2) Seeking an understanding of what was happening in the NT during its own age, not a later interpretation developed throughout history;
3) Accepting the text at face value
4) Seeking to harmonize what the Bible taught in one particular location with themes taught elsewhere in the Bible
5) Developing a meaning based on the immediate context of a word or passage, relegating distant uses of the same term to a much lesser influence (vi, preface)
6) Developing a broad and keen knowledge of the Bible over years of study
7) Developing an extensive knowledge of people as they sought spiritual direction from Lard's written and spoken ministry

Lard, the scholar of humble beginnings, had an appreciation that the people on the land could benefit from scholarship though they had not developed the ability. His commentary is an example of respectfully using the work of others while letting readers look over his shoulder as he made his own informed judgment on the Romans text. As such, it has a lasting value with regard to methodology as well as textual meaning.

A CALL TO PROPHETIC PREACHING

TIMOTHY SENSING

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In 1962 A. N. Wilder argued that genre form and content cannot be separated from each other, yet he observed that the history of biblical study and preaching has been primarily a history of the divorce of form from content.[1] F. Craddock responded positively to Wilder's analysis stating, "The separation of form and content is fatal for preaching, for it fails to recognize the theology implicit in the method of communication."[2] Craddock's work popularized genre studies' connection to preaching, opening the floodgates of a "new homiletic." He stated, "The time has arrived for critical review of sermon form as well as content."[3] It took almost a decade for Craddock's emphasis to gain momentum. In time, subsequent authors brought forth a host of texts advancing the cause that the literary form and function of the text should have an influence on preaching strategies.[4]

Due to the newness of the study of how form and function of literary genres influence sermon design, many forms have received little attention. The most glaring example of this lack of attention is T. Long's omission of prophetic literature from his *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*.[5] This paper explores the form and function of OT prophecy and offers a modest proposal for renewal of preaching with a prophetic voice today.

Misconceptions Abound

Prophets are not our contemporaries. Prophets spoke to their own people during their own time. Distance of time and space magnifies the conceptual dissonance that exists between then and now. Consequently, misconceptions

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[1] A. N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

[2] F. Craddock, *As One without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971) 128.

[3] Ibid., 153.

[4] For a review of the recent homiletical developments, see my earlier article "Parabolic Preaching," *ResQ* 33:4 (1991) 193–208.

[5] T. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). He later rectified this omission in "Preaching the Prophet" in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. M. Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 306–16.

abound as to the nature of prophecy. Our misclassifications often arise from our reaction against futuristic, political, and charismatic abuses facilitated by others who embrace prophecy for their own theological agendas.

My earliest recollection of the meaning of prophecy narrowly defines the term as a prediction of the future. Subsequently, I have learned that prophets are not fortune-tellers or foretellers of the future even though a predictive element exists within their writings. These prophets were primarily concerned about their future, not ours.[6] Prophets were forth tellers of the message of God and the activity of God during times of crisis that impinged upon the common understandings of what was, is, and will be. Most of the material found in the prophetic books would correspond best to the genre of sermon more than any other classification.

A second misconception about the nature of prophecy relates to the function of its activity within society. Although earlier this century mainline Protestant groups primarily understood prophets as social reformers, OT prophets were not promoters of a social gospel.[7] D. S. Long calls this type of prophet an opposition figure against institution and tradition. He concludes it is a false assumption to see the prophets so future oriented that they find only contempt for the past social order. The prophets did not see obedience to tradition as a compromise.[8] They stood under the community of faith, not set over or against it. The message connected the past traditions to the present needs in order for the community to find its true identity.[9]

E. Achtemeier takes issue with identifying prophetic preaching as equal to judgmental preaching. When interpreters understand prophets as social critics and reformers who condemn Israelite society on the basis of absolutist standards of justice and righteousness, they miss the deeper theological issues that motivated them to speak. Achtemeier finds no particular ideology or social program that motivated the OT prophets to speak. They possessed no political agenda. God gave them a message; therefore, they preached their sermon.[10] However, the prophet cannot be divorced completely from the

[6] D. E. Gowan, *Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark LTD, 1980) 119.

[7] The misconception that a prophet is a social reformer or a political-action figure will be revisited throughout this paper.

[8] D. S. Long, "Prophetic Preaching," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, eds. W. H. Willimon and R. Lischer (Louisville: John Knox, 1995) 387.

