally important that students of preaching should be able to draw from the deep well of this oral cultural source, a problem for those who of necessity have to do their education in English, a tongue which has long since been marked by literacy and which for many cuts them off from the emotional side of language which comes with the mother tongue.

It might not be too dramatic to assert, then, that a preaching course for Africans should ideally begin with a course in African literature in which students could explore proverbs, folktales, *palaver* and many other aspects of their oral heritage. This 'drinking from one's own wells' would be a necessary preparation for the inculturation work of pastoral preaching. The long and rigorous training of the traditional exponent of African eloquence should be taken seriously as a model for the preacher. The fact that he or she speaks the language more fluently than foreign missionaries does not mean automatic attainment of cultural eloquence. This is the local equivalent of the 'professionalism' that preaching is currently seeking in countries like the United States. In addition, age and maturity are issues which need to be kept in mind. Ordination is not magic.

In the pedagogical work at hand the Gospel model is the controlling one, that of a servant of the Word, but a truly competent one.

9.7 Pedagogy

There are several conclusions to be drawn from this chapter in which we have 'sampled' the system of formation of preachers as it actually is. In general the students show promise and are optimistic and quite confident about their future preaching. The pedagogues are more sanguine, particularly about the weaknesses of teaching institutions which often lack African pedagogues, but generally believe that, given reasonably talented and committed students who are also maturing as persons, the 'art' of preaching can be passed on. 'Preachers are born, not made; but they are born raw' (McCracken 1956:68). These teachers are particularly insistent on 'pastoral training', the supervised immersion of students into pastoral work for a good stretch of time. In their experience this meeting with reality has a maturing effect and effects a sharpening up of their expertise in preaching.

9.7.1 Formation

The main conclusion here is that the technical competence of the preacher is no more sufficient than was the technical competence of the classical rhetor. The 'good person' comes before the 'speaking well', and if the former has been neglected the result will be polished emptiness in both rhetoric and preaching. Without the depth that comes from personal and spiritual development, preaching will sound superficial, even if it is accomplished intellectually and technically. This is what the Greeks referred to as *ethos*. For the Christian preacher *ethos* is about an experiential knowledge of God.

For this we conclude that we need to look to the formation programme in its entirety. A rigorous and rounded training which is self-consciously not a soft option is recommended. Once again the demands of the specialists of the tradition and the image of the Maasai herdboycan be invoked. The intellectual is not to be neglected since there is still something to be said for the position that curriculum creates character. This is especially so in a situation where because

of a history of poor education African students can suffer from a lack of academic confidence.

The demands of the training are many and varied. The need to have a grip on both the traditional culture of the people and the emerging modern synthesis espoused by the younger generation, illustrates these demands. There is a question of how much scientific knowledge a modern preacher needs in order to speak coherently to a world being formed by science.

The programme, then, is required to produce reflective people, in all senses of the word, people who can reflect intellectually and prayerfully, and thus discern their way through the issues that life presents in a time of dizzying cultural change.

The above challenges have been outlined for those teaching and learning to preach where cultures cross, not that they may feel overwhelmed by them, but that they may be helped to grasp the *kairos* that they represent, today, on this our Continent, for the sake of Christ's church.

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APPENDICES**Appendix 1 - Questionnaire 1: To Students**

Name:	Country of Origin:
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1. English is my 1st, 2nd, 3rd Language

=> _____

2. Did you have any experience of public speaking before you came to the seminary/college? If so what?

=> _____

3. How would you rate the preaching in your home parish on a scale of 1 to 10?

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)

Comment? _____

4. Was preaching done by lay people?

=> _____

5. If so how would you rate the standard, on a scale of 1 to 10?

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)

Coment? _____

6. What are the elements of an effective homily in your home setting?

=> _____

7. What is your theological opinion on the following? Which village do you believe would be more Christian after 50 years, the one in which there was [well conducted] Mass without preaching or the one in which there was [good] preaching without Mass?

=> _____

8. Please put the following activities in order of importance as far as you are concerned. [Number 1 = most important, number 14 = least].

Sacrament of reconciliation.

Visiting the sick.

Financial administration.

Marriage encounter.

Benediction

Baptisms.

RCIA.

Preaching at the Eucharist.

Fund-raising.

Lay leadership formation

Catechetics.

Parish Council meetings.

Retreat giving.

Maintenance of buildings.

9. Please gauge the truth of the following statements on a scale of 1 to 10 [Please mark the number chosen] and add a comment on the line given.