[9] Ibid., 388.

[10] E. Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989) 109. She includes the observation that God's prophets were not keen political observers who foresaw the inevitable consequences of individual and corporate actions. This naturalistic view robs the prophets of their divine role. By couching her objection in the fabric of the herald metaphor, Achtemeier's crucial point can be neglected.

social, economic, and political upheavals of the day. These very upheavals prompted much of the prophetic activity in Israel. The theological message of prophecy developed a strong word of grace and future hope through pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic times, addressing the heart of social, political, and economic context.

Yet it has been difficult for many to maintain the tension between being socially involved, politically astute, and theologically conservative. Polar ends of the spectrum often leave no room for any mediating options. The fallacy of making a one-to-one correspondence with a prophet to a political figure pervades many liberation theologies. For example, W. L. Owensby calls preachers to be prophetic by taking a greater political position and opposing nationalism that either promotes or is silent about poverty, racism, inequality, and injustice. He states, "Everyone likes a generalized abstract message that favors justice for the oppressed. But prophetic truth is seldom general. A word of hope for the poor is a word of challenge to the rich; justice for the oppressed means judgment of the oppressor."[11] Furthermore, Gonzalez and Gonzalez claim God continually speaks through the voice of the powerless. They note that the powerful have never heard the gospel accurately. They call the preacher to give voice to the powerless that are absent from the pew.[12]

Achtemeier states that while OT prophets illuminated God's activity in the world, preachers today may or may not have that insight. She ironically illustrates the double standard of those who draft prophetic pronouncements that oppose Hitler but not the bombing of Dresden.[13]

Achtemeier seeks a theological center that allows us to find our stance. Our preaching is prophecy only in the secondary sense as it points to our historic faith and God's continuing activity. The OT prophets mediated the will of God to Israel. In the same vein, when contemporary preachers use the witness of Scripture to influence Christian life, they are prophetic. Achtemeier includes the way in which the ancient prophets represented Israel before God. However, they never separated themselves from the

[11] W. L. Owensby, "Jesus' Baptism and the Call of Disciples and Prophets," in *Social Themes of the Christian Year: A Commentary on the Lectionary*, ed. D. T. Hessell (Philadelphia: Geneva, 1983) 76.

[12] J. L. Gonzalez and C. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon 1980) 31.

[13] Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 110. William Sloane Coffin, "A Neighborhood a Wide as God's Heart," in *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture: Essays in Honor of David Buttrick*, eds. T. G. Long and E. Farley (Louisville Westminster/John Knox, 1996) 32–37, offers an example of a political critique o United States policies that may serve as a worthy example contra Achtemeier.

people. They always spoke as one within community.[14] This at times led to isolation and persecution, but it was not their intent. OT prophets interceded before God on behalf of the people. So deeply did they identify with the people that they suffered first in their own bodies the destruction that would come to all the people. "Far from being a person who simply castigates society and individuals for their sins, a truly prophetic preacher is therefore one who goes out into the breach caused by our sinful rebellions against God and who, through prayer and preaching and love and sacrifice, builds up a wall for the new Israel, the church."[15] D. Gowan is even stronger in his rejection of modern preachers who attempt to be prophetic. If a primary focus of OT prophets was to project a new vision of a new era and an end to the old era, then modern preachers do not have that calling or authority.[16]

Finally, D. Gowan lists ecstatic personalities as a misnomer for prophets. This element is sometimes found in the biblical narratives of early prophetic conduct, yet is virtually absent from the writing prophets who came later in Israel's history.[17] Although it may be a false dichotomy to separate the non-literary prophets from the literary prophets, Gowan's point about over-emphasizing the ecstatic nature of prophecy is well taken. D. S. Long notes that the ecstatic misconception also plagued the early church's understanding of prophecy and often affects our embracing the form and function of prophetic preaching today.[18]

Identity Issues

Anthropological studies indicate prophets are intermediaries between the human and the divine worlds. Some societies have other means to connect these worlds and will not tolerate prophetic activity. Since they have no place in their social order for prophets, prophets are seen as sick individuals in need of cure or expulsion. Traditional, well-defined patterns and expected norms for the prophets to follow exist in societies that recognize prophets. If the prophet departs from the norms, then the prophet runs the risk of rejection. In some societies, anyone can be a prophet. In other societies, the role of prophet is a well-defined position with concrete social structures and is rightly called a "prophetic office."[19]

Prophets usually came out of Israel's mainstream. Often they had direct access to the temple and the palace. Although prophets seemingly possessed

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 113.

[16] Gowan, *Reclaiming*, 127.

[17] Gowan, *Reclaiming*, 120.

[18] D. S. Long, "Prophetic Preaching," 386.

[19] R. Wilson, "Early Israelite Prophecy" in *Interpreting the Prophets*, eds. J. L. Mays and P. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 7.

different titles, positions, and activities associated with their roles, duties, and functions often overlapped with no clear-cut way to classify their activity. Any observable differences between various prophetic activities were rooted in the various social contexts in a particular time and place.[20]

Prophets functioned both socially and religiously in society. Some prophets appeared on the fringe of society calling for social and religious change. These prophets were politically powerless. Other prophets appeared within the established power structure. They functioned to maintain the social order. If change occurred, it happened orderly so that the overall social order would be preserved.[21]

Prophetic utterances are profoundly corporate enterprises. The larger interpretive community over time helps shape the message. Communication is not a one-way street from speaker to hearer, but there is a "feedback loop" in which the audience affects what the speaker says.[22] A cacophony of voices speaking at one time in society may seem difficult to hear. People waiting to hear the one true voice from God may be confused. However, over time, one voice will be recognized by the community as the one that offered the best evidence of correctly interpreting events. Although the prophet may have been rejected by his contemporaries, his works were preserved by the community in the canon as the inspired voice.

Prophets appeared on the scene because of unprecedented upheavals in the political, military, economic, or social scenes. As Israel progressively moved from God's covenant to worship other gods, religious upheaval grew. Finally, shifts in population and national boundaries led to constantly unsettled conditions. Society was in flux. Israel's pre-understandings of the nature of its covenant and position in the land came under scrutiny by its experiences. The people needed a Word from the Lord, a reminder, so that God's covenant society could be preserved. If the society would not respond to the message, then God would punish them for being in violation of the covenant. God would not leave them. God would reestablish his covenant in the future.[23] Subsequently, the message of the prophets was a forging of the interplay of three factors: (1) the ancient covenant traditions of Israel's

[20] G. R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991) 207.

[21] Wilson, "Israelite Prophecy," 7.

[22] G. M. Tucker, "Reading and Preaching the Old Testament," in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, eds. G. R. O'Day and T. G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) 49.

[23] G. D. Fee and D. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1982) 152.

election and land promise; (2) God's new word for Israel today; and (3) the concrete realities of some particular situation.[24]

The message from God integrally connected the life of the prophet with the exigency of the day. The prophet functioned as a witness who was able to herald God's message to his own community. He was not an independent, objective, or dispassionate figure. His own life, health, family, community, and future were intertwined in the fabric of God's dealings with Israel.

> The prophet is a person, not a microphone. He is endowed with a mission, with the power of a word not his own that accounts for his greatness—but also with temperament, concern, character, and individuality. As there was no resisting the impact of divine interpreters, at times there was no resisting the vortex of his own temperament. The Word of God reverberated in the voice of man.
>
> The prophet's task is to convey a divine view, yet as a person he has a point of view. He speaks from the perspective of God as perceived from the perspective of his own situation. We must seek to understand not only the views he expounds but also the attitudes he embodies; his own position, feeling response—not only what he said but also what he lived; the private, the intimate dimension of the word, the subjective side of the message.[25]

Prophets experienced a fellowship with the feelings of God. They shared a sympathy with the divine pathos.[26] Prophets were in touch with the heart of God; therefore, they expressed God's heart as God's voice. Prophets imparted God's heart together with its content. Due to the prophets' extraordinary sensitivity to God's heart, they were also

> sensitive to evil, to injustice so that at times [they] seem to pay excessive attention to trivialities, to what we might deplore but have learned to deal with. To us a single act of injustice—cheating in business, exploitation of the poor—is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence; to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world. . . . To the prophets even a minor injustice assumes cosmic proportions. [27]

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[24] D. E. Gowan, *Theology of the Prophetic Books: The Death and Resurrection of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998) 6–10. Gowan, p. 6, notes how the prophetic word is a new word for a people who depended upon their unique relationship with God and the land. He interprets the writings on two levels, "words that appear to be contemporary with the events surrounding the demise of Israel and Judah, interpreting what is happening and is about to happen; and the book in its final form, reflecting exilic or post-exilic interpretations of what did happen and what that means for the community which now accepts these books as definitive for their faith and life."