1. Generally speaking there is natural preaching talent in the seminary among students.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

2. My full preaching potential is being realised in my training programme.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

3. Learning to preach in a second language has its merits.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

4. A rural background has advantages for preaching.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

5. And disadvantages.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

6. A town background has advantages for preaching.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

7. And disadvantages.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

8. The seminary is the ideal setting in which to learn how to preach.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

9. The academic courses are fully integrated into the pastoral, including preaching.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

10. Psychological growth is an important factor in my formation as a preacher.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

11. This is addressed adequately at the seminary/college.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

12. Spiritual growth is an important factor in my formation as a preacher.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

13. This is addressed adequately at the seminary/college.
=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

14. By ordination I will be a capable preacher, able to handle most topics.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

10. Please add any other ideas you may have on the process of learning how to preach.
Over the page =>

Appendix 2 - Questionnaire 2: To Students as Parishioners

Name: _____

Country of Origin: _____

1] Please list the following qualities of the preacher in the order of importance as far as you are concerned. Feel free to list qualities of your own and put them into the order.

Skill with words.

Passion.

Imagination.

Prayerfulness and holiness of life.

Ability as a story teller.

Length.

Looking the part.

Dynamism and 'vibrancy'.

Brevity.

Age.

Clear diction.

Experience of life.

Youth.

Intellect.

Prepares the material well.

Well vested and groomed.

2] Please gauge the truth of the following propositions on a scale of 1 to 10 and write a brief comment in response to them. [Please mark the number chosen].

1. Our priest is generally a good preacher.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

2. Our priest is generally a poor preacher.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

3. Our preacher is an average preacher.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

4. He preaches from the scriptures.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

5. He gives us the teaching of the church.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

6. He grounds his homilies in the reality of our lives.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

7. He is imaginative and brings in arts, culture, current affairs.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

8. He brings us consolation and good news.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

9. He speaks out of his own experience.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

10. He begins and ends well.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

11. He is always well prepared and organised.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

12. He is focused and does not ramble.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

13. He normally judges the amount of time appropriate for the occasion.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

14. We can understand him; he knows our level.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

15. He doesn't speak down to us.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

16. He has a good command of the vernacular.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

17. He understands and refers to the local culture.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

18. He has a good voice.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

19. He has an effective vocal style.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

20. He has good body language.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

21. He has good eye contact.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

22. We remember what he says.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

23. We talk about his homilies.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10) _____

24. [In the case of a young priest] He never preaches on topics he is too young to handle.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

25. He gives the impression that he prays over what he preaches.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

26. He addresses social issues.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

27. He tends to the spiritual and pious.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

28. He lays down the law frequently.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

29. He invites feedback on his preaching.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

30. He involves others in the preparation of his preaching.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

31. The time in the parish has helped improve his preaching.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

32. He visits us in our homes.

=>(1)(2)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7)(8)(9)(10)_____

33. Would you like to make any further comments?

=> _____

Appendix 3 - Questionnaire 3: To Students at the End of Course

Name:	First Language:	Age:
--------------	------------------------	-------------

1. What academic areas do you now realise that you need to work on?

=> _____

2. What practical skills do you realise that you still need to develop?

=> _____

3. What disciplines do you now see as important?

=> _____

4. What disciplines do you realise that you still need to develop?

=> _____

5. What areas of personal growth do you think you need to develop as a preacher?

=> _____

6. Do you think you are now ready to preach?

=> _____

7. If yes, why and with any limitations?

=> _____

8. If not, why not?

=> _____

9. If not, when do you think you will be ready to preach?

=> _____

10. To what extent do you think preaching can be taught in class?

=> _____

12. Please put in order of importance the most important insights, if any, you have had about preaching during this course?

=>

13. Please write a few lines beginning with the phrase, "If I was teaching this class I would..."

=>

14. To what would you compare preaching? Try to find an image and develop it below. E.g. you might want to describe it as sweated labour or as one of the arts or in some inculturated way. Try to say what you personally think preaching is all about and how you feel about the prospect of being a preacher of the Gospel

=>

Appendix 4**Interviews**

Gribben, Robert. *Melbourne, Australia 14/5/2000* (Interview)

Lewis, Michael SJ. *Pretoria, South Africa 13/12/1999* (Interview)

Moynahan, Michael SJ. *Melbourne, Australia. 8/5/2000* (Interview)

Negri, Patrick SSS. *Melbourne, Australia 17/2/2000* (Interview)

Ngubane, Immaculata OP. *Pretoria, South Africa 31/8/2000* (Interview)

Wales, Sean. *Merrivale, South Africa. 4/1/2000* (Interview)