[25] A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) x.

[26] Ibid., 26.

[27] Ibid., 1.

Heschel draws six conclusions about prophets: (1) Prophets felt the agony of God; (2) prophets made little concessions to human weaknesses because Israel was not just another people; (3) prophets were iconoclasts who attacked the established powers; (4) prophets were often embarrassed, lonely, and frustrated by their message; (5) prophets were not only messengers but also participants in the council of God; and (6) their words were charged with divine power because they had experienced God's own pathos.

The Form and Function of Prophetic Literature

Much of what took place in prophecy must be understood with a clear conception of the function of *dabar* in ancient Israel's thought. "Word" or "deed" was not equal to a label or to an intellectual meaning as understood in Western thought. "Word" in Jewish thought was woven into function. The spiritual and the material, the ideal and the real, and the idea and the actuality were intertwined. A word was power, a creator of reality, an event. Prophets were not transmitters.[28] The word the prophets received was far from neutral. The word pressed in upon the prophets until it was made their own. It transformed and consumed them.[29] The prophets glimpsed the vision that God cast for the people, thus generating passion within their souls for the mission of God's vision.

Prophets were speakers of oral literature. The genre can generally be divided into three overlapping categories: reports, speeches, and prayers.[30] A closer examination of the prophets, however, discloses a wide variety of mixed forms with no clear-cut distinguishing marks. H. Gunkel, a precursor to form-critical methods, at the turn of the century, opened the doors to seeing the prophetic literature as speech genres.[31] Subsequent authors, however, used inconsistent terminology to classify prophetic genre forms.[32] Some of the forms identified from the literature are judgment speeches, prophecies of blessing and deliverance, woe oracles, symbolic actions, lega

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[28] G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Traditions of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, vol. 2, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1965) 37; S. Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching the Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 2–3.

[29] G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 36; Heschel, *Prophets*, 25–26.

[30] G. M. Tucker, "Prophetic Speech," in *Interpreting the Prophets*, eds. J. L. Mays and P. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 29.

[31] H. Gunkel, "The Israelite Prophecy from the Time of Amos," in *Twentieth Century Theology in the Making*, ed. J. Pelikan (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 48–75.

[32] For example, two classifiers of this literature, K. Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form Critical Method*, trans. S. M. Cuptitt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), and C. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. H. C. White (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), differ often in their schemes.

oracles, disputation speeches, poetry, wisdom sayings, and apocalyptic.[33] There remains need for continued study of the various genre types in the prophetic speeches themselves.

The prophetic oracle is the primary literary unit in prophetic speech.[34] Just as in the case of genre forms, several scholars categorized oracles using different schemes.[35] Since these categories are being imposed upon the text by the interpreter, they need to remain as flexible guides. Greidanus simplifies the various elements of an oracle as (1) a statement of the reason for God's action, (2) the messenger formula, and (3) the announcement of God's action.[36] Pre-occupation with form may result in bogging down the homiletical process; however, studying the literary forms of the prophetic speech act offers the best alternative for the preacher to focus on the function of prophecy, namely, on God's activity among his people.[37] Subsequently, the preacher's exegetical work with each passage, delineating the literary flow and logical movement of the content, will provide not only a worthwhile pattern for sermon form, but also pathways to sermon function. The sermon that imitates both form and function of the text will facilitate stewardship of our prophetic voice today.

Existing within these prophetic forms were several rhetorical structures. Various methods of parallelism, inclusion, and chiasm were prevalent. Rhetorical devices alerted the audience to where the prophet was going. Sometimes the function was to restore the audience's focus. Sometimes the function was to give necessary emphasis. Often the rhetorical structure functioned as a mnemonic device aiding the audience in retention.[38] By recognizing rhetorical structures in the texts, we see the rhetorical strategies that enabled the prophets to do what they did. These rhetorical devices, likewise, provide a rich soil for harvesting sermon strategies that will best communicate God's message to congregations today.

G. von Rad emphasizes that no one form of prophecy can be identified as the origin for the phenomenon within Israel. He concludes that the "messenger formula" was the most constant and consistently used in Israelite history. However, form was never just something external. Form cannot be separated from content.[39] What determined the choice of form was primarily

[33] Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 214–16.

[34] H. W. Wolff, *Old Testament and Christian Preaching*, trans. M. Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 76. See Tucker, "Prophetic Speech," 30.

[35] Wolff, *Old Testament*, 76; von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 37; Gowan, *Reclaiming*, 123; Achtemeier, *Preaching from Isaiah*, 120.

[36] Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 243.

[37] Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 110.

[38] Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 250.

[39] G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 39.

the subject matter of the message. G. von Rad clearly emphasizes that the prophets were conditioned by the old traditions of the Torah. They re-interpreted these traditions by applying them to their own times. Because of the new situations within which the prophets found themselves, they modified the traditions. New situations opened up fresh possible ways of understanding old traditions.[40]

The Theology of the Prophets

The deeper theological issues that motivated the prophets can be inferred from the form of their speeches. They announced the coming action of God and the reason for that action. However, they never left Israel hopeless. They offered future hope that would follow the day of judgment. Judgment was never the last word.[41] Therefore, S. Greidanus emphasizes the significance of both "prophetic judgment speech" and "prophetic salvation speech."[42]

Prophecy was always conditional in nature. The blessings or the judgments were conditional upon the response of the people.[43] Therefore prophets functioned as intercessors for the people before God. They represented the community in covenant relationship with God. The sins commonly named by the prophets were not a violation of a specific code but a breaking of covenant. The prophets were concerned with the community's lack of trust in God and their failure to respond in love. Therefore, the prophets often rehearsed God's gracious activity in the past as a reminder of the hopeful possibilities in the future.[44] Yet possibilities for blessing also imply possibilities for curses.

The homiletical significance for preachers today is the continuity between God's acts in the past and his acts in the future.[45] It is reductionistic approach to the literature to see OT prophets as moralistic or legalistic heralds who offer only isolated moral maxims.[46] They alway

[40] Ibid., 45–46.

[41] E. Achtemeier, "Preaching from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel," in *Biblic Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury*, ed. J. W. Cox (Philadelphia: Westminste 1983) 121.

[42] Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 243.

[43] W. C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preachi and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 193.

[44] Achtemeier, *Preaching from Isaiah*, 121–22. Gowan, *Reclaiming*, 126, do not find the conditional aspect. For him, the prophets said, "It's too late. The end near and cannot be averted. The best we can hope for is a remnant, a few who c become part of the new order." However, a few years later, Gowan, *Theology*, emphasizes the arrival of other prophetic voices that explained God's intend future and renewal.

[45] Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 262.

[46] Achtemeier, *Preaching from Isaiah*, 120.

addressed contemporary needs with a word that connected them to their covenant roots and their future hope.

The primary message of the prophets dealt with religious apostasy of the nation. They were concerned with reformation not innovation, confrontation not creation, revival not change. Therefore, preservation of the tradition was central as they reapplied the covenant to new situations, re-envisioned the present in light of the past in order to insure future fidelity.[47]

The prophets saw that God was about to do a new thing in the land. They were not interested in the future generally, but focused rather on the activity of God in the present.[48] Although they spoke about social justice, these issues were rooted in the theology of the covenant between God and Israel. Social justice issues often served as the immediate context of obvious violations of covenant that led to God's new activity. These issues were not timeless truths abstracted out of context, but expressions of God's past and future activity among his people. The new action of God in the land revolved around a restoration of his original intent for his community.

The prophets subverted the more common and established vision that the people had of the future by presenting God's vision of reality. W. Brueggemann classifies their message as a witness of God's action in the world and of God's voice of justice and righteousness as they determine the future. The prophets articulated an alternative future for their community. This future anticipated trouble for seemingly successful people while promising well-being for those in despair.[49] The message was rooted in the most authoritative and treasured traditions and memories of their community. These traditions redefined their present reality. Often the prophets were able to be successful in reinterpreting the traditions because God gave them critical discernment of the social situation. The memories of the people converged with their future possibility uttered by the prophets in the present moment. Brueggemann states:

> Their characteristic work is to voice a 'metahistory,' that is, to witness to the power, pain, purpose, and presence of God in human affairs, a reality that is usually not noticed by those otherwise preoccupied. 'Metahistory' suggests that there is a quality, texture, and resolve in, with, and under human effort that cannot be disregarded or overcome.[50]

The prophets boldly called God's people back to God's covenant. Their message covered every conceivable area of community life. The issues

[47] Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 208.

[48] T. Long, "Preaching the Prophets," 306.

[49] W. Brueggemann, "Prophets, Old Testament," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, eds. W. H. Willimon and R. Lischer (Louisville: John Knox, 1995) 389.

[50] Ibid., 390.

identified in their writings (ethical, economic, political, cultic) were only symptomatic of the greater ills of Israel's apostasy. When the prophets spoke about the poor, law courts, business dealings, prayer, government, international treaties, wealth exhibitionism, family life and divorce, ritual feasts, tithing, or sacrifices, they were speaking from the heart of the covenant to people in the covenant. They desired to awaken faith in the congregation that would lead to renewed trust and obedience.[51] Positive reinforcements or blessings dealt with life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect, and safety. The list of blessings is contrasted with negative enforcements and punishments which dealt with "death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, destitution, and disgrace."[52] Therefore, their ministry has been described as a ministry of disclosure, a stripping bare of the people to expose their conduct and to lift the veil of the future so that no one would be deceived about how God would react.[53]

As the prophets saw how the larger culture was denying the covenant tradition, they criticized it from God's perspective. From the perspective of Israel, this criticism must have seemed radical, yet the prophets were simply expressing Israel's identity and mission in old terms, namely, God's perspective of reality. As the prophets proclaimed the vision of God's reality, they also named the discrepancies between this vision and the way the people were presently living. The prophets proclaimed this vision as the future that God was about to restore to the land.

Prophetic Preaching Today

Although there are various ways to interpret prophetic literature that include the extremes of highly literal readings and bizarre, allegorical readings, in Churches of Christ, the most common approach to interpreting the prophets is a historical-critical reading. The OT is an ancient, oriental book that engages us in a strange and alien world.[54] Sometimes, though, when preachers become historians, they may lose objectivity by looking for a single correct interpretation that can somehow be abstracted and carried intact across the hermeneutical bridge. The historical-critical reading needs to encompass a theological interpretation of the text. Reaffirming the foundational theology of the original text and setting provides a basis for the theology that will inform the sermon. The propositional distillery approach to hermeneutics must give way to a more dynamic theological reading of the text.

[51] Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 117.

[52] Fee and Stuart, *How to Read*, 152.

[53] H. W. Wolff, *Confrontations with Prophets*, trans. M. Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

[54] Tucker, *Reading*, 34.

W. J.Burghardt follows Heschel's categories closely, believing that to a limited extent the preacher is equal to the prophet. He states, "We too should be keenly sensitive to evil and injustice; we too should feel fiercely; we too should challenge the idols in our community and culture; we too can expect to find loneliness our lot, frustration inescapable; we too have to experience God as loving care."[55] Burghardt believes we should not follow Heschel's categories in two respects: (1) we must recognize our human weakness; and (2) recognize that we are less confident about what constitutes the Word of the Lord. In other words, a distance remains between their calling and ours. Infallibility and limitations placed upon us by our own preunderstandings, biases, and opinions confirm our lack of inspiration. Therefore, at least one implication for our preaching is that we can better serve our congregations by sharing a vision of the future rather than judging their present lives.[56]

G. Osborne suggests the most appropriate way to preach from the prophets is to recontextualize the gap between their social context and ours by finding analogous situations in the church. The church is the appropriate analog for God's covenant community.[57] Bright would find that bridge in a christocentric interpretation that is rooted in an understanding of the relationship of the two testaments.[58] However, Childs finds no "unilinear trajectory" toward Christianity. He notes the obvious common chords but rejects being able to find Christ under every verse.[59] The OT needs to speak with the force of its own theology and authority. Trajectories of biblical theology find their denouement in Christ, but even a christocentric approach needs to embrace the overarching theocentric message of the whole Christian faith.

It is inappropriate to set up antagonism that many locate between the prophet and the community. There should be no gulf between the prophetic role of the minister and the priestly or pastoral role of the preacher. The false dichotomy does not accurately portray OT prophets and should not be used as a model for the preacher today. The prophet always spoke from within community. Prophetic preaching always maintained a pastoral activity. The prophet is not opposed to God's covenant past, but calls the community to be true to its identity.[60] Prophets possessed pastoral and priestly motives that

[55] W. J. Brughardt, *Preaching: The Art and the Craft* (New York: Paulist, 1987) 38.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 219.

[58] J. Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967) 183–85; Achtemeier, *Preaching from Isaiah*, 123.

[59] Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 459–60; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 258.

[60] Long, "Prophetic Preaching," 387–88.

prized restoration over castigation, renewal over judgment. With tears in their hearts, prophets announced judgment, not because of preference, but of necessity.

Prophetic preaching offers an alternate perception of reality by letting people see their own history in the light of God's grace.[61] Often these issues will not be the big issues of the day. Prophetic preaching can address people wherever they try to live together and worry about their future and identity. S. Hauerwas agrees by noting that visiting the sick may appear mundane, but no less a prophetic task than protesting against the idolatry of the state. Visiting the sick can be part of the protest by refusing to let the state or society determine whom it will and will not serve.[62] Or as Wilson says, "The prophetic ministry of the church is exercised wherever issues of justice, mercy, and love are named as issues of faith."[63]

J. R. Nichols develops the idea of pastor, priest, and prophet. The language of the preacher, he notes, is more interpretive than descriptive. Description follows a referential definition of language that seeks to reproduce an accurate picture. However, interpretive language seeks to make sense of the world. An interpretive word becomes an event, a linguistic happening. Nichols gives five dimensions of the role of the preacher that seeks to mediate these functions. These dimensions can be reduced to two: The prophet/pastor binds the community together by establishing connectedness and affirmation of faith. Furthermore, the prophet/pastor articulates a new vision of reality for the community.[64] Therefore, the prophet recalls God's covenant love while picturing God's purposes for the community.[65]

> What this means for preachers is that preaching from the prophetic literature involves the preacher in two broad tasks: (1) viewing life through the lens of God's covenant and imaginatively proclaiming the vision of human society, both in personal and social dimensions, living in responsiveness and obedience to God; and (2) truthfully and courageously naming the discrepancies between this vision and the way people are presently living.[66]

[61] W. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 110.

[62] S. Hauerwas, "The Pastor as Prophet," in *The Pastor as Prophet*, eds. E. E. Shelp and R. H. Sutherland (New York: Pilgrim, 1985) 43.

[63] P. S. Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988) 198.

[64] J. R. Nichols, *The Restoring Word: Preaching as Pastoral Communication* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

[65] D. Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 104–5.

[66] Long, "Preaching the Prophets," 309.

A Modern Example

Martin Luther King Jr. is often cited as a positive example of prophetic preaching. Buttrick notes how King's prophetic voice changed the nation.[67] King's voice of liberation announced the future of God for America and then added the prophetic word "Now!" King advanced the Christian tradition of ministry with the oppressed and the American tradition of democratic justice together because he creatively embraced both traditions. He called America to account for both traditions they professed in common.

R. Lischer notes how King's identification with his people eventually led him to confront the power structures in America. King saw the true nature of the evil around him. He boldly named this evil. Finally, King began a reconstructive effort, an imaginative alternative to a racist society. Lischer states, "Like many of the biblical prophets who exhorted Israel to return to the provisions of the covenant, the early and mid-career King fulfilled a conservative function, for his imaginative vision of what America would become was derived from his vision of what America had once been."[68]

Lischer documents how King's own self-understanding changed.[69] Primarily, these changes are seen as one looks at the hope expressed by King. He became a suffering servant. Success would come by his own redemptive suffering. King began to rule out success for the movement but never faithfulness. He believed in the power of the word either to redeem the soul of America or to consign it to judgment. The passion in King's sermons became a passion with urgency. As King continued his ministry, the self-awareness that suffering and death would overtake him was communicated clearly to an audience seeking another word of hope.

As King evolved, he shifted his emphasis and style. He began to demythologize America's false security of its view of "liberty and justice for all."[70] He spoke now as one who had direct access to God's council. He began to emphasize his personal right to speak for God. Lischer emphasizes how King, more so than others, held the prophet's stance of suffering as a vehicle for God's new vision. He used symbolic actions as a way to demonstrate God's future reality already present.[71]

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[67] Buttrick, *Captive Voice*, 105.

[68] R. Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word That Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 157.

[69] R. Lischer, "The Word That Moves: The Preaching of Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Theology Today* 46 (1989) 169.

[70] Lischer, *King*, 178.

[71] Lischer's categories for M. L. King Jr. resemble Heschel's categories listed above, *Prophets*, 26. The political action figure may be given a prophetic persona that reflects preconceived ideas about an idealized John the Baptist character rather than a less tragic one due to earlier described misconceptions.

However, as noted above, others find difficulty with identifying cultural critics of the nation with the prophets of old. Achtemeier considers this type representation of prophetic preaching as corresponding to the stereotypes commonly held by the populace. She states:

> Many preachers, therefore, who have leveled criticism against their congregations have comforted themselves with the thought that they were being 'prophetic,' and the prophetic message has repeatedly been claimed as identical with the ideology of . . . social, political, or economic protests and movements. Such stereotypical uses of the prophetic books badly distort their message and intention."[72]

That prophecy is directed to a community in covenant relationship militates against any parallel with modern prophetic preaching directed against a present-day secular state. The proper analogical parallel would be either Judaism or the Christian church. The prophets of old must always be understood in the context of the larger theological concerns, namely, relationship with God.

Conclusion

T. Long summarizes the connection between modern preachers and prophets. Preachers today are concerned with speaking a message from God to their particular time, place, and people. The messages are diverse in theme, purpose, language, and local characteristics. The prophetic sermon is not the special-case sermon requiring extra moral indignation or an outpouring of social issues. To the contrary, the prophetic sermon is the continuing ministry to speak that which the culture cannot identify. Preachers speak about the life-giving Word and activity of God to real people struggling with genuine issues.[73]

When preachers face the pressing issues of the congregation and the larger society, they can preach a prophetic word. Prophetic preaching has the potential to transform the lives of people as they struggle to face the everyday challenges in a swirling society. First, the sermon must be rooted in the tradition of the congregation's historic faith. Next, the message must be theologically informed. Furthermore, present issues must be interpreted in the context of faith and theology. Finally, the preacher will envision for the audience God's intended future that can be presently realized. In other words, the prophetic sermon will disorient the status quo by addressing present issues with a Word of God so that a new orientation (reality) can be created in the lives of people. The new and future Word will faithfully

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[72] Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 119.

[73] T. Long, *Preaching the Prophets*, 308.

represent the old Word in the turbulent present. Preachers who presume to do more or less lose their credibility if not their authority.

The audience, too, can begin to think critically about the message presented. The pulpit should never be so exalted that the pew receives whatever verdict is passed down as though edicts were being delivered from a judge's bench. The audience should not abdicate its personal responsibility. The more informed the people are concerning the nature of prophecy and the role of a prophet today, the more able they are to discern for themselves that which they believe to be sacred and true. The pulpit and the pew need to take seriously the nature of the preaching encounter, for the sermon belongs to the whole community of faith.

(MIS)UNDERSTANDING WESTCOTT AND HORT

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In 1881, after twenty-eight years of labor, the Cambridge scholars Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort published their edition of the Greek New Testament. A short time later they issued a companion volume which details the method behind their textual decisions and includes an appendix: "Notes on Select Readings."[1] That Westcott and Hort (hereinafter WH) introduced a new era in NT textual criticism is the near-unanimous opinion of interested scholars. WH, however, have also received criticism over the last century.[2] While some of this criticism is warranted, regrettably WH have often been misunderstood and misrepresented.

The purpose of this paper is to correct two misinterpretations of WH which have crept into NT scholarship. The first concerns WH's theory of conflation and defenders of the Byzantine text. The second addresses the notion that WH denied that the scribal process was ever doctrinally influenced.

Conflate Readings in the Byzantine Text[3]

WH considered the Byzantine text (which they called Syrian) late and therefore relatively unimportant for reconstructing the original NT text. Their primary argument for the inferiority of the Byzantine text was its

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[1] *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1881); *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek: With Notes on Select Readings* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882; 2d ed., London and New York: Macmillan, 1896; reprinted, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988).

[2] For example, see Ernest C. Colwell, "Genealogical Method: Its Achievements and Its Limitations," *JBL* 66 (1947) 109–33, reprinted in Colwell, *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, NTTS 9 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969) 63–83. For a brief assessment of the theory of WH, see Graham A. Patrick, "1881–1981: The Centenary of the Westcott and Hort Text," *ExpTim* 92 (Sept. 1981) 359–64.

[3] This section is adapted from the author's M.Div. thesis (Emmanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, TN, 1995